

Caring for a Loved One with a Mental Health Disorder

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Hugh, Parent

There is definitely a stigma to mental illness. You know, we see that as parents, how that gets reflected is that quite often you are blamed for some of the challenges that your kids exhibit. You know, you are either overbearing or you are too permissive or you have done something wrong somehow to have your kids have those kinds of challenges, and that is just absolutely not true.

Narrator

One in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental health disorder. If you are a caregiver to one of them, your support and help is very important. It starts with listening and learning.

Heather M. Jones, PhD, Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

Caregivers can do a couple of things. One, is to work with their child or their loved one's care provider and learn new ways of responding to their child or their loved one's mental health concern. And secondly, is learning about what the treatment modality entails. So learning a lot about the mental health issue; learning about the anxiety, about the depression; understanding what it's like for their loved one to experience this level of, severity of an illness.

Narrator

Every person with a mental health disorder experiences it differently. No video or healthcare professional can tell you how to prepare for every situation that may arise. Your experience as a caregiver is a learning process. You will learn what works and what doesn't.

Hugh, Parent

So before my son was diagnosed, things were not much different than after except that we were confused by an awful lot of different words that we had never heard before. Trying to find services, trying to understand, learn, all of those things probably changed pretty dramatically. Our interests were pretty much solely on, "What is this all about? What do we do? What's available out there? Who are the experts?"

Rachel C. Leonard, PhD, Behavioral Activation Specialist & Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

Loved ones can be extremely helpful when someone's going through treatment. Some of the things that might be useful are just kind of providing a lot of support and praise for engaging in treatment, showing them that they don't need to be ashamed of it, and that it's actually a really great thing that they're seeking treatment; that can go a long way.

Heather M. Jones, PhD, Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

Often times when there is a mental health issue, it creates a lot of anxiety and worry in a family member and so we would want them to seek support and acknowledging how difficult and courageous they would have to be in order to actually seek that support. For parents and caregivers to be a source of support in face of that stigma is incredibly important.

Rachel C. Leonard, PhD, Behavioral Activation Specialist & Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

If someone notices that a friend or a loved one might be struggling with symptoms of depression, it's really important to talk with them about it. I think sometimes people have this fear that by talking about it they could make it worse, and I know that's often true, especially related to suicide, and the data show the opposite.

Peggy Scallon, MD, FAPA, Medical Director, FOCUS Adolescent Mood Disorders Program, Rogers Memorial Hospital

One thing that's important is just to ask them and to let them know that you're a person that they can trust and you will help them to seek any answers that they might need, and you're willing to hear anything that they might tell you. People really appreciate that you might express that you'd be there for the journey that might be coming ahead and that you won't abandon them.

Narrator

As a caregiver to someone diagnosed with a mental health disorder, you need to know that you are not alone. Millions of caregivers have experienced some of the same thoughts and questions you may be having. Secondly, keep in mind you can call on experienced mental health professionals and other resources to help you.

Hugh, Parent

One of the big challenges that you have when you are dealing with issues like mental health in a family, is that sense of isolation. But, boy when you get connected to others who have walked in similar shoes, who know not only the challenges you face, but also the joys, it makes a huge difference.

Heather M. Jones, PhD, Clinical Supervisor, Rogers Memorial Hospital

The first place that caregivers should go to receive help is their primary care physician and relying on that, that kind of first-line treatment provider that they know, have a relationship with. I think secondarily to that, if they have children, if we're talking about parents with children that may be experiencing mental health concerns, going to their school counselor or school psychologist; those are excellent resources.

Narrator

Other helpful resources are parents or family members whose loved ones have faced similar challenges. They may share that supporting someone does not mean controlling them. You can support and encourage your adult loved one but you don't have to solve their problems for them. Offer suggestions and input, but be ready to accept and support their decisions.

Peggy Scallon, MD, FAPA, Medical Director, FOCUS Adolescent Mood Disorders Program, Rogers Memorial Hospital

Loved ones can be very helpful in asking questions on behalf of their family member or friend. They can remember to ask the things that a person who's suffering from depression might not be present for. The first thing is to establish a trusting relationship with a treater and have that be a person that you can take any question to, what other kinds of resources might be available, how they could be helpful to them in every aspect of their life.

Narrator

Here are important questions you can ask to help find the right treatment for your loved one.

- What therapies and medications are available?
- Do people with this condition typically spend time in residential treatment?
- For adults, what options are available for supportive housing or employment?

Hugh, Parent

Here is one thing I know. My kids have enriched my life. And even though we have had challenges and we have had some struggles, I feel sorry for others who have not had the opportunities that I have had as a parent.