

Supporting Someone with a Mental Health Concern

All of us experience sadness & worry from time-to-time.

Often, it may be a passing phase, but at times it may indicate a mental health concern.

In either case, support from our near & dear ones plays an important role in protecting & promoting our mental well-being.

Tips to support & encourage a person in distress to consult a mental health professional

- ✓ Educate yourself about mental health.
- ✓ Give them time to talk about their problems.
- ✓ Let them know that you are there to listen to them without judgment.
- ✓ Encourage them gently to consult a professional.
- ✓ Assure them that consulting a professional does not mean that something is wrong with them, but that they deserve an unbiased & safe space to explore & process their experiences.
- ✓ Offer to make an appointment for them or just be there in the waiting room. But, talk to them about their preference & take appropriate steps.
- ✓ Involve them in the routine, social events, etc.
- ✓ Acknowledge and appreciate their efforts.
- ✓ If they say or do things that upset you, try not to take it personally. Remember, they are dealing with difficult thoughts and emotions.

- ✓ Take some time out if you find things to be difficult. Your mental health is important too.

Accepting what is possible, being aware of your limits and knowing the available options can make you feel less helpless.

DON'T

- ✗ Invalidate or trivialize ("It could be worse," "Everyone has stress," "You have so much to be grateful for.")
- ✗ Call them over-sensitive
- ✗ Restrict emotional expression ("Don't cry")
- ✗ Interrupt while they are trying to share
- ✗ Judge/blame/criticize ("it's your fault," "you are just lazy/seeking attention").
- ✗ Try to fix their problems
- ✗ Give pre-mature advice
- ✗ Make assumptions or force logical arguments on them. Your understanding of a problem & solution may be different from theirs ("I know what you're going through").
- ✗ Force them to talk to you or make them do something they don't want to. Respect their choices and decisions.

When would self-help & support from friends/family not be enough?

- Only temporary relief after trying to solve the problem on one's own/with help of family/friends
- Feeling low or worried to the extent that it interferes with daily routine
- Frequent & intense negative thoughts of hopelessness/helplessness/worthlessness
- Low motivation to carry out daily tasks
- Frequent difficulties in managing emotions
- Changes in eating & sleeping patterns
- Significant decline in work/academic performance due to the concern
- Experiencing thoughts about ending life

These are not symptoms of a particular mental health condition but indicate that professional consultation in these scenarios will be beneficial. Experiencing one-two of these may not qualify for a diagnosis, and everyone experiencing a mental health concern may not experience all the indicators.

Why consult a mental health professional?

- It's not necessary to have a diagnosable or severe mental health condition to consult.
- Consultation can help to understand:
 - if the concern requires further professional help
 - to know the recommended & available options including self-help
- Can prevent the problem from becoming worse.
- Can help to make sense of one's experiences & learn ways to manage them.

How can a mental health professional help?

- Professional helps to learn coping skills that are different from just giving advice.
- They use specific therapeutic strategies to deal with the symptoms effectively & move towards recovery.
- Sometimes, psychotherapy/counseling can be combined with medications to restore the chemical imbalance that cause/affect these problems. But, the treatment choice depends on nature of problem, it's severity and one's personal preference.

Self-help, support system & professional help are not exclusive, but complement one another to provide the help that the person needs and deserves. Encourage them to start thinking about taking care of themselves and take a step towards mental wellness.



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