

Tips for How to help someone MANAGE treatment

For Family Members and Friends

Medical professionals often remark on how helpful family members and friends can be in reporting changes in depressed patients' symptoms and ensuring that patients consistently take their prescribed medication.

It also is very important for families to work together in managing treatment, since mood changes and behaviors affect the whole family, and there are many issues involved in treatment. Ways you can work as a team are to:

- **Partner in treatment.** Medications take up to 4 to 6 weeks to take effect, the dosage may need to be adjusted, and medications often need to be changed. You can help your depressed family member or friend by scheduling and tracking medications, making medical appointments, and reporting changes to the medical professional.
- **Be understanding.** Let your depressed family member or friend continually know that you care. Depressed people need to be reminded that many people are concerned about them.
- **Learn about depression.** The more understanding you have of the symptoms and issues surrounding depression, the more you can cope, help, and keep your expectations realistic. Review books, brochures, and videos on a variety of depression topics.
- **Share your feelings as a family.** Since depression affects the whole family, it is important to share your feelings, both the feelings of the depressed person and the caregivers' feelings. By talking about issues and emotions, you can uncover what works and what is not helpful to one another.
- **Meet with the depressed person's doctor.** It is very useful for you to meet with the medical professional from time to time, if your family member or friend with depression will agree to it. You can gain a good understanding of the condition and discuss issues together.
- **See a family or couples therapist.** Marriages in which a spouse has depression have a much higher likelihood of ending in divorce. Couples therapy can help restore relationships by addressing resentful feelings and communications skills.

Children with depression in the family need support and ways to become resilient from developing depression themselves. Family therapy helps children: understand that they didn't cause the depression; discuss their feelings; and learn coping mechanisms.

- **Develop a crisis plan.** Talk to your depressed family member or friend about what you will do if there is a crisis, under various circumstances, and where you will take the person. Put the plan in writing.

- **Create a support system.** Try not to take on caring for a depressed individual all by yourself, because it is a difficult task and can bring you down. Talk to other family members about sharing responsibilities and join a support group to help you cope.

Questions for the clinician

A good way to partner in treatment and provide emotional support is to go to appointments periodically with the depressed person. You can keep track of the clinician's recommendations, discuss changes in symptoms, and review the treatment plan.

Before you see the clinician

- What types of patients and conditions do you currently treat in your practice?
- What do you do when you are unsure of a patient's diagnosis or treatment?
- How do you involve families and friends in treatment?

During the visit

- What is the possible diagnosis at this point?
- How definite is this diagnosis? If not definite, what are the other possibilities?
- What is your recommended treatment (e.g., medication, psychotherapy)?
- What are the expected results of treatment?
- What signs should we look for that indicate the treatment is working?
- How soon will we see these signs?
- What will you recommend if this course of treatment does not work?
- Why have you chosen this particular medication?
- What are the risks and side effects of the medication?
- Is this a case that you normally treat and that is within your practice capabilities?
- What role can we play in helping with treatment?
- Which days and times are best to reach you?
- Who can answer our questions as they come up and when you are unavailable?
- What have been your experiences with our insurance company, and how can we facilitate reimbursements?
- Do you recommend that we get another consult with another psychiatric specialist?

If treatment is not working

- Is there something else we need to be doing?
- Are there any issues that may contribute to our family member or friend not responding to treatment (e.g., noncompliance with medication)?
- How can we help in getting treatment to work?
- Should we get a second opinion?

For more information, contact Families for Depression Awareness, (781) 890-0220