

Mental Health Awareness



Supporting a Friend

Encouragement can significantly aid someone's healing journey as they deal with a mental health issue.

That starts with encouragement and any help you can provide with their overall well-being. Strive to learn more about the specifics of these illnesses, both in terms of their challenges and how to help.

LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Good communication is vital when supporting someone with a mental health challenge. Foster an environment where open and honest dialogue can happen. Listen attentively without passing judgment. Acknowledge their feelings and experiences, while practicing understanding and compassion. Don't minimize difficulties; and remain steadfast in your commitment to help as needed.

Encourage your loved one to seek professional assistance with managing their mental health. Offer to help locate a suitable psychiatrist, therapist or support group that can serve their particular needs. Be patient and compassionate, since reaching out for help for many can be very difficult.

LEARNING MORE

One of the best ways to



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assist a loved one is to learn about their specific condition. By familiarizing yourself with the symptoms, triggers and available treatments, you can offer better support to someone who's in distress. You can get plenty of information from trustworthy organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which provides essential

information and resources for both those affected by mental illness and their supporters. Visit nami.org/types-of-conditions/ to find out more.

CELEBRATE THE WINS

Along the way, acknowledge the progress being made by your loved one — even the small victories. Recognize their bravery in facing these

obstacles, and provide praise throughout their journey. Your support can serve as a powerful source of encouragement as they move forward.

REMEMBER SELF-CARE

Supporting a loved one with a mental illness calls for patience, understanding and empathy. Your efforts can have a huge effect on their

recovery experience. But don't forget to take care of yourself. Establish boundaries to safeguard your own well-being, and don't hesitate to reach out to family, friends or a therapist for support if necessary. This may mean designating certain times when you are unavailable, so that you can focus on your own needs and interests.

At Work: Handling Burnout

Many people get more than money out of their work life.

There's a sense of accomplishment for a job well done. But when a career begins to occupy too much of our attention and time, our mental health can be affected.

Here's how to keep things in proper balance:

DEFINING THE TERM

Experts define burnout as a workplace phenomenon arising from unmanaged chronic stress. It presents through feelings of emotional exhaustion, a diminished sense of personal achievement and de-personalization. Workers in jobs who need to invest considerable empathy and emotional energy into their roles, like health-care workers, teachers, first responders and public figures may be particularly susceptible.

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Begin by focusing on self-care. Study after study has confirmed the critical role this plays in preserving mental well-being and avoiding burnout. Activities such as exercise, a hobby, listening to music, yoga or meditation can effectively alleviate stress for many people. Next, set



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professional boundaries. This is important not only in personal spheres but also in your professional life. Maintain clear distinctions between work and home time to lessen burnout risks. Focus on limiting work to your scheduled hours and try to avoid carrying stress from work back

home afterward.

Finally, strengthen your personal sense of community. Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and other supportive figures can be beneficial in reducing the stress that leads to burnout. If your circle is smaller, consider a support group for advice and

emotional encouragement. Sharing experiences with others can help combat feelings of isolation. They may be able to help you discover new stress management strategies, as well.

COPING WITH BURNOUT

If you already feel burned

out, counseling may be necessary. A professional therapist can help with processing your experiences and emotions. In the meantime, practice mindfulness and relaxation. Techniques like deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation can also help greatly reduce stress levels.

Picking a Therapist

Maybe you're ready to make a change in your mental health journey.

Maybe your needs have shifted, or you're looking for a different kind of support.

Whatever the reason, finding the right therapist can take time—and the right match can make a meaningful difference.

Research consistently shows that the relationship between a therapist and client is one of the strongest predictors of positive outcomes. Credentials matter, but connection, trust and communication matter just as much. A qualified therapist is essential—but the right therapist is the one who helps you feel heard, respected and supported.

BEGINNING YOUR SEARCH

If you plan to use insurance, start by reviewing your provider's directory to see who is in network. Pay attention to co-pays, deductibles and any limits on the number of sessions covered. These details can vary widely between plans.

Search professional directories such as the American Psychological Association, Psychology Today and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, which allow you to filter by specialty, location and treatment approach. For more targeted support, consider



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organizations focused on specific concerns, such as the National Eating Disorders Association, the National Center for PTSD or the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. These groups can help connect you with professionals who have relevant experience.

Recommendations from friends, family or coworkers can also be helpful—but keep in mind that therapy is highly

personal. A therapist who works well for someone else may not be the right fit for you.

DOING YOUR HOMEWORK

As you narrow your options, look beyond basic qualifications. Licensing and years of experience are important, but they are only the starting point. Review therapists' profiles, websites or introductory materials to get a sense of how

they describe their work. Some may take a structured, goal-oriented approach, while others focus more on open-ended conversation and reflection. Many offer a brief phone consultation, which can provide a valuable first impression of their communication style.

