

How to Help a Friend

Interested in helping a friend who is struggling, yet not quite sure how to do so most effectively? Here are some tips that can help:

- Be compassionate and make sure your friend knows that you're talking with him because you really care.
 - Assume a non-blaming tone – you don't want to put anyone on the defensive in order for this to go well!
 - Steer clear of ultimatums, threats or other pressure-filled tactics.
 - Use "I" statements to express your concern, such as "I've noticed that you're spending a lot of time alone on the computer and I'm just really worried about you."
 - Listen well by tuning in, keeping an open posture and not interrupting your friend.
 - Also, listen actively by reflecting what she said back to her – that shows that you're listening and really *getting* what she's saying.
 - Use prompts like "Why don't you tell me more about..." or "What do you think about..."
 - Don't jump to conclusions or offer speedy solutions – if it was that easy, your friend likely would have done something about it already! It's not up to you to solve the issue; it's more about listening and letting the person know that he is cared for so he can attack the problem using his own knowledge and strength.
- Include your friend's opinion by asking her what she thinks could help in this situation.
 - Don't promise confidentiality because you may need to go to a trusted counselor, advisor or other support person in order to get your friend the best help you can. Being stuck in a promise of confidentiality doesn't allow you to help your friend most effectively.
 - Keep in mind that you aren't a trained counselor and that you shouldn't take the weight of the world on your shoulders. If it's too much for you to handle, remove yourself and refer your friend to a counselor who can help.
 - Offer to walk over to the counseling, campus ministry or hall director's office with your friend. It's another way to actively show support.

Some pieces adapted from "Showing Support to Someone Close to You" from Mental Health America of Colorado, www.mhacolorado.org/pdf/Family%20MH/Mental%20Illness,%20Showing%20Support.pdf

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Helping with Mental Health Concerns

If a friend is dealing with a mental health diagnosis, there are some particular things you can do to be helpful...

- ▶ Educate yourself about his diagnosis, any signs and symptoms and what side effects his medications may be causing.
- ▶ Let her go through her own stages when she receives a diagnosis. Some people may be relieved and actively seek treatment, while others may be devastated initially and feel stressed out.
- ▶ Practice active listening, letting your friend talk and reflecting your understanding back to him.
- ▶ Don't discount any of her feelings, even if you think they are symptoms of her illness.
- ▶ Encourage your friend to be an active partner with his treatment team as they work toward recovery. This includes speaking up if he feels something isn't working.
- ▶ Recognize that medications won't be an immediate "magic bullet." It often takes time for people to find the right meds and proper dosages that work for them.
- ▶ And also realize that medication isn't the only answer. Social support, therapy, self-esteem and feeling like they're contributing to society are all essential elements in the recovery process.
- ▶ Offer to accompany your friend to medical and counseling appointments, if she'd like you to. This can be just to sit with her in the waiting room or to be there during the visit, as an advocate and another set of ears.
- ▶ Always respect your friend's need for and right to privacy. This can help preserve his dignity.