

How to Support a Family Member Who is Struggling with a Mental Health Issue

Headline: Post pandemic, the number of people in the U.S. who say they have struggled with loneliness, anxiety, depression or other challenges at some point is 1 in 3. Chances are that you or someone you know may need the support of a family member or friend. How can we be there for someone?

Song Suggestion: Be Not Afraid

Bible and Catechism Readings:

John 15:12

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you

Jesus' love for people is extravagant. While we are not able to literally lay down our lives on a daily basis for others, we can choose to lay down our lives and love extravagantly in smaller practical ways. For instance, we can choose to go out of our way to help someone in need even though it may be personally inconvenient to us.

Matthew 5:13-16

You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

We may underestimate the power of simply living an honest and faithful life before God. By doing so, others notice and may actually end up seeing the beauty of God through our lives. Leading hearts to God is at the top of the list for acts of service.

Matthew 25:40

And the king will say to them in reply, Amen I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.

This verse is a wake-up call to remind us that God is in all places! Make sure to keep your heart open to him and how he wants you to share his love with everyone you encounter.

Proverbs 3:27

Refuse no one the good on which he has a claim when it is in your power to do it for him.

It is God's job to place specific people in our lives that need help, and it is also his job to give us the resources to help those people. We just need to be faithful to act in those moments with what he's given us, and we can let him take care of the rest!

Saint: Saint Dymphna is the patron saint of those with mental or nervous disorders or mental illness. Prayer: Good Saint Dymphna, great wonder-worker in every affliction of mind and body, I humbly implore your powerful intercession with Jesus through Mary, the Health of the Sick, in my present need. (*Mention it.*) Saint Dymphna, martyr of purity, patroness of those who suffer with nervous and mental afflictions, beloved child of Jesus and Mary, pray to Them for me and obtain my request.

(Pray one Our Father, one Hail Mary and one Glory Be.)

Saint Dymphna, Virgin and Martyr, pray for us.

Vignette:

If a friend or family member is showing signs of a mental health problem or reaching out to you for help, offer support by:

- Finding out if the person is getting the care that he needs and wants—if not, connect him to help
- Expressing your concern and support
- Reminding your friend or family member that help is available and that mental health problems can be treated
- Asking questions, listening to ideas, and being responsive when the topic of mental health problems come up
- Reassuring your friend or family member that you care about her.
- Offering to help your friend or family member with everyday tasks
- Including your friend or family member in your plans—continue to invite her without being overbearing, even if your friend or family member resists your invitations

If you have trouble finding the right words, try leading with these questions and make sure to actively listen to your friend or family member's response:

- I've been worried about you. Can we talk about what you are experiencing? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?
- What can I do to help you to talk about issues with your parents or someone else who is responsible and cares about you?
- What else can I help you with?
- I care about you and want to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?
- Who or what has helped you deal with similar issues in the past?
- Sometimes talking to someone who has dealt with a similar experience helps. Do you know of others who have experienced these types of problems who you can talk with?
- It seems like you are going through a difficult time. How can I help you to find help?
- How can I help you find more information about mental health problems?
- I'm concerned about your safety. Have you thought about harming yourself or others?

When talking about mental health problems:

- Know how to connect people to help
- Communicate in a straightforward manner
- Speak at a level appropriate to a person's age and development level (preschool children need fewer details as compared to teenagers)
- Discuss the topic when and where the person feels safe and comfortable
- Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if the person becomes confused or looks upset

Sometimes it is helpful to make a comparison to a physical illness. For example, many people get sick with a cold or the flu, but only a few get really sick with something serious like pneumonia. People who have a cold are usually able to do their normal activities. However, if they get pneumonia, they will have to take medicine and may have to go to the hospital.

Similarly, feelings of sadness, anxiety, worry, irritability, or sleep problems are common for most people. However, when these feelings get very intense, last for a long period of time, and begin to interfere with school, work, and relationships, it may be a sign of a mental health problem. And just like people need to take medicine and get professional help for physical conditions, someone with a mental health problem may need to take medicine and/or participate in therapy to get better.

Acknowledging that supporting someone else can be stressful for you, remember self-care. Get regular exercise. Just 30 minutes of walking every day can boost your mood and improve your health. Eat healthy, regular meals and stay hydrated. Make sleep a priority. Try a relaxing activity. Set goals and priorities. Practice gratitude.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

When you ask a friend how he is doing, are you really listening or just being polite?

Have you experienced a mental health issue? What were some things that helped you to recover?

Is there a person in your family who can benefit from your reaching out?

Action Plan:

Take time to consider who may be in need of your compassionate listening.

Resources:

Set to begin in late fall, the St Gregory the Great family of Parishes will have a Mental Wellness Ministry which will offer support groups to listen and provide resources for those in need of help.

Also, the Misfit Toys group meets on Thursdays, 7-8am. This is a great group that provides support to guys who are going through a rough patch or who are supporting family members/friends. Contact Vince Phelan or Bob Considine for more information.

The Association of Catholic Mental Health Ministers

<https://catholicmhm.org/>

Mental health ministry provides vital spiritual accompaniment for people experiencing mental health challenges and mental illness, as well as those who care for them.

The Mental Health Coalition

<https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/resources>

This provides information on mental health issues and a directory of providers

Directory of Catholic Therapists

<https://www.catholictherapists.com/>

Therapists whose approach includes Catholic Spirituality, many are available through video appointments

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/how-to-talk/friends-and-family-members>

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