

Supporting Friends and Family Members

Through Mental Health Issues



Mental Health issues affect millions of people. The effects are not limited to the individual, but also family and friends. Family members and friends may feel overwhelmed, helpless, angry, ashamed, guilty, confused, exhausted, and many other emotions. It is important to know that any and all of these feelings are normal. This handout is meant to give some information and resources on how to offer support and to take care of yourself.

It is important to remember...

- Your loved one's struggles are not anyone's fault
- You cannot make them better
- Every person's experience is different
- They cannot just get over it
- Asking direct questions is the best way to know what your loved one wants and/or needs

Helpful things that you can do...

- Educate yourself on your loved one's condition and on helpful resources in your area.
- Ask your loved one what they need
- Offer hope for the future
- Don't try to fix your loved one's problem, you can't
- Be patient, recovery is a process
- Understand your limitations and set boundaries accordingly
- Encourage your loved one to get treatment
- Take care of yourself

How to show your loved one support...

- Offer to go with them to a health care provider
- Help them write out symptoms and questions for their appointments
- Show them love and kindness
- Try to not be judgmental of their situation
- Offer to help them schedule and organize appointments and medications
- Help them set up an advanced directive (see below for more information)
- Take care of yourself

Advanced Directive

An advanced directive allows a person to designate someone to represent their health care interests in the event they are unable to do so themselves. These are used in situations of mental health crisis or incapacity and legal in Montana.

www.disabilityrightsmt.org

www.mtpeernetwork.org

How to take care of yourself

It has been mentioned a few times in this handout that taking care of yourself is important. This can be done by seeking out support for yourself, determining your boundaries and sticking to them, taking time to relax, and do things that you enjoy. You will be better able to support your loved one if you are healthy.

Helpful tips...

- Help your loved one set up a group in their cellphone or on paper that has people who would be helpful in a crisis. These may be their counselors, doctors, peer supporters, and other loved ones. This list can then be shared with you and other supportive loved ones. Having this resource allows for more options than just calling 911 in a crisis situation.
- Help your loved one keep track of what medications work and what medications do not work. This also includes being aware of side effects. Keeping this information to share with a health care provider can make for a more efficient and less stressful appointment.
- Encourage your loved one to seek out peer support. There may be groups at a Drop In Center, local churches, or online. Here is a link to an online support group forum.
<http://www.supportgroupscentral.com/>

Advice from someone who has received crisis support...

“It's important that the person in crisis has at least one person who not only is willing to help but has an idea of the things to expect and with no judgment. It's tremendously stressful to deal with alone and a great support system in place helps great deal.”

Resources

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness provides family support groups and education classes. Check their website for your local representatives. www.nami.org

CIT, if dealing with law enforcement ask if they have any Crisis Intervention Team officers. If so, you can request a CIT officer be sent. www.citmontana.org

DBSA, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance offers great support for those going through a crisis and education for anyone interested in learning more about mental health.
<http://www.dbsalliance.org/>

Mental Health America of Montana is a statewide education and advocacy organization. Our mission is to work for good mental health for all; and for social justice as well as quality services for persons with mental illnesses and preserving the rights of consumers and their families. www.mhaofmt.org

This handout was developed by.

www.mtpeernetwork.org

