

## Supporting a Loved One with Mental Health Challenges: A Guide for Family & Friends

### Understanding Mental Health Challenges

Mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, bipolar disorder, and others impact how people think, feel, and function. These challenges are not a sign of weakness. Support from friends and family can make a meaningful difference by helping individuals feel heard, valued, and less alone.

### How Family & Friends Can Help: A Supportive Checklist

#### Listen Without Judgment

- Allow them to talk freely without interruption.
- Avoid giving unsolicited advice.
- Validate feelings with phrases like: “I hear you. That sounds difficult.”

#### Ask Open-Ended, Caring Questions

- How can I support you today?
- Would you like to talk or would you prefer quiet company?
- Is there anything that feels overwhelming right now?

#### Educate Yourself

- Learn about their condition from reliable sources.
- Ask them what their experience is like.
- Understanding symptoms increases empathy and reduces frustration.

#### Offer Practical Support

- Help with errands, chores, or meals.
- Offer transportation to appointments.
- Assist with organizing reminders or schedules.

#### Respect Boundaries

- Ask before offering advice or stepping in.
- Don't pressure them to talk if they aren't ready.
- Recognize that everyone copes differently.

#### Encourage but Don't Force Professional Support

- Gently suggest counseling or support groups.
- Mention medical or mental health professionals as options.
- Avoid making them feel ashamed or pressured.

### Stay Connected

- Check in regularly with calls or messages.
- Small gestures remind them they are cared for.
- Be patient with withdrawal; connection still matters.

### Watch for Warning Signs

- Talk of hopelessness or self-harm.
- Extreme withdrawal or sudden behavior changes.
- Encourage immediate professional help if needed.

### Take Care of Yourself

- Set boundaries to avoid burnout.
- Seek your own support or counseling.
- Self-care helps you remain present and supportive.

### Celebrate Small Wins

- Acknowledge any progress, even small steps.
- Remind them healing takes time.
- Recognize their strength and effort.

