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How to Help Someone with Mental Health Issues

Unusual thoughts and behaviours are often two of the hardest aspects of mental illness for many friends, families, and care-givers to understand, accept, and cope with. Common problems people may encounter include:

Disordered thinking and speech, social withdrawal, depression, self harm, suicidal feelings or actions, aggression, risky behaviour, becoming over-dependent.

How can I help someone with disordered thought and speech?

If someone you live with has delusions or paranoid beliefs, try to avoid:

- Confronting them about the thoughts they express
- Laughing at them
- Undermining them by telling them they are stupid or their thoughts are stupid
- Ignoring them by remaining silent

Instead it is better to reassure them clearly and calmly, letting them know you understand that they see things in a particular way, but you believe there is no problem or threat in the situation.

How can I help someone who is becoming socially isolated?

To reduce the effects of mental illness on social isolation it is important to:

- Understand their vulnerability in social settings
- Provide uncomplicated and undemanding social activity to help rebuild their confidence - keep numbers to a minimum and keep conversations short and free of issues that generate high emotions
- Expect progress to be made in very small steps
- Reassure and encourage them by noting and praising each small success made

How you can help someone with depression

Depression can be effectively treated with medication such as antidepressants. Other suggestions to help someone when they are depressed include:

- Offer them emotional support, patience, affection, and encouragement
- Invite them out on walks, outings, and gentle activities
- Help them feel good about themselves by praising daily achievements
- Encourage them to help themselves through self-help techniques
- Find out about self help or support groups open to them
- Encourage participation in activities that once gave them pleasure

How to help a suicidal relative or friend

You can help the most by just listening to what the person has to say. The aim is to try to see the world as the person sees it, to 'stand in their shoes'. Seek to understand and validate the person's perspective, without judging, criticizing, or blaming.

- Let the person know that you care about them and that they are not alone
- If there is immediate danger, stay with them, or have someone else stay with them
- Get professional help for the person at risk and support for yourself
- Remove all available means to suicide

How to help to minimize or stop aggressive behaviour

- Minimize stress
- Try not to argue with the person when they become upset because they no longer have the ability to be rational
- Try not to get upset or excited as well
- Never try to restrain a person
- Never put your own safety at risk

How can I help someone who is engaging in risky behaviour?

Some of the suggestions in dealing with risky behaviour include:

- Try to help the person see the consequences of what they are doing
- Provide reassurance, the person needs to know that you will support them until they regain control over the situation
- Urge the person to seek help; you may want to contact the person's GP or their mental health team

How can I stop someone becoming over-dependent?

Decide early on how much you can do and how much you want to do and set boundaries. Make sure you let the person with mental illness know these boundaries. If you find yourself having to do more than you want to do because the person is particularly unwell, contact social services for a caregiver assessment. They may be able to arrange additional help or a respite break for you and the person who is ill.

You can help to build up the person's self-esteem and confidence by gradually building up their independence.

Let's **think** about
mental illness

with an **OPEN**
m i n d

