



Mental health
advocacy, education
and support.

How to Support a Loved One Living with a Mental Health Condition

You can help a friend or family member who is experiencing a mental health problem by recognizing the signs, ensuring that your loved ones know they are supported, and connecting them to professional help.

Educate Yourself about Mental Illness

Your loved one may be experiencing a mental health condition if they are displaying any of the following symptoms:

- Feeling sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality, or sleeping habits
- Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities
- Seeing, hearing, or believing things that are not real
- Risk-taking behaviors that can cause harm to self or others

Educating yourself about your loved one's illness is the foundation of support. Not knowing how the illness functions can create misconceptions and prevent families from helping their loved one effectively. For example, it's hard for some people to appreciate the severity of symptoms, or that individuals cannot just "snap out of it."

Share Your Concerns

Share your observations with your loved one. Focus on being nonjudgmental and empathetic. Make an effort to use "I" statements and express *your* feelings and observations, so your loved one feels supported and noticed, rather than blamed. Try leading with these questions when starting a conversation about mental health:

- "I've been worried about you. Can we talk about what you are experiencing? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?"
- "I am someone who cares and wants to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?"

Stigma and fear of being misunderstood or rejected by family, friends, and society is the biggest reason individuals do not seek help for their mental health condition. Having open communication about mental health and creating a support system are important steps to an individual's recovery.

Offer to Help

Beginning treatment can feel overwhelming to many people diagnosed with mental health conditions, so assistance with coordinating services can provide relief.

- "How can I best support you right now?"
- "Can I help you locate mental health services and supports? Can I help you make an appointment?"

Keep in mind that you are not expected to have all of the answers. NAMI Chicago's Information and Referral Helpline can assist you or your loved one in gathering resources for further support. Call us at 312-563-0445.