



Supporting a family member or friend living with mental illness

Adapted from www.heretohelp.bc.ca: Supporting a family member

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Supporting a family member or friend



Learning how to cope with any ongoing illness is no easy task.

Learning how to manage a mental illness and make the most out of life can be challenging.

However, with information and the support of their family and friends, most people (children, youth and adults) can take an active role in managing the symptoms of their disorder and in living a fulfilling and productive life.



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Families and friends play a major role in supporting a person with a mental illness.



Research shows that people who have a long-term illness do much better when they have a strong social network and the support of their loved ones.



Research has also shown that people who have major health problems recover more quickly and stay well longer when they have family members and friends around to help them solve problems and deal with stressors in their lives.

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How can I support a relative or friend living with a mental illness?



- Use a caring and non-judgmental manner.
- Ask the person what he/she needs from you or others.
- If you are concerned about their wellbeing, share your concerns with them.
“How have you been doing lately?” ... “I’ve noticed some changes...”

A person needs to be ready to share their feelings. If they are not ready, let him/her know that you will be available in the future.

- Encourage self-help strategies and help-seeking behaviour.
- Help the person remain hopeful and cope with negative feelings.
- Support recovery. Be patient and celebrate success.
- Acknowledge the tough times or setbacks and remind the person of past successes.
- Learn to be aware of the ups and downs in managing a mental illness.
- Take care of yourself.

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Supporting Recovery

When a family member or friend suffers from a mental illness one of the most important things to do is to take the time to learn about the disorder.

By educating yourself you can take an active role in the person's recovery.

What is Recovery?

- Recovery is a process and a goal - it is learning to successfully manage a disorder, having control over symptoms and having a quality of life.
- It involves overcoming the negative impact of a psychiatric disability despite its continued presence.
- It is often described as a way of living in order to make the most out of life.

Recovery is less about returning to a former state than about realizing the potential person your relative or friend can become.

**It is about getting on with life
in spite of having a mental illness.**



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How can I support my relative's or friend's recovery?



As with any other health condition, people who are recovering from a mental health problem need our support and understanding.

A sense of hope, self-esteem and well-being are essential components of recovery. Without a belief that life will get better, there is unlikely to be any motivation to help oneself.

Having a sense of control over one's life helps a person to feel better about themselves and who they are.

Love and acceptance from family members and friends help a person to feel good about themselves. In addition, the skills and abilities a person develops help them value the contributions they can make.

A common denominator of recovery is the presence of people who believe in and stand by the person recovering from a mental illness.

It is in this context that families can significantly aid in recovery.

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What If my relative or friend refuses to get help?



You may find yourself in a situation where you believe your relative or friend is having serious problems that warrant professional intervention but your relative or friend refuses to seek medical advice.

If the person is unwilling to see a doctor or mental health professional, set aside some time to discuss your concerns with him/her and reasons why he/she is unwilling to seek help. Back up your concerns with examples of behaviours or problems you have noticed.

Because symptoms of mental illness may stem from other physical illnesses, you may want to initially encourage your relative or friend to see their doctor for a check-up (rather than suggesting from the start that it is a mental illness).

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Where can I find help for my relative or friend?



CMHA Information and Referral Service (204) 982-6100

Can assist you with information on services provided in Winnipeg, community organizations and self help groups.

Mobile Crisis Services (204) 940-1781

Specializes in crisis intervention, mental health assessment and short-term follow-up for adults experiencing a mental health crisis. Offers 24-hour consultation and home visits. Individual, family members, friends and service providers can call for assistance.

Youth Mobile Crisis Team (204) 949-4777 / 1-888-383-2776

24-hour Mobile Crisis Team provides services to children, adolescents, families and caregivers, when crisis services are required. The team will stabilize crises, provide on-site services and develop treatment strategies for ongoing intervention.

The **Mental Health Resource Guide** includes information on mental health, mental illness, services available in Winnipeg, community organizations and self-help groups. For a free copy call: CMHA-Winnipeg (204) 982-6100 or at www.winnipeg.cmha.ca 's **Publications** section.