

**12 SIMPLE WAYS
TO SUPPORT**
Someone Struggling with
**MENTAL
HEALTH**



12 SIMPLE WAYS TO SUPPORT *Someone Struggling with* MENTAL HEALTH

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About the Authors:

Peggy Gerace Roosa is an author, researcher, and loving mother of a child suffering with severe Bi-Polar Disorder, and a family member diagnosed with Acute Depression which led to a suicide attempt. She has spent years researching the subject of mental health, and has learned much through her personal journey and experiences which she distills through practical advice in the pages of this eBook.

Judi Paliungas is an author, graphic designer and a certified life coach. She, too, has journeyed with close friends and family members who have struggled with mental health disorders such as paranoid schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, addiction and dissociative disorders.

Judi has invested years learning how to be a positive presence in the face of challenges, and helping others discover their dreams and live a life they love. She has also experienced her own challenges with mental health in the form of anxiety, work and support burnout, and learning to create healthy life boundaries. Her insights and experience are also weaved into this resource.

She is currently serving on the Board of Directors for Standing Tall Igniting Hope as their Content Editor and Webmaster.

Introduction

Did you know that 1 in 5 Adults have some kind of mental health condition? That's over 40 million Americans; more than the populations of New York and Florida combined. In young people it's even more alarming. Rates of youth with severe depression has nearly doubled in the last 10 years. And close to 30 million people struggle with some kind of addiction or are in recovery.

There is clear data from many respected sources that there is a definite connection between mental illness and the use of addictive substances. By far the most common issue connecting mental illness and substance abuse is the intention of patients to medicate the mental health symptoms that they find disruptive or uncomfortable by using alcohol and drugs.

So the chances are, there is someone in YOUR life who is struggling with some kind of mental health issue, or has already sought help and is in treatment. You want to help – but it is often difficult and overwhelming to figure out the best way to provide support.

This eBook is in no way offering medical advice or should replace professional care. We do, however, understand that knowledge is key to effective communication and increased understanding – so we've put together some deceptively simple steps along with some resources that provide easy ways that you can provide effective support and encouragement to those struggling with Mental Health.

1

Just Be There

The best thing you can do for someone who is struggling with depression, mental illness or recovery is to simply be there. While it's true that there is a time and place for intervention and firm action, in most instances, the best thing you can offer them is your "presence."

- **Some of the most healing moments come** when you sit quietly with your loved one and let them cry, or wordlessly hold their hand.
- **Speak warmly to them** with statements such as "You're so important to me." "Tell me what you are feeling." "Tell me what I can do to support you." "We're going to find a way to help you to feel better."
- **If you can't be with them in person, send them an encouraging message.** Check out [AHigherThought.com](https://www.AHigherThought.com) for FREE beautiful short [video sentiments](#) that you can share from your computer or phone.



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Co-author, Judi Paliungas, share a personal story from her friend, David, that truly illustrates the power of “just being there.” Here is David’s story in his own words:

“It was a Friday afternoon in May of 2002. I was numb with grief because two days earlier, some drugged-out jerk had struck and killed my dad with their pickup truck. Mom and my three brothers and I spent agonizing hours in a Riverside emergency room, watching the heart monitor beeps trail down to zero.

Now at last I was home, grateful for my wife’s embrace and comforting words. But still totally upside down emotionally.

Then there was a knock at the door. When I opened it, my friend Phil was standing there. “May I come in?” he quietly asked.

He came in, and to this day, I can remember exactly where he sat and where I sat. We were there alone, wordless for perhaps a minute. Then he said just one line. “David, just . . . please tell me about your dad.”

That was all. He didn’t over-promise. He didn’t weep or engage in histrionics. He didn’t try to find the “right words” or tell me tritely that “my dad was in a better place.” He simply allowed me to share some warm memories and impressions of the father I had loved and now had just lost.

Man, that was kindness. It comforted me. Its healing impact on my soul was immeasurable.”

Judi says, “I never forgot that story. It dawned on me that the approach David’s friend took to comfort him through his loss – quietly listening while encouraging David to talk and share – works in any kind of situation where someone suffering emotionally.”

“Just quietly being there” is one of the most powerful things you can do.

2

Don't Label or Try to Diagnose

- **If you are not an expert on the other person's situation, do not present yourself as one.**
- **Remember, only a certified health professional can diagnose or treat an illness.** Instead, offer consistent emotional support and understanding.
- **Never just assume a person is mentally unwell or in recovery.** Just because you believe a person to be mentally unwell or in recovery does not mean they are. Only a certified health professional can diagnose an illness.
- **Remember it's not your job to try to “cure” the person or come up with answers to their problems.** Sometimes, the best way to help someone is to just be there for them. Let them know you care.



