

HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT SOMEONE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS (AND LOOK AFTER YOURSELF)

Practice Self-Care

Often when we are looking after others or worried about their wellbeing we forget to look after ourselves. Make it a priority to do things you enjoy, debrief after a stressful event with someone you trust or call a helpline for support. Take some time to relax, connect with others, look after your nutrition and get a good amount of sleep. For resources on minding your mental health – visit here <https://ie.reachout.com/getting-help-2/minding-your-mental-health/> and <http://supportingfamilies.org.nz/your-wellbeing/>

Resource yourself

Learn about the illness being faced, dispel myths and focus on facts, connect with local mental health services and online resources for information. Click here for an A – Z list of Mental Health Information <http://supportingfamilies.org.nz/mental-health-information/>

Be patient

There may be good days, not so good days and days when things are really tough. Accept recovery is an individual process and resist the idea of trying to ‘cure’ them on a timeline.

Stay in touch

Remind them that you are there, ask them what help they need. Don’t avoid them if they are unwell. Use tools like texts, emails, cards, notes or voice messages to stay in touch. Even if they decline the offers - continue to gently invite them to things or let them know they are welcome to join in the future. Don’t be discouraged if your invitations are turned down for now. Let them know you will be there when they are ready.

Be persistently kind

Offering compassion, objectivity and acceptance is truly valuable. You may not know from your loved one until a point of time in the future how crucial this was.

Be positive

The recovery process does not follow a straight line and can take time. If it feels like two steps forward, one step back remember you are still moving forward! Celebrate small achievements and focus on what your loved one can do and not what they can’t.

Start conversations and not conflict

If your loved one doesn’t not agree there is a problem, discuss it and try to find out why. Listen without attempting to change them and without judging. Focus on building trust and rapport. However, if you are concerned about their safety it is ok to ask them if they are thinking of harming themselves. This will not put the thought into their head. For more information about having a conversation about self-harm and suicidality please see here <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/mental-health/preventing-suicide/if-youre-worried-someone-may-be-suicidal>

Make sure you have resources

Keep a list of contact numbers that you can call if your family / whānau member becomes unsafe or need of crisis support. If your loved one's behaviour is causing concern encourage them to talk to someone they trust such as their GP, psychologist or a helpline. If you think that they are at risk of harming themselves or someone else then **you do not need consent** to contact someone for help. Please see the list of crisis numbers or visit <http://supportingfamilies.org.nz/crisis-services/>

Find a support network and keep it active

You may be surprised at how many other people will have experience with what you are going through once you reach out and connect. Try to avoid self-blame, guilt or falling into the role of fixer, saviour or over-extending yourself trying to solve everything. If you are finding yourself having these thoughts it's a signal you may need more support - talk to a friend, call a helpline, your GP or a counsellor.

Help for parents, family and friends

[Commonground](#) – a website hub providing parents, family, whānau and friends with access to information, tools and support to help a young person who is struggling.

[Parent Help](#) – 0800 568 856 for parents/whānau seeking support, advice and practical strategies on all parenting concerns. Anonymous, non-judgemental and confidential.

[Family Services 211 Helpline](#) – 0800 211 211 for help finding (and direct transfer to) community based health and social support services in your area.

[Skylight](#) – 0800 299 100 for support through trauma, loss and grief; 9am–5pm weekdays.

[Supporting Families In Mental Illness](#) – For families and whānau supporting a loved one who has a mental illness. Auckland 0800 732 825. Find other regions' contact details [here](#).