

Mental Illness

What to do when it happens to someone in your life

Remember, your job isn't to "fix it", anymore than you would try to fix a heart attack

Your job is Support, Comfort, and Connection

- Remind them that with time and treatment, **recovery is possible**, there will be better days.
- Mental illness is often a marathon, not a sprint. **Encourage ongoing self-care**, important both for individuals living with mental illness and for caregivers/family members/close friends.
- Encourage them to use coping skills and tools they've developed, and **help them nurture their own resiliency**.
- If a person is suicidal, especially if they have a plan, they need to go to the ER immediately. **Always take it seriously**. Even if suicidal thoughts are common symptoms, if they are actively suicidal, stay with them. Help them get help.
- **When they are well, develop a plan** with your loved one for how you can to help when they are sick. For example, "when you're extremely anxious, I can remind you to do your meditation exercises, or we can go on a walk." Or, "If you are planning to hurt yourself, I should encourage you to go to the ER, and get help if you can't."
- **Encourage them to connect** with support groups and their local NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) chapter.
- **Ask them what THEY would find helpful**, and listen to them talk about their symptoms and treatment so you can better understand their experience.
- If faith is a helpful part of their life, **offer to pray with them** or connect them with their faith community.
- Often, your emotional support, patience, encouragement, **your PRESENCE, is the best gift** you can give. Be a good friend.
- You know all the things you'd do for someone home from surgery, who's had a baby, or had some other tough life event? Those are all great things to do for people experiencing difficult times with mental illness and their families. **Bring a casserole**, or another meal! **Visit**, take them to coffee, send an encouraging card. Go for a walk, or offer to drive to a doctor's appointment. **Show up!**