3

Learn as Much as You Can About the Condition They Are Struggling With

- **If the other person is asking for help or support from you, be certain the advice or resources you provide are accurate** and appropriate to their situation.
- **You can avoid missteps and misunderstandings simply by educating yourself about the condition your loved one is dealing with.** Once you can understand the condition's symptoms, course and consequences, you can better support your loved one.

For example, some people assume that if a person with depression has a good day, they're cured. But there is an ebb and flow to symptoms that many non-depressed people misunderstand.

- **Most people who are struggling will appreciate your efforts to better understand them** and to attempt to see things through their eyes.



4

Encourage the Person to Share Their Feelings, While Practicing “Active Listening”

- **Let the Other Person Do Most of the Talking** – Remember, you are there to listen and learn, and to try to understand things from THEIR point of view.
- **Pay Attention** – Give them your undivided attention, and acknowledge what they are saying. Recognize that non-verbal communication also “speaks” loudly.
 - You can do this by looking at the speaker directly.
 - Put aside distracting thoughts.
 - Avoid being distracted by background noise, your smart devices or side conversations.



- “Listen” to the speaker’s body language.
- Don’t mentally prepare a rebuttal! There is a huge difference between actually listening and simply waiting your turn to “talk.”
- **Show That You’re Listening** – Use your own body language and gestures to show that you are engaged.

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- Look them in the eyes, nod occasionally.
 - Smile and use other facial expressions.
 - Make sure that your posture is open and interested.
 - Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like “yes,” “uh huh” and “tell me more.”
- **Provide Feedback** – Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said.
- This may require you to reflect on what is being said and to ask questions or by paraphrasing. *“What I’m hearing is...”* and *“Sounds like you are saying...”* are great ways to reflect back.
 - Ask questions to clarify certain points. *“What do you mean when you say...”* *“Is this what you mean?”*
 - Summarize the speaker’s comments periodically.
 - **If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, tell them. And ask for more information:** *“I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX. Is that what you meant?”*



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- **Don't Interrupt Them** – Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.
 - Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
 - Don't interrupt with counter arguments.
- **Respond Appropriately** – Active listening is designed to encourage respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting them down.
 - Be candid, open and honest in your response.
 - Assert your opinions respectfully.
 - Treat the other person in a way that you think you would want to be treated.



5

Use Your Intuition and Pay Attention to Nonverbal Cues

We all share a kind of super power that quickly helps us decide whether to trust someone, make the purchase, take that job, or to know when something doesn't feel quite right.

- **Use your Intuition to determine if something is wrong,** if the other person just needs your quiet, loving presence, or if they are ready and willing to discuss their situation.
- **Listen to that inner voice, instead of ignoring it.** Slow down, spend some time by yourself, and listen to that voice in the back of your head. We often make our best decisions when we balance our instincts and rational thinking.
- **Never force anyone into a conversation that they may not be comfortable having.**



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While most people appreciate the opportunity to be heard and understood, this is not true of everyone. Know when to back off, and try other forms of support. (Keep reading for more ideas)

- **Practice “empathetic accuracy.”** This means that you can read the other’s body language and tone of voice to understand their underlying thoughts and feelings. It’s an effective way to develop more meaningful relationships.
- **Let go of negative emotions.** Your intuition is muted when you’re depressed or angry. And, those negative emotions aren’t good for your health or productivity. Our intuition increases when we are able to accept and let go of those negative emotions.
- **Understand that your Intuition, like a muscle, can be developed and increased.** Tara Taylor’s audio course, [*Master Your Intuition in Just 7 Days*](#) can teach you how to create a clearer connection with your intuition.



