



Mental Illness - Support for Families and Caregivers

Mental illness affects families and friends as well as the person who is coping with a mental health problem. In fact, caring for a loved one dealing with mental illness can be exhausting and stressful, both physically and emotionally. Friends and family members, with their support and understanding, are key to a loved one's healthy management of mental illness and to the recovery process. But it is important to remember that caregivers also need care. Supporting friends and family in staying informed about mental illness and available resources, and being there to provide encouragement through the many feelings and challenges they are facing, is critical. The stronger caregivers are, the better able they will be to support a loved one struggling with mental illness.

Learning About Mental Illness

Whether a loved one's diagnosis of mental illness is new, long-term, or changing, a family will benefit from gaining pertinent information. These organizations are a good place to start:

- Community Partnership of Southern Arizona—information on the behavioral health system: 520-318-6946; 520-318-6960 for TTY (Telecommunications Device for the deaf); www.cpsa-rbha.org
- Crisis Response Network—includes the hotline for mental health emergencies: 520-622-6000
- Community Information and Referral Services—listing of many different community resources, including those for mental health: www.cir.org
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)—detailed information on various mental illnesses: www.nami.org

Finding Support

There is no need for a family or circle of friends to handle the ups and downs of caring for a loved one with mental illness alone. Depending on

the situation, families can't always take care of it at home. Here are some local places to find support:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)-Southern Arizona educational and support groups for family members, as well as those with mental illness: 520-622-5822, www.namisa.org
- MIKID (Mentally Ill Kids in Distress)—support groups for parents, caregivers, and grandparents: 520-882-0142, www.mikid.org

Reaching Out to Your Faith Family

If you, a loved one or friend is dealing with a mental illness, your congregation can be an ideal source of spiritual support as well as information about other resources. Reach out to your faith leaders and to care groups in your faith community. These are ways to ask for your faith family's caring presence:

- Visits by your clergy, Stephen Ministers, Caring Community/Bikur Cholim members, or others involved in care outreach.
- Prayers offered for you and your loved one, either on a personal basis or as part of communal prayer time.
- Attention to mental illness in worship services, offering prayers, scripture readings, and religious rituals to present acceptance, hope and strength.
- A group for people with mental illness and/or their families in which support is given with prayer and other faith practices.

If your congregation doesn't have any or all of these avenues available, take the initiative to reach out nonetheless. You may be the impetus to help your faith community widen their understanding and welcome to many others affected by mental illness.

More ideas and resources are available for you and your faith leaders in the ICS Resource Kit on Mental Illness at www.icstucson.org.

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