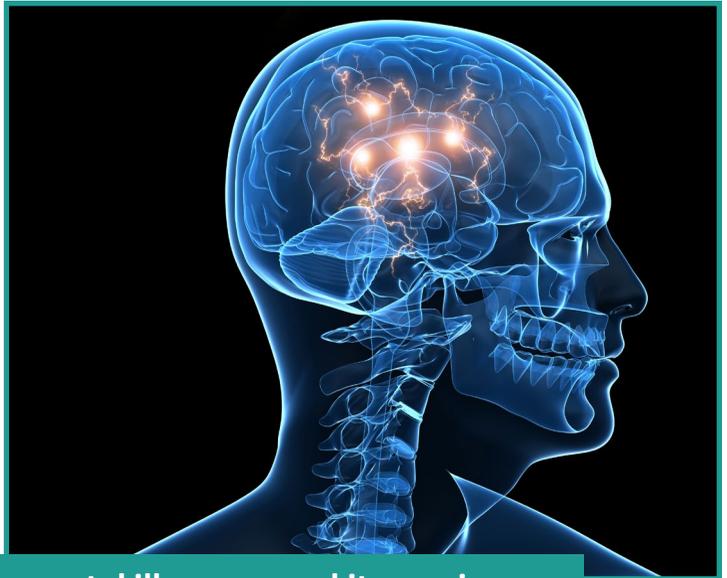


Supporting someone with a mental illness



Millions of people worldwide live with mental illnesses, and it remains one of the least understood conditions in our society today. Because of this, many people face stigma, prejudice, and discrimination in their daily lives.

Research confirms that support from colleagues, family members, and friends is a key part of helping someone who is going through a mental illness. This support provides a network of practical and emotional help which can aid in their wellbeing and recovery.

How can you help?

- Educate yourself. Accept the fact that the person has a legitimate illness. Learn all you can about their condition and its treatment, so that you can cope more effectively and help keep your expectations realistic.
- Communicate effectively. Be understanding. Let them know that you care. Engage them in conversation and listen carefully. Try also not to become angry at your friend or family member. Don't get stuck talking about the past, stay in the present.
- Help your colleague, friend, or family member stay active. Invite them for walks, to the movies, and other various activities. Encourage participation in activities they once enjoyed such as hobbies, sports, or cultural activities. Do not push them to undertake too much too soon. Too many demands can increase feelings of failure.
- Offer practical support. Cook dinner once a week, offer support with a work project, run errands, or arrange a regular time to take a walk over lunch or go to the gym together.

- Help with medical needs. Encourage them to maintain professional medical help. Help them identify emotional and physical symptoms.
- Be patient and resilient. Getting better takes time, even when a person is committed to treatment. Don't expect a quick recovery or a permanent cure. Be patient with the pace of recovery and prepare for setbacks and challenges.

Things you shouldn't do

There are also some things that are not helpful either to yourself or the person you are caring for.

For example, you shouldn't:

- Pressure them to 'just relax' or 'calm down'.
- Pressure them to manage how they're feeling with drugs or alcohol.
- Assume that you can make them feel less anxious.
- Help them avoid situations that make them feel anxious.
- Assume the problem will just go away.

It can be very frustrating helping someone. Remember that the person affected by the mental illness is probably just as frustrated. While it is a difficult task, family, friends, and colleagues can all make a huge difference to a person's recovery by being understanding and compassionate.