



Guide for New ^{and current} Mental Health Caregivers

Have you recently learned that a friend or family member has been diagnosed with a mental health condition? Are you currently supporting someone with a mental health condition? Wondering how you can help? Below are some practical ways to make a difference.

What is a caregiver?

Caregivers can be parents, relatives, friends, spouse, adult children, even neighbors. Many believe that a caregiver is involved finances, cooking, and cleaning as well as day-to-day needs. Not all play such an involved role. Being a caregiver can mean a lot of things. A caregiver can do one or all of the following



- *Provide support and encouragement. Spend time together. Bring them to Mass.*
- *Drive someone to appointments.*
- *Attend appointments and help someone make treatment decisions, or be an extra 'set of ears' to help them remember/understand what is being said - stay organized*
- *Help someone to understand their rights.*
- *Listen when someone is struggling with symptoms or the recovery process.*
- *Make legal or financial decisions on someone's behalf. Or attend a legal meeting to assist in their understanding of what is being discussed.*
- *Help someone get accommodations at work or school.*
- *Run errands or help with household chores. Make a meal.*
- *Pick children up from school or sporting event.*
- *Be there to manage crisis situations perhaps simply by contacting a family member or crisis hotline*

Understanding a diagnosis is key to being an effective caregiver *and* it is the first step in understanding how you may support someone living with a mental health condition. **Scan the QR code below to learn more about each diagnosis.**



Bipolar Disorder



Psychosis



Schizophrenia



Depression



Eating disorders



Anxiety



Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)



Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)



Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)



scan for conditions not listed above

Mental Health Conditions | National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)



Reaching Out

The only way to really understand what your loved one is going through is to talk to them about it. Some people will jump at the opportunity to express themselves, but others may still be trying to process internally what it means to have a mental health condition. If they don't feel like talking, be patient and let them know that you're there when they're ready.

Starting a conversation

- **Be Patient**- allow them to process their feelings and share when their ready.
- **Listen**- be an active listener with an open mind, without judgement
- **Practice Empathy** - allow yourself to feel and understand things the way that they are experiencing them. (*this is different from sympathy*)
- **Share**- if you've experienced mental illness yourself, you can share your experiences to help them open up and feel supported. But don't assume that their experiences will be the same as yours.
- **Advice**— be cautious about giving advice. Wait until they ask or at least check to be sure they're open to receiving it. Do not pressure them to follow a specific treatment plan
- **Ask**- talk to your loved one about how you can help. Ask them what they need.

Self care

Caring for another can be very rewarding and stressful. It's important to also take care of yourself. Your own physical and mental health is important for its own sake—and being healthy will also make you a better caregiver!

When taking care of someone is too stressful



How can I find support as a caregiver?



Caring for someone if I also have a mental illness



I need a break from caregiving

