



How to Help Yourself When a Loved One Is Mentally Ill

When someone we love is suffering, it can feel so difficult to witness. Among other things, we may feel powerless, frustrated and frightened. That's true whether the loved one's suffering originates from a physical illness or injury, addiction or self-destructive activity.

Those feelings can be compounded when a loved one suffers a debilitating, persistent and chronic mental illness, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. Strange, unpredictable behaviors can be terrifying and confusing. Your loved one may suddenly rage at you with blame or be utterly dependent upon you for basic needs and emotional stability.

You may experience many confusing emotions yourself, including anger, grief, guilt, fear and sadness. As you struggle with each episode of illness and worry about the future, you may feel anxious and overwhelmed.

Unfortunately, since serious mental illness still carries a stigma, you may be keeping it a secret, resulting in increased isolation, frustration and difficulty because you may have no one to talk to about your feelings or no way to get information and support.

The Crucial Task of Taking Care of Yourself

When you're in the middle of a chaotic or confusing situation, taking care of yourself can be the last thing you think of, yet, it is crucial. According to NAMI, the National Association for the Mentally Ill, here are a few ways to do that:

Educate yourself about mental illness. Read everything you can about your loved one's condition, its treatment options, as well as tools and strategies for coping with the illness and minimizing relapses. NAMI has a

wealth of written and audio material, as well as 1,200 local U.S. chapters.

Seek support. You do not have to suffer in silence. NAMI offers free support groups for loved ones as well as a HelpLine: 1-800-950-6264. You can find enormous relief from sharing your thoughts and feelings in a supportive environment among those who understand.

Accept the reality of the situation. While you can offer valuable support and love, you cannot cure your loved one's mental disorder. His or her symptoms may get better or they may get worse. Hospitalization may be necessary. Medication can restore stability and functionality, but may not heal the condition. You may have to lower your expectations of what your loved one can do. For instance, he or she may only be able to work part-time or, in some cases, not at all.

Set boundaries and clear limits. If you feel strong resentment, you are giving too much. If you need a break from the situation, find a way to get it. Don't tolerate violent behavior. As hard as it is, consider if you need to leave the situation or make other arrangements for care.

Holding Onto Hope

Advances in our understanding and treatment of severe and chronic mental illness occur every day. People get better and learn effective ways to cope. Relapses can become less common and shorter in duration.

While your loved one may never completely heal, and coping with the situation may challenge you like nothing else, it is possible to learn how to manage the stress of the situation as you care for your loved one as well as yourself. *

10 Things Sapping Your Life Energy

We get so used to life being a certain way, that we don't realize how much behaviors and situations can drain our life energy and distract us from our purpose. Here are 10 of the most common.

- 1. Negativity.** Try listing five things in your life for which you have gratitude right now.
- 2. Clutter.** Take five minutes each day to put things in order. Someone else's mess? Have an honest conversation.
- 3. Unkind words or behavior.** If you've been putting up with people speaking disrespectfully to you, try working on your self-esteem.
- 4. Obligations.** Your wishes are important. Don't want to attend the work party for a coworker you never bonded with? That's okay.
- 5. Poor work/life balance.** It's essential for health and happiness not to let work take priority over home and family.
- 6. Unhappiness in your job.** What is one action that you can take right now to shift the situation?
- 7. House and car repairs.** Make it a habit to repair things quickly. You might be saving yourself from a bigger problem (and bill).
- 8. Lack of respect for time.** Communicate honestly about the impact of other people's lateness. Take inventory of your awareness of others' time, if needed.
- 9. Poor wellness habits.** Don't give in to bad habits. Being proactive about your health now can prevent larger health issues in the future.
- 10. Financial problems.** Use a budget system (online or offline) to keep yourself financially fit. *

A Letter From Fred Chapin



When someone you love has a severe mental illness, caring for that person as well as yourself can feel like an impossible task. Just coping with each episode of the illness can feel completely overwhelming and confusing. Yet, as the article on page 1 reveals, it is imperative that you get the education and support you need.

