

Let's talk about...

Supporting People in Need

MENTAL ILLNESS DEMYSTIFIED

SO OFTEN PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH PERSONAL ISSUES ARE RELUCTANT TO TALK ABOUT THEM AND ASK FOR HELP. AS THEIR PARTNER, PARENT, ADULT CHILD, COLLEAGUE, OR FRIEND, WE MAY FEEL WE SHOULD BE PROACTIVE ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED AND STAYING INVOLVED. BUT FOR MOST PEOPLE TALKING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS WORKING THROUGH PERSONAL ISSUES TAKES THEM OUTSIDE OF THEIR COMFORT ZONE. WHILE THERE IS NO MAGIC FORMULA FOR SUPPORTING A PERSON DEALING WITH OBVIOUS PERSONAL ISSUES, TAKING THE TIME TO REACH OUT TO SOMEONE WHO IS STRUGGLING COULD MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

While you may not always know for sure if someone you care about is struggling with a personal issue, there are a number of signs that may indicate a problem:

- Signs of poor judgment, confusion, or forgetfulness
- Taking time away from work/school
- Mood swings
- Poor concentration
- Complaints or indications of insomnia, loss of appetite, headaches, stomach problems, and high blood pressure
- Incomplete or substandard work or school work
- Decrease in creativity and initiative
- Becoming withdrawn or avoiding social settings

STARTING A CONVERSATION

You may find it difficult to begin a conversation with your friend or loved one, but it doesn't have to be if you are prepared. Here are some basic guidelines that will help ensure a positive start:

- Honour the relationship you have by allowing adequate time for discussion.
- You may find the words flow more easily if you have the conversation in a calm environment, such as at a local park or at a coffee shop, away from the business of work or home.
- Don't be surprised or hurt if the person doesn't open up to you immediately. Persistence is critical.
- Be honest and not afraid to share your own feelings.

- Try not to pass judgment – the person who is struggling is likely feeling vulnerable, so it's important to show genuine concern and compassion.
- Once the conversation gets going, listen to what they are saying. Don't be thinking about what you are going to say.
- Don't change the subject, even if you find some of the things being said difficult.
- Don't interrupt or minimize their feelings by saying things like "You'll be all right" or "Don't worry."
- Don't force your advice on the other person – try presenting your suggestions as questions: "Have you ever thought about..."
- Offer support and encouragement to seek help from their family physician, the EFAP, or a student advisor.

A word of caution... it's important to respect boundaries – what may be support to one person, may feel intrusive to another. When offering support, take into consideration the strength of the relationship you have and be respectful of the boundaries the other person sets.

PROVIDING SUPPORT

The first thing you need to do is to encourage your friend or loved one to seek professional help. Once you know they are in good hands, then there may be any number of ways in which you can provide support to them:

- Practical support can include things like taking them to doctor or counsellor appointments, picking up their children from school or extracurricular activities, and taking some time to cook an occasional meal for them.
- Motivational support can include taking a walk, attending a yoga class, or going to the gym together.
- Emotional support can include calling them nightly to see how they're feeling, meeting for coffee or tea once a week to catch up, and encouraging them to stick with their treatment program. Your emotional support can help get them on the road to recovery.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Even though you are aiding in your friend or loved one's recovery, you need to know that even though they may have setbacks and recurring episodes, you should still continue to coach and motivate them. If the person has a specific medical condition, then it might be a good idea to educate yourself so you know what they are dealing with and what successful treatment requires.

When supporting people in need, it's important to encourage them to seek professional help, let them know they have a shoulder to lean on, and then stay connected in as many different ways as you can.



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