

## 5 simple things you can do to make the world a better place for people with mental illnesses and their families

Faith and spirituality can be a very helpful component of someone's recovery from mental illness. A place of worship is a safe space where people can feel welcomed and have an instant sense of support and community, but how they are treated within this environment is crucial to that feeling of security.

### Be a friend

Provide companionship and compassion on the road toward recovery. Offer a ride to your house of worship or to a local support group. Listen without judgement. Pray for those you know with mental illnesses and for their family members.

### Be an inspiration

Share your story. Has mental illness impacted you or your family in some way? Your story may empower others to seek treatment or have hope.

### Watch your language

Pay attention to the words you use and avoid stigmatizing labels. Do not refer to people as "crazy," "psycho," "lunatic" or "mental." Use Person-First language. For example, say "She is a person with bipolar disorder" instead of "She is a bipolar."

### Be a "StigmaBuster"

Challenge negative attitudes toward mental illness among your friends and acquaintances and in the media.

### Learn the facts

Educate yourself about the various mental illnesses. Attend a lecture or class or use the Internet. Good places to start include the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org), NAMI FaithNet, [www.nami.org/NAMIFaithnet](http://www.nami.org/NAMIFaithnet), and the National Institute of Mental Health, [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov).

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## Tips for How to Help a Person with Mental Illness

Because 1 in 5 Americans lives with a mental health condition, you likely encounter people with a mental illness in your family or in your daily life. Stigma and myths around mental illness can make us nervous about how to relate to someone. If you are unsure of how best to approach someone who may be struggling, these tips may help.

- Find a space that is comfortable**, where you won't likely be interrupted and where there are minimal distractions.
- Ease into the conversation**. It may be that the person is not in a place to talk, and that is OK. A greeting and a gentle kindness can go a long way. Sometimes less is more.
- Be sure to speak in a relaxed, calm and straightforward manner** and stick to one topic at a time.
- Be respectful, compassionate and empathetic** to their feelings by engaging in reflective listening, such as "I hear that you are having a bad day today. Yes, some days are certainly more challenging than others. I understand."
- Be a good listener**, be responsive and make eye contact with a caring approach.
- Speak at a level appropriate to the person's age and development level**. Keep in mind that mental illness has nothing to do with a person's intelligence.
- Show respect and understanding for how they describe and interpret their symptoms**.
- Genuinely express your concern**. Be real and authentic.
- Offer your support and connect them to help** if you feel that they need it. Ask, "How can I help?" if appropriate, or even, "Can I pray with you now?" if appropriate.
- Give the person hope for recovery**, offer encouragement and prayers.

*Prayer: God who has created us all. May we be good companions to each other in life's journey and have the courage to reach out to those who need our love and care.*

Adapted from NAMI FaithNet. Find more resources at: <http://www.nami.org/NAMIFaithnet> 5/2017