6

Don't Minimize Their Feelings

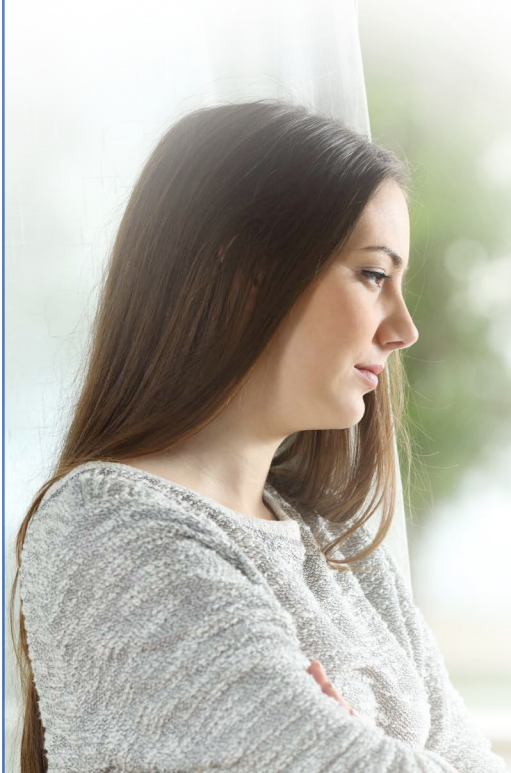
Communicate with the person about your concerns in a manner that demonstrates compassion and caring without judgment.

- **Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.** Remember, the other person's feelings are **REAL to THEM**, regardless of the facts or what you might think.
- **Sometimes, upon deeper inspection, you'll come to see how the other person's feelings are justified**, even if you believe them to be skewed, or not technically correct for the situation in which they find themselves.
- **Don't trivialize or blame the other person** for their illness.

- **Don't pressure them** to "Put a smile on their face," "Snap out of it" or "Get their act together."

- **Avoid dismissive or blaming comments** such as, "You don't seem that bad to me," or "You brought this on yourself."

- **Never nag or become hostile or sarcastic.** Doing so will not help the situation, and often will drive away the other person. Remember that your intent is to be a loving, helpful and healing presence.



7

It's Okay to Sympathize with the Other Person's Situation

- Remember that support does NOT mean acceptance.
- You can be supportive while still holding that person accountable for their behavior.
- “Tough Love” isn’t always helpful. Although there is a time and place for tough love – especially when someone is in the downward spiral of addiction or self-sabotage, but when it comes to mental health, a softer approach often works better. Many individuals think that being tough on their loved one will undo their depression or inspire positive behavioral changes.



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For instance, some people might intentionally be impatient with their depressed loved one, push their boundaries, use silence, be callous or even give an ultimatum (e.g., “You better snap out of it or I’m going to leave”) – but remember that depression, bi-polar disorder and addictions are diseases, and this kind of approach is as useless, hurtful and harmful as ignoring or refusing help to someone who has cancer.

- **It’s not your job to try to “cure” the person or fix their problems for them.** Leave the “curing” to the professionals, and understand that recovery is something that your friend or loved one needs to choose for themselves. Sometimes, the best way to help someone is to just be there for them, letting them know you care.



8

Realize That Small Gestures Matter

If you're uncomfortable with emotional expression, or are afraid of overstepping, you can show support in other ways:

- **Send an encouraging text or email.** One of our favorite resources for support and encouragement is a sharable video line from [AHigherThought.com](https://www.AHigherThought.com). This is a completely free service. You'll find their video sentiments highly professional, and easy to share from your phone or computer.
- **Invite them over for dinner, bring a meal to them, or give them something thoughtful** like flowers, home made cookies or muffins.
- **Acknowledge a positive quality or something they've done or achieved** by writing a simple note or dropping [an encouraging "leave behind" card](#).
- **Send an inexpensive, thoughtful gift.** Items such as a [guided meditation](#), relaxation tape, [an inspirational poster](#) or [pop open cards](#) are all easy ways to show you care.

These gestures provide a loving connection and become beacons of light that help guide your loved one through their darkness.

For a reminder about the power of loving kindness, watch the music video on our site, [Fill the World With Love](#).



9

Stay in Regular Contact, Even When Things Seem to Be “Going Well”

- **Don’t wait for your friend or loved one to “respond” or “reach out”.** Many times, those struggling with mental health or addiction and recovery suffer in silence. They may be having a rough week, but try to conceal it or simply keep to themselves.
- **Just because the “drama” or “symptoms” are gone doesn’t mean the person is doing well.** Someone who’s feeling hopeless may still laugh at a joke, and a child who’s in despair may still attend class, get good grades and even seem cheerful, so it’s important to know that mental health, addiction and recovery each has a far and often imperceptible range.
- **Out of sight shouldn’t mean out of mind.** Life is happening at warp speed, and it’s easy to let weeks fly by before we remember to make contact with a friend or loved one. So create a reminder on your calendar or smart phone to reach out in small, caring ways on a regular basis.



10

Take Care of Yourself and Your Own Physical and Emotional Health

Sometimes we can get so caught up in supporting or helping someone in crisis that we forget to take care of ourselves. Staying physically and emotionally healthy is crucial. If you aren't healthy yourself, you won't be able to provide the most effective support and care to others.

