

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Supporting a Loved One With a Chronic Illness

Study after study reveals that people who have a chronic ailment adjust better when they have a network of people behind them. All the more reason why it's important for family and friends to focus on their own needs, as well as the needs of their loved ones. Here are a few tips that may help:

Reflect and adapt. Take a time out for some introspection and openly assess your reaction. Is your natural instinct to dive in and help, retreat or feel angry? Identify and acknowledge these responses, even if they seem irrational. The more honest you are with yourself, the easier it will be to respond in the most supportive, helpful way possible.

Bridge the gap with communication. Don't know what to say or do around your loved one? Tell them Creating a façade that everything is 'normal' blocks the lines of communication and may unintentionally belittle your loved one's experience. Tell your friend or relative you're worried or that you're not sure how to help. He or she will appreciate your honesty.

Put yourself in your loved one's shoes. Helping and supporting a chronically ill friend or relative can be trying. Stress, discomfort or pain may make your loved one irritable or unresponsive. When these moments arise, remain patient and calm and remind yourself of the mental and physical struggle your loved one is enduring.

Acknowledge successes and challenges. Accept that there will be good days and bad, whether it's recovering from a round of treatment, taking a step towards rehabilitation, or sharing in grief when stumbling blocks arise.

Find support. Don’t try to go it alone. Share your fears, stresses and triumphs and connect with others in similar situations. Join an organization that provides support and information to caregivers or family members of people affected by a chronic illness. Some groups deal with chronic illness in general, while others address the concerns and challenges of specific conditions.

Your presence and support are the most meaningful gifts you can give to a loved one living with a chronic illness. Remember to take care of yourself, too. You need to be in good shape to care for them.
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