

Caring for Loved Ones with Mental Health Conditions

Most people believe that mental health conditions are rare and "happen to someone else." In fact, mental health conditions are common and widespread. An estimated 44 million Americans experience some form of mental health problem within a given year. If you think you or someone you know may have a mental health condition, it is important to remember that there is hope!

How to cope day to day:

- ✓ **Accept Your Feelings.** You may find yourself denying the warning signs, worrying what other people will think, or wondering what caused your own, or your loved one's symptoms. However, accepting that these feelings are normal and common among individuals and families can be a good, first step in recovering.
- ✓ **Understand Changes in Behavior.** The outward signs of a mental health condition are often behavioral. A person may be extremely quiet, withdrawn; or they may burst into tears, express anxiety, or be easily angered. Discuss these behavior changes with your, or your loved one's mental health professional. They will likely offer you strategies for coping. Remember, your loved ones' behavior is likely as dismaying to them as it is to you. Ask questions, listen with an open mind and offer support.
- ✓ **Establish a Support Network.** Whenever possible, seek support from friends and family. If you feel you cannot discuss your situation with them, look for a self-help or support group. These groups provide an opportunity for you to talk to others who are experiencing similar problems. They will likely listen and offer valuable advice.
- ✓ **Seek Counseling.** Therapy can be beneficial for both the individual with the mental health issue and family members. A mental health professional can suggest ways to cope and better understand the illness. When looking for a therapist, be patient and talk to a few professionals so you can choose the person that is right for you. It may take time until you are comfortable, but in the long run you will be glad you sought out help.
- ✓ **Take Time Out.** It is common for the person with the mental health problem to become the focus of family life. When this happens, other members of the family may feel ignored or resentful. Some may find it difficult to pursue their own interests. If you are the caregiver, you likely need some time for yourself. Schedule time away to prevent becoming frustrated and angry. Scheduling time for yourself will help you keep things in perspective giving you more patience and compassion for helping.

Learn more at: <https://www.mhanational.org/recognizing-warning-signs-and-how-cope>
With proper support and treatment, many people who struggle with mental health conditions are able to live fulfilling and productive lives.

Questions? Contact us at 363ISR.W.ART.363ISR.W@us.af.mil or at 757-764-9316