- **Engage in relaxation and meditation.** There are so many wonderful mindfulness and meditation tools available online. One of our favorites is the [Calm App](#). Many of their meditations are available for free on their [YouTube Channel](#).
- **Practice self-care.** Those of us who are caregivers or who are on the front lines of supporting those who are struggling also need a way to vent, connect and find perspective. The Caregiver Action Network has some great [resources for caregivers](#).
- **Find a supportive friend or join a support group.** Reach out to someone who is going through a similar situation, or join a support group such as [Alanon](#), the [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#), or an online community such as [SmartRecovery.org](#).

11

Be Patient

Patience is a pivotal part of supporting your loved one.

- **When you're patient with your loved one, you're letting them know that it doesn't matter how long this is going to take,** or how involved the treatments are going to be, or the difficulties that accompany the passage from symptom onset to recovery, because you will be there.
- **Patience has a powerful result.** With patience, comes hope.
- **Sometimes supporting someone may feel like you're walking a tight rope.** *What do I say? What do I not say? What do I do? What do I not do?* But remember that just by being there and listening can be an incredible gift.



12

Live in Possibility by Always Believing In Their Continued Healing & Recovery

- **Provide an atmosphere of optimism and hope for them and for yourself.** Positive, upbeat music, such as [AffirmaJams](#) or music from artists such as [Faith Rivera](#) is a great way to turn up the good vibes.
- **Encourage your loved one to invest in themselves, to expand their awareness and learn to manage their thoughts** with tools like the books [Brave Thinking](#) and [Infinite Possibilities](#).
- **Realize that mental health recovery is a highly individual process.** It is not a straight forward, linear process. Each person's journey is unique to them.

We hope the information we've shared has been useful in helping you to continue to be the source of love, encouragement and support to those loved ones who are on the path to Mental Healing.



Additional Resources:

[StandingTallIgnitingHope.org](https://standingtallignitinghope.org)

Standing Tall Igniting Hope is a non-profit organization building a Community of the Heart that inspires, supports and provides services for those living with mental health challenges or grief due to the loss of a family member by suicide.

We are dedicated to:

- Supporting family members who would benefit from loving guidance support after experiencing a death in the family by suicide.
- Providing treatment scholarships as they become available for people 18 and older who are living with mental health challenges and do not have access to full or partial mental health coverage.
- To grow a community of dedicated healers who provide support for people dealing with mental health issues.

Find out more at: [StandingTallIgnitingHope.org](https://standingtallignitinghope.org)

ADAA (Anxiety and Depression Association of America) this organization provides resources and therapist referrals through membership meetings and their highly active online member community. <https://adaa.org>

Al-Anon provides resources and support to those with friends or family members who are struggling with alcohol addiction. Learn from the experiences of others who have faced similar problems. Learn more at <https://al-anon.org/>

BetterHelp.com – provides accessible, affordable, and convenient therapy — so anyone who struggles with life’s challenges can get help, anytime and anywhere with access to licensed, trained, experienced, and accredited psychologists (PhD / PsyD), marriage and family therapists (LMFT), clinical social workers (LCSW / LMSW), and board licensed professional counselors (LPC). <https://www.betterhelp.com/>

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Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance – Family support is crucial for those affected by depression or bipolar disorder. If you or someone in your family lives with a mood disorder the DBSA Family Center is a place of compassion, hope and understanding. It is a central place for a wide variety of family-focused resources and information. www.dbsalliance.org/

Faithful Counseling is designed as a solution for people seeking traditional mental health therapy who would prefer hearing from the perspective of a Christian. If you are seeking a mental health professional who is a practicing Christian, Faithful Counseling may be a great option for you. <https://www.faithfulcounseling.com/>

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is an organization dedicated to improving the lives of people with mental illness through meetings, coaching, educational sessions, and related events. <https://www.nami.org/>

The Mighty is a privately funded site designed to help those facing disability, disease and mental illness through the power of personal stories and the strength of communities. <https://themighty.com>

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) is a government sponsored organization promoting prevention and early intervention towards reducing the impact of mental and substance use disorders. <https://www.samhsa.gov/>

TalkSpace Online Therapy Talkspace is an online counseling platform that provides users the confidential support of a licensed counselor through an easy-to-use and HIPAA-compliant app. Improve your mental health in the most convenient and affordable way! You'll get matched with a licensed counselor in your state from the comfort of your device, and receive ongoing support via secure messaging and live video sessions. <https://try.talkspace.com/>