Helping Someone You Love

ONE-PAGE QUICK REFERENCE • A practical ally guide for families and friends

START THE CONVERSATION

- Find a calm, private time and mention what you have noticed, not what you assume.
- Ask: “You have seemed under a lot of strain. What has this been like for you?”
- Listen more than you speak. Reflect feelings: “That sounds exhausting.”
- Ask: “Would you like me to listen, help with something practical, or help find care?”

HELP THAT OFTEN MATTERS

- Offer a specific task: a ride, groceries, childcare, a meal, or help making a call.
- Invite connection without pressure; continue gentle check-ins if declined.
- Respect autonomy and privacy, except when safety requires urgent action.
- If they mention suicide, ask directly; contact 988 for guidance and emergency help if danger is immediate.

AVOID THESE RESPONSES

- Do not argue that they should be grateful, pray harder, cheer up, or simply be more disciplined.
- Do not promise secrecy about an imminent safety threat. Do not make yourself their sole source of help.

Important: General educational information only; not diagnosis, treatment, or individualized safety planning. U.S. crisis support: call or text 988. For immediate danger or medical emergencies, call 911.

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HOW TO LISTEN WELL

Open questions work better than interrogations: “What has been hardest lately?” “When is it worse?” “What would make today more manageable?”

Validate the experience without affirming inaccurate beliefs: “I hear how alone you feel” rather than debating or agreeing that nobody cares. Silence and patient attention can be useful.

WHEN SOMEONE DOES NOT WANT HELP

You cannot ordinarily force an adult into treatment. You can keep the door open, explain your concern clearly, offer choices, and check back. Some people need more than one conversation.

Separate disagreement from abandonment. You can say: “I will respect your choice about talking right now. I will check in again on Friday.”

PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Offer to identify a clinic, organize transport, sit with them while they call, or accompany them if wanted. Break big tasks into one manageable action.

Ask before involving other relatives. Consider whether family conflict, financial issues, or shame makes disclosure difficult.

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TAKING SUICIDAL LANGUAGE SERIOUSLY

Talk of death, unbearable pain, feeling trapped, being a burden, or plans for suicide should be addressed directly and calmly. Asking about suicide does not plant the idea.

If the person says yes, listen, ask about immediate safety, stay with them if safe to do so, and bring in trained help. For immediate danger call 911. For support in a crisis call or text 988.

CARING WITHOUT BURNING OUT

Be clear about what you can realistically do and recruit additional trusted supporters, with permission when possible. It is reasonable to have boundaries around time, money, and availability.

Supporters may benefit from their own counselor, peer group or trusted person. You are an ally, not a replacement for professional treatment.

A SIMPLE SUPPORT AGREEMENT

Ask what kind of check-in feels okay, who may be contacted during a crisis, and what practical support would be useful this week. Write down agreed next steps without turning the interaction into surveillance.

RELIABLE SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-to-help-someone-having-thoughts-of-suicide

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide

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