



HOW TO HELP A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER FACT SHEET

Information courtesy of NAMI on Campus (www.nami.org) and Campus Mind Works (www.campusmindworks.org).

Here are some tips about how you may want to respond if a friend or family member tells you that he/she has a mental health disorder:

Show your support and listen. Express your concern and sympathy, talk openly and make sure that your friend or family member knows that he/she is not alone. The most important thing you can do is just offer to be available.

Ask what you can do to help. You can leave this open-ended (“I want to know how I can best support you.”) or suggest specific tasks that might be helpful (“Can I drive you to your appointment?”). If you know that your friend or family member is struggling in school, it can be helpful just to offer to study with him/her.

Reassure your friend or family member that you still care about him/her.

- Many people with mental health disorders tend to withdraw from family and friends.
- Continue to invite your friend to go to dinner, study, talk, or just hang out.
- Even if he/she doesn't always feel like talking or spending time together, it can be a comfort just to know that he/she has friends that care.

Educate yourself about your friend or family member's disorder. This can help you to know what to expect. Click for more information on:

- Each Mind Matters - www.eachmindmatters.org/
- National Alliance on Mental Illness- www.nami.org/
- Reach Out – reachout.com
- Half of Us – www.halfofus.com



Watch the story of two friends, and how Lauren's support and willingness to listen, help Rachel manage her bipolar disorder. [From halfofus.com](http://www.halfofus.com)



Support your friend or family member's healthy behaviors.

- Certain strategies, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy and exercising can be helpful when managing one's mental health.
- Know that alcohol and other drugs interfere with most psychiatric medications, making them less effective and, in some cases, dangerous.

Not sure what to say? You're not alone.

Sometimes it can be hard to tell which of our well-meaning comments will be helpful and which may actually hurt more than they help. Here are some guidelines from the [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#) for talking with someone who shows symptoms of a mental health disorder. Put the statements into your own words. What's most important is that your friend or family member understands your support.

| WHAT HELPS | WHAT HURTS |
|--|---|
| I know you have a real illness and that's what causes these thoughts and feelings. | It's all in your head. |
| I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help. | We all go through times like this. |
| You are important to me. Your life is important to me. | You have so much to live for-- why do you want to die? |
| Tell me what I can do now to help you. | What do you want me to do? I can't do anything about your situation. |
| You might not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change. | Just snap out of it. Look on the bright side. |
| You are not alone in this. I'm here for you. | You'll be fine. Stop worrying. |
| Talk to me. I'm listening. | Here's my advice... |
| I am here for you. We will get through this together. | What's wrong with you? Shouldn't you be better by now? |