

9 WAYS TO HELP A LOVED ONE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

For You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. (Psalm 63:7)

"WHAT DO I DO? HOW DO I HELP?"

When a loved one has a mental illness, we may be unsure of what to do or how to help. Where do we start? The truth is, there are many ways to help. These nine are a great place to begin.

1. LISTEN WITH COMPASSION AND PATIENCE

Listen with compassion and patience. Let your loved one lead the conversation at their own pace. Talking about mental illness is vulnerable and requires a lot of courage. Asking open-ended questions is an invitation to a deeper conversation. Consider questions such as: *What makes you feel loved and valued? What do you wish others understood about you?* (***Ask Generous Questions*** is a great free resource.)

2. BE CURIOUS

Learning about our loved ones' diagnoses helps us ask better questions about their daily life, losses, fears, hopes, and dreams. Reading stories about others with mental illness increases our understanding, challenges our perspectives, and deepens our compassion. Curiosity can strengthen relationships.

3. LOVE WITHOUT JUDGMENT OR AGENDA

We're often tempted to fix a problem, find a solution, or try to change the ones we love, but we are simply called to love others, share in their joys and sufferings, and offer the comfort of our presence. Let's show our loved ones the beauty we see in them.

4. HELP YOUR LOVED ONE MAKE A SELF-CARE SAFETY PLAN

A self-care safety plan could include an emergency contact person and the names of friends and loved ones who can respond quickly. Listing daily self-care goals (such as eating three healthy meals a day, taking a shower, making the bed, getting the mail, checking in with family by phone) and encouraging hope-filled Bible verses can provide much-needed structure.

5. BUILD HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Building healthy boundaries with our loved ones gives the relationship a chance to thrive even at challenging times. This statement is a great place to start: "I feel _____ when _____ because _____. What I need is _____." When we understand what triggers us, why we are triggered, and what we need in that situation, we begin to build safer, stronger relationships. Boundary-building is about compassionately naming our limits, which helps us avoid feelings of frustration, overwhelm, stress, and resentment.

6. KEEP INVITING LOVED ONES

It's important to keep inviting loved ones for dinner, for coffee, for a picnic at the park, or to celebrate holidays— *even if they cancel at the last minute.* Our persistent kindness makes a difference, even if we can't always see see its impact.

7. PRIORITIZE SELF-CARE

The unpredictability of caring for a loved one with mental illness is profound, often leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Self-care is how we learn to honor our needs and limits. This includes good boundaries, sufficient sleep, healthy eating, active movement, and prioritizing our relationships with God and others. Self-care is indispensable in our care for loved ones with mental illness. (Find great self-care resources at chronic-joy.org/self-care.)

8. SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

When mental illness speaks a slanted and incomplete truth to our loved ones, we can compassionately remind them what is real and true. When depression says, "Life is worthless," we can remind our loved one that they are dearly loved, immensely valued, and deeply precious to God. When anxiety says, "You cannot survive what scares you," we can say, "God is stronger than the fear, and He promises to be with you always."

9. STAY CLOSE TO GOD

Mental illness is difficult and unpredictable, but God is with us. He longs for us to come to Him with everything on our hearts, to find our strength in Him, and to rest in Him. He will give us light for each new step, hope for the days to come, and the strength and compassion to walk beside our loved one.