

SANE

FACTSHEET

HELPING

There are lots of simple, everyday ways you can support someone who has a mental illness. Small things can make a big difference: being there to listen, keeping in touch and reminding the person that you care. Another powerful way to help is to learn as much as possible about the illness and its treatment. This will help you communicate more knowledgeably and effectively with the person you care for and any treating health professionals. You can also share this information with family and friends to help them to better understand and provide support.

Being a carer can make demands upon your own physical and mental health too. Make sure you speak out to other family members and health professionals, for example, and ensure you get the support you need.

TIPS FOR BEING A CARER

- **Ask how you can help.** People will want support in different ways at different times so asking is the best way to know how you can help. Sometimes people struggle to express what they need so making suggestions can also be useful.
- **Give them time.** Some people might prefer a text message or email rather than talking on the phone or face-to-face. This means they can get back to you when they feel ready. What's important is that they know you'll be there when they're ready to get in touch. Others may prefer to hear a human voice, with a regular phone call instead.
- **Try to be open-minded and non-judgemental.** This can be hard with some of the behavioural changes associated with symptoms. For example, if someone starts staying in bed rather than meeting their responsibilities it can be tempting to attribute this to the individual rather than the condition. It is best to focus on how to deal with the symptoms rather than judge the behaviour alone.
- **Encourage sticking to a treatment plan** and make a crisis plan so that you know what to do if symptoms escalate.
- **Remember you are not to blame** if things get difficult and try not to take hurtful comments personally. Some mental health conditions may involve increased anger and irritability that can be difficult for the person to control. At the same time, aggression and violence are always unacceptable. Do not hesitate to call on help in these circumstances, even if this involves the police.
- **Try to be patient.** Getting better can take time.
- **If you live together, setting out house rules can help.** However, be sensitive to the

fact that there may be times when keeping to those rules feels beyond the person's ability.

- **If you know someone has been unwell**, don't be afraid to ask how they are. They might want to talk about it or they might not. Letting them know they don't have to avoid the issue can be helpful.
- **Try to avoid clichés.** Phrases like 'Cheer up', 'I'm sure it'll pass' and 'It could be worse' won't help and can make the person feel more isolated.
- **Don't just talk about mental health.** Keep in mind that having a mental illness is just one part of a person's experience. People aren't defined solely by their health problems.
- **Encouraging the person to do things** without being unrealistic or demanding. For example, social contact is very important to our wellbeing and so encouraging outings and meetings with others can be helpful. Bear in mind this can sometimes feel daunting for someone affected by mental illness.
- **Consider the person as a whole.** Remember that they have the same range of personal, emotional and sexual needs as anyone else. Is their physical health being looked after by a GP? Are there alcohol or drug problems that needs attention?
- **Many carers neglect their own needs because of their caring role.** This doesn't help you or anyone else in the long run. Look after your own physical and mental health, and talk to a health professional about what support is available. See [What support is available for carers?](#)

If you are concerned about your caring role or its impact on you, contact [the SANE Help Centre](#) on 1800 18 SANE (7263) for information, guidance, and referral for support.