



Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How to help a loved one through mental illness



The dynamics involved in the diagnosing of mental illness could affect the person being diagnosed and his or her family, friends, and colleagues. Conversely, recognizing the mental illness and developing a treatment plan can relieve the stress with family and friends and recovery can move forward. In most parts of the world mental illness is not regarded with the same importance as physical health. While a positive attitude in much of the developed world is growing - but far from perfect - in many other cultures there is still shame, fear, mystical beliefs, and discrimination surrounding the recognition and treatment of persons with mental illness.

The stigma of mental illness, preventing diagnosis, acceptance and treatment, is surrounded by myths going back centuries - and still prevalent in many cultures today. What are some of these myths and facts?

Myth	Fact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People with mental illnesses are dangerous and should be avoided	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental illness accounts for, at most, 3-5% of all violent acts; persons with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence rather than perpetrators
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children don't experience mental illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Half of all mental illnesses show signs before a person turns 14; and three-quarters begin before age 24

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental illness can't be treated; you are ill for life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full recovery, with treatment, is possible. With treatment and support between 70-90% of individuals have reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can't do anything for a person with mental illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and friends can be important influences to help someone get treatment and services by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reaching out and letting them know you are there to help 2. Helping them access mental health services 3. Treating them with respect, just as you would anyone else 4. Speaking out when you hear people using labels like "crazy"

1. So, how do you talk to a loved one about mental illness? No matter who is affected – you, your partner or spouse, your child, friend, or relative – you can use the following suggestions to begin the conversation and process of seeking or providing support: Start with yourself. When you understand more about the illness, you'll be more comfortable talking with others about it. Seek trusted information and understanding from mental health professionals and associations.
2. Create an atmosphere that welcomes open discussion by asking loved ones what they notice about the person's symptoms and behaviour.
3. Ask them what they understand about words they use to describe mental illness.
4. Explain what mental illness is, relating it to other illnesses that are "managed" with help such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, etc.
5. Talk to your children and family about recovery, letting them know that it's possible to manage the illness and live life to the fullest.
6. Tell kids that mental illness is not their fault (if they show signs of self-blame) and despite a member of the family having a mental illness, that they will not necessarily develop an illness themselves.

Other ways to help and support a loved one through mental illness is by being an advocate for mental illness acceptance in your community. The mental illness advocacy movement is taking place in Australia, Canada, Europe, New Zealand, and the U.S. It comprises a diverse collection of organizations and people working together to achieve common goals for people with mental illness. This movement has helped change society's perceptions of people with mental illness. What can you do to become an advocate in your community?

- Take a mental illness awareness training
- Attend a support group meeting
- Participate in activities to raise awareness
- Be vocal in defending the rights of persons with mental illness
- Help a friend in need
- Speak up when you hear a derogatory term about people with mental illness
- Support legislative action
- Invite others to join

If you or someone you care about is struggling with mental illness or any other unusual symptom, talk to your doctor or contact your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP).

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