Another difficult situation we face, if we are parents, is when our children leave home or go to college. The article on page 3 looks at why some parents feel a sense of pride and satisfaction while others find the resulting void unbearable. Whichever your experience might be, there are ways to cope and even begin to thrive.

On page 4 we meet Eileen, who has learned how to speak her truth with skill. When you speak honestly about your dissatisfaction, you do run the risk of alienating others. However, as Eileen discovered, with a little skill and consciousness, it is possible to speak up and be heard.

Putting up with bad habits and belittling behavior (in ourselves and from those around us) can put a real drain on life energy. The Top 10 in this issue takes a look at some situations and behaviors we may need to stop tolerating and tips on how to change them.

And finally, the quiz asks if sleep deprivation is getting in your way.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

Is Sleep Deprivation Harming Your Health and Quality of Life?

Quality sleep is as important to our health as food and water. Yet, we often cut back on sleep in favor of "getting more done." Chronic lack of sleep can cause a wide range of symptoms, including impaired brain function, memory loss, depression, weight gain and irritability. Long-term health issues include increased risk for heart attack and stroke. Answer the following true/false questions to discover whether lack of sleep is getting in your way.



True False

- 1. My memory, in general, isn't as good as it used to be.
- 2. I feel easily irritated, impatient and/or moody, and my relationships are being affected.
- 3. I have to have coffee to get going in the morning and often depend upon other caffeine or sugar boosts to get through the day.
- 4. I feel depressed sometimes, but don't have the time to deal with it.
- 5. I have a hard time controlling my emotions—and find myself at the point of tears without really knowing why.
- 6. I often feel overwhelmed, and my ability to handle stress is diminished.
- 7. I have difficulty concentrating and sometimes have to ask people to repeat what they just said.
- 8. Instead of feeling refreshed when I wake up, I still feel tired.
- 9. I have a hard time staying awake when I read or watch television.
- 10. I doze off easily.
- 11. I don't have the energy to do fun things with my partner, and that is creating stress in our relationship.
- 12. I get sleepy when I drive and have to do things to keep myself alert, such as drinking a soda or keeping the windows open to get more fresh air.
- 13. My reaction time when I drive isn't as fast as it once was.
- 14. I'm not performing as well at work; everything takes longer than it used to.
- 15. I've been dropping the ball at work and at home, not following through with simple tasks.
- 16. I don't feel very motivated—I just don't have the energy.
- 17. I've been eating more to boost my energy and my weight has been creeping up.
- 18. I get sick often.
- 19. People tell me that I look tired.

If you answered true to several of these statements, your sleep deprivation may be harming your overall health and well-being. Please call if you'd like support in exploring ways to remedy this issue. ✧

Letting Go and Trusting When Your Children Leave Home

Our children occupy a place in our hearts deeper than most any other relationship, from the second they arrive on the planet, just inches long and utterly dependent on us.

We nurture, guide, feed and protect them for years. The relationship brings us a complex mixture of joy, frustration, sadness, delight, anger, pride and love. Our children occupy our focus like nothing else, as they grow taller and more independent with every year.

And then they go away.

Of course, we knew that from the beginning. And that's been the goal all along.

But that doesn't make an empty nest any easier when it finally comes.

Fortunately, an empty nest is also the beginning of another era for parents, one that can be equally fulfilling.

Several recent studies have shed light on what's often referred to as "empty nest syndrome"—that is, the feelings of grief that arise when children leave home for college, jobs or marriage. Here are a few of their findings:

Men feel loss, too. Feelings of loss are not exclusive to women. Men feel just as much loss and may actually be less emotionally prepared to deal with those feelings.

Most women don't fall apart. Unlike the common perception, it's not typical for most women to experience lingering depression, or loss of purpose and identity. Though they experienced sadness, mothers speak more about their pride and joy in watching their kids make this transition and the relief they felt in seeing the fruits of their labor realized.

