

## MENTAL ILLNESS

# Tips for the Caregiver

Taking care of a loved one who has a mental illness is a very important role. It can also be very hard. Listed below are 3 important tips to help you provide care while caring for yourself.

### **Help your loved one stick with treatment.**

Following a treatment plan is the fastest way for someone with a mental illness to get better. If your loved one stops taking his or her medications or stops going to the doctor, symptoms will return. If he or she gets worse, self-care may be harder. Your loved one may not get the help he or she needs. He or she may even end up on the street or in jail.

If your loved one has a hard time taking his or her medicine every day, help him or her set up a plan for this. Go to the doctor with your loved one when you can. Keep notes from your doctor visit. You can help him or her remember what the doctor says. You will also be showing that you care.

**Help your loved one set goals.** This can help him or her function day to day. Each step toward these goals should be small. Your loved one should work toward each goal with your support. People with a mental illness who are nagged at and put down often get worse. Telling them what they are doing right is the best way to help them move forward.

**Take care of yourself.** You have to deal with how this affects your own health. The stress that you may experience when taking care of your loved one may make you feel physically, emotionally, and mentally tired.

If you are under a lot of stress, your loved one may lose focus and have more trouble sticking with his or her treatment plan. This could make the illness get worse. It is very important for you to take care of yourself.

## **To help a loved one with mental illness, you can:**

- Offer support
- Talk to your loved one and listen to him or her talk about their feelings
- Figure out what may set off symptoms
- Invite your loved one out for walks, outings, and other fun events
- Be alert for a change in behavior from your loved one. Always tell the doctor if he or she experiences a change in behavior.

## **Learn about your loved one's mental illness**

This will help you know what he or she is going through. It will also make it easier for you to talk to your loved one's care team about the illness.

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## Caregivers— to help yourself, you should:

- Ask for help from family and friends
- Ask for information and options from doctors
- Ask for guidance and advice from therapists and counselors

The following tips can help you give your loved one the best care you can without burning yourself out.

**Hold a family meeting.** Everyone in your family should be told what's going on. A family meeting is a good way to let everyone know they can help, even if they are far away. It can keep you from taking on all the work all of the time. You may be surprised at how helpful others want to be.

**Keep records** of emergency numbers, doctors, daily medications, backup people, and other information about your loved one's care. Keep it up to date.

**Join a support group** or find another caregiver to talk to. You will get support, and you may learn practical tips as well. This can help you find answers to problems you face.

**Create a care team** to help out during emergencies or during difficult times. Make a list of people to call on to help with small chores. You must be willing to tell others what you need and to let them help.

**Stick to a routine.** When things are hard, keeping a daily routine can help. Your loved one may find change upsetting and confusing.

**Do your best.** It's very hard to always stay upbeat and happy while you focus on practical chores and decisions. Think about getting the job done as well as you can. It is worth the effort.

**Remember — ask others for help, plan ahead, and do the best that you can.**