



How to Help a Person Experiencing a Mental Illness

1. Learn to recognize symptoms of mental illness*.
2. If the person is threatening to harm themselves or others, call 911.
3. Listen without feeling obliged to give advice or find solutions. Be accepting and understanding.
4. Tell the person they are loved, deserve to feel better, and will feel better with appropriate treatment.
5. Encourage the person to get treatment, or in the case of a minor, contact the parent/guardian to take the child for treatment.
6. If the person is functional, but refuses to seek treatment, seek assistance from family members, friends, and/or co-workers who may be influential.
7. Invite the person to Mass and to participate in the life of your parish without imposing demands and expectations beyond their current ability.
8. Allow family members the opportunity to share their sorrows, joys, coping skills, and information about mental illness. Continue to ask about their family member with mental illness.
9. Do not assume responsibility for the person's life or treatment.
10. Combat the stigma of mental illness by objecting to negative stereotyping.

* Warning Signs for Mental Illness

Not all symptoms occur in every person with a mental illness. A person displaying one or more of these warning signs should be evaluated by a physician or psychiatrist as soon as possible.

1. Marked personality change
2. Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
3. Strange or grandiose ideas
4. Excessive anxieties
5. Prolonged depressions and apathy
6. Marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns
7. Thinking or talking about suicide
8. Extreme highs and lows
9. Abuse of alcohol or drugs
10. Excessive anger, hostility or violent behavior

COMMUNICATION TIPS	
<i>When the person...</i>	<i>You should...</i>
Is withdrawn	Initiate relevant conversation
Appears over-stimulated	Limit input; don't force discussion
Appears fearful	Stay calm
Becomes agitated	Allow personal and physical space
Has trouble remembering	Help the person record information
Displays poor judgment	Remain rational and reinforce common sense
Believes delusions	Avoid arguing
Lacks self esteem	Affirm the person's value

Sources: *With Cords of Compassion*, United Mental Health, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA, 1992
Helping the Depressed Person Get Treatment, Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Rockville, MD, 1990

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