Happier partnerships. Contrary to the image of couples having trouble after the kids are gone, empty nesters of both genders reported their marital satisfaction was improved because they spent more quality time together.

Not everyone cries for a week and then moves on with life. Some parents really suffer. Research suggests that about 10% of mothers are more severely affected when their children leave home, and the problem may be more long-term.

Those who experience the most long-term pain often have these things in common:

- They consider change stressful and to be avoided.
- Their marriage is rocky.



- They worry that their children aren't ready for adult responsibilities.
- They have a weaker sense of self-worth; their identity is tied to being a parent.
- Their own experience of moving away from their parents was difficult.
- Other "letting go" times, such as weaning or sending children to school, were painful.
- They are full-time parents, with no other paid employment or self-employment.

If you are having severe reactions (crying excessively, so sad you don't want to see friends or go to work, feeling your useful life has ended), consider seeking professional help.

For most parents, the following suggestions will help you get through the transition:

Feel your feelings. But don't burden your children with them. Once they've left, ration your calls to once or twice a week. Try texting. The more they feel you clinging, the more they'll pull away.

Get support. If you're going through menopause, or having to care for elderly parents, your feelings may be exacerbated. Speak with a physician if you're experiencing difficult menopausal symptoms, and consider ways to take a break from your caregiving to take care of YOU.

Be proactive. As much as possible, make family plans while everyone is still under the same roof. Plan family vacations, take time off from work for special days, take advantage of all opportunities to talk with your child.

Dream and do. Use your greater freedom and relaxed responsibility to get back in touch with your own dreams and aspirations. Make a list of all the hobbies you'd like to pursue, or classes you'd like to take. Spend time that you didn't have before developing new friendships.

Dive into that new business or career that you've been dreaming about.

Above all, forgive yourself for not being a "perfect" parent, and acknowledge all that you've been able to provide for your children. Focus on letting go and trusting that your child is on his or her path—bumps and all—and will be fine. And you will be, too. *



How to Speak Your Mind Without Alienating People

Eileen began having issues with one of the co-founders of her start-up after he bulldozed over her experience and capability in a leadership meeting. After her resentment had built up to a nearly unmanageable level, she asked to speak with him and explained how she was feeling.

"I made sure to speak my truth," says Eileen. "By that I mean that I spoke with him in a completely honest way about my discomfort, without trying to minimize or play down the fact that I felt disrespected. I used "I" statements, but was also clear about why the work environment had become unbearable."

Although the lead up to the talk was terrifying, since the meeting, her work environment has become significantly more pleasant.

Eileen's experience is perfectly normal, especially in regards to the fear she felt before expressing her

dissatisfaction. Most people have a difficult time saying what's true for them when issues come up in family and work life.

They fear the pain of being rejected, so they alter their words and actions and may even manipulate situations and people to get what they want without having to speak honestly and risk discomfort.



However, speaking your truth is not only mentally liberating, it's beneficial to your physical health. When you let your true self be seen, you heal. Holding in emotions and resentments can lead to

stress, which can be taxing on the body. Releasing stressful tension is just one of the benefits of speaking truthfully.

But how does one actually do this

without alienating others? Here are some suggestions:

1. Aim for being real, not right.

Speak from the heart, and focus on expressing your thoughts without attacking the other person.

2. Get to know your own truth through introspective exercises.

Think about what you value, what inspires you, what makes you feel grounded, what gives you purpose in life.

3. Practice. Speaking your truth becomes easier with time and repetition. Always pay attention to your inner pilot light. And when something seems off in your outer world, don't be afraid to let your voice be heard.

As difficult as it may feel to start speaking up, ultimately it's easier to be truthful than it is to evade the issue. It takes courage to speak up, to risk another's displeasure, but in the end the physical and mental rewards of doing so are endless. *

Chapin & Russell Associates

A Division of Resource Management Services, Inc.
3020 W. Willow Knolls Drive
Peoria, IL 61614
Tel: 309.681.5850 Fax: 309.681.5658

www.chapinandrussell.com