Consider practical factors as well, such as availability, session format (in-person or virtual) and scheduling flexibility. These details can influence

whether therapy feels sustainable over time.

GETTING STARTED

Before your first appointment—or during an initial consultation—ask questions that go beyond logistics and explore how a therapist works and relates to clients. You might ask:

- How would you describe your approach to therapy in everyday language?
- What does a typical session with you look like?
- How do you work with clients who have concerns similar to mine?
- How do you handle it if something we're doing doesn't feel helpful?
- How do you invite feedback from clients about the process?
- What does a strong therapist-client relationship look like to you?

These questions can offer insight into whether a therapist's style aligns with your needs and preferences. Just as important, notice how you feel during the conversation. Do you feel comfortable asking questions? Do you feel listened to and respected?

Remember that you are not obligated to stay with a therapist who doesn't feel like a good fit. Even a highly qualified professional may not match your communication style or needs. If something feels off—whether it's difficulty building trust, feeling misunderstood or discomfort during sessions—it's appropriate to bring it up or explore other options.

Navigating Life's Challenges

Anyone can find themselves in a tough situation sometimes.

Life has a way of throwing curveballs.

By turning to professionally agreed-upon strategies, however, we can build resiliency and move past those challenges.

FOR YOURSELF

Work to stay positive. Fostering this healthy outlook benefits both your mental and physical health. Try keeping a gratitude journal or envisioning a bright future. Look for the silver linings that help us all steer clear of negative thoughts.

Make dietary changes as needed. A nutritious diet can increase your energy levels and mood-regulating chemicals in your body, while also mitigating the effects of stress. Eat healthy meals and snacks while avoiding restrictive dieting and skipped meals. Some evidence suggests that consuming foods high in Vitamin B-12, Omega-3 fatty acids and folate can help combat depression.

Focus on your sleep patterns. Not getting enough rest contributes to heightened anxiety, a greater likelihood of depression and poor memory. Set a consistent bedtime, cut down on caffeine (particularly before bedtime) and schedule time for unwinding before sleep.



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IN THE COMMUNITY

Research indicates that individuals who regularly help others tend to experience lower depression rates, greater happiness and improved health. That can mean volunteering but also simply checking in on a friend or offering a smile to someone you meet.

Getting out there will help

build connections that provide emotional support, advice, different viewpoints and validation. You can connect with others by signing up for classes, joining groups or simply reaching out to old acquaintances. Strengthen your existing relationships by scheduling quality time together. If you don't have a

larger friend group, consider participating in a support group.

Stick to a regular exercise routine. It's beneficial for your body and enhances mood by lowering stress levels, promoting a sense of well-being and lessening anxiety.

Create your own joy. Make

time for leisure activities you enjoy, especially those that involve other people. Laughter can alleviate anxiety and pain, while positive feelings help reduce stress. Draw more humor into your life through joke books, fun visits, uplifting quotes and comedy podcasts — and look for the humor in everyday situations.

Real Talk About Mental Health

One in four adults in the U.S. will experience a mental health condition in any given year.

Professional support—from therapists, primary care providers and crisis services—plays a critical role. But many people first reach out, or are first noticed, in everyday conversations with friends, family members or coworkers.

Those conversations can open a door—or quietly close one. What matters isn't saying the “perfect” thing, but creating a space where someone feels safe enough to be honest.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

There's no script, and there doesn't need to be. What matters most is intention and environment.

Choose a setting with some privacy and minimal distractions. Give the conversation your full attention. Then start simply and directly:

- “I've noticed you don't seem like yourself lately. How are you doing?”
- “You've been on my mind. Do you want to talk?”

These openings are effective because they are specific and grounded in observation, not assumptions or diagnoses. Be prepared for any response—including “I'm fine.” If that happens, keep the door open: “Okay. I'm here if you ever do want to talk.”

WHAT HELPS

Effective support is less about fixing and more about being present. Listen more than you speak.

Let the person set the pace. Silence isn't failure—it can be part of processing.

Reflect, don't redirect. Instead of shifting the topic or offering solutions,



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try, “That sounds exhausting” or “I'm really glad you told me.”

Ask open, respectful questions. “What's been weighing on you the most?” “What would feel helpful right now?” Be honest about your role. You don't have to have answers to be supportive: “I don't know exactly what to say, but I care about you.”

Offer specific, practical support. General offers like “let me know if you need anything” can be hard to act on. Instead: “Can I bring you dinner this week?” or “Do you want company at your appointment?”

Encourage professional support—without pressure. You might say: “Have you thought about talking to a therapist or doctor? I can help you find someone if you want.” Organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness and

the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offer resources, education and support for individuals and families.

WHAT TO AVOID

Certain responses, even when well-intended, can shut down communication. Don't minimize or compare. Phrases like “this will pass” or “everyone feels that way sometimes” can make someone feel dismissed. Don't try to fix the problem immediately. Jumping to solutions can unintentionally signal that their feelings are something to be solved rather than understood.

Don't diagnose or direct treatment. Speculating about diagnoses or insisting on a specific approach can undermine autonomy. Don't center yourself. Sharing your own experiences can be

helpful in some cases, but shifting the focus too quickly can make the other person feel unheard.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Not every conversation will go smoothly. The person may withdraw, change the subject or respond with frustration. That doesn't mean you've failed. Consistency matters more than a single interaction.

Checking in again later — without pressure — can reinforce that your support is steady.

It's also important to recognize your own limits. Supporting someone does not mean taking responsibility for their well-being. Encouraging professional help and maintaining appropriate boundaries are part of offering sustainable support.

Dealing with Anxiety

Millions of people are affected by anxiety every day.

This is different from the temporary feelings of worry or nervousness that happen in the course of life and work. Instead, anxiety is an overwhelming emotional response that can disrupt daily activities and, eventually, our overall health. Identifying the signs can be an important first step toward getting the help needed to manage this very prevalent mental health issue.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Anxiety is characterized by a sense of constant fear or worry that feels uncontrollable. Sufferers may find their minds racing as they imagine worst-case scenarios — even when there is no real threat. Anxiety may present physically, including symptoms such as sweating, shaking, a rapid heart rate, shortness of breath or dizziness. This can quickly escalate to panic attacks, which are sudden episodes of extreme worry with physical symptoms like chest pain, a sense of impending doom and heart palpitations.

Behavioral changes may indicate anxiety. Some sufferers may steer clear of specific situations or activities that spark anxiety, finding themselves in isolation from social withdrawal. Others may develop compulsive actions or routines to momentarily ease their anxiety. Sleep issues are



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commonly reported.

HARD TO DIAGNOSE

Certain anxiety symptoms are less noticeable and may be mistaken for other disorders or overlooked entirely. Less identifiable symptoms frequently associated with anxiety include digestive problems, muscle pain and tension, skin issues,

changes in appetite, sleep disturbances and cognitive issues, among others.

Anxiety can manifest in the digestive system, resulting in stomach pain, diarrhea, constipation, nausea, or even irritable bowel syndrome. Symptoms may include chronic tension and pain in muscles, such as headaches, backaches

and teeth grinding. Anxiety can worsen existing skin conditions like eczema, acne, psoriasis and hives, or trigger new ones.

Some may lose their appetite during anxious times, while others might turn to food for comfort, resulting in emotional eating and weight gain. Some might deal with nightmares,

sleepwalking or night sweats. Among the unexpected cognitive effects are memory lapses, indecision, trouble focusing or feeling overwhelmed by routine tasks. Those with anxiety might become overly sensitive to sensory stimulation, leading them to become overwhelmed in situations that others find manageable.

Social Media and You

Social media apps have transformed our lives, from how we interact and communicate to the way we access information.

They help us keep in touch with family and friends, while providing easy access to a vast array of content. But there can be a darker side to social media — especially for those who overuse it.

CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGE

Research has now connected social media usage with heightened feelings of depression and loneliness — particularly among young adults. As we're constantly exposed to idealized portrayals of other people's lives, some people begin to compare themselves unfavorably. This, in turn, fosters feelings of inadequacy and isolation.

The compulsive nature of our online lives may worsen mental health concerns. Heavy social media use has been linked to addiction-like behavior, including cravings, withdrawal and a lack of control. This kind of addiction can hinder daily routines, disrupt sleep and impact overall wellness.

CUTTING EDGE ISSUES

Cyberbullying is a form of negative interaction rising at an alarming rate among young



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people. Research has shown that some 60 percent of American teenagers have encountered some form of it. The widespread nature and anonymity of the apps encourage bullying behaviors. Those affected suffer psychological distress and may have suicidal thoughts.

Just the constant flow of new

posts and alerts can elevate our anxiety and stress. Those who regularly check their social media are experiencing greater stress than those who use these apps less often. The burden of maintaining an online image, keeping up with the latest trends and promptly responding to messages can feel overwhelming.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Despite these many challenges, there are ways to reduce negative influences on your mental health. Set limits on social media use, for yourself and younger, more impressionable members of your family. Focus on participating in offline activities.

Work to create a positive

online space by unfollowing accounts that spark negative emotions. It's an easy way to encourage a healthier relationship with social media. As you recognize the potential risks and apply mindful strategies to navigating the digital world, you'll be making the most of social media while protecting your mental well-being.