



How to help a friend or loved one suffering from a chronic illness

If someone you love is diagnosed with cancer or a life-threatening disease, you may feel desperate and completely helpless. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Research has shown us that family and friends can play a huge role in helping patients deal with a chronic illness.

When a person is suffering from a chronic illness, it's important that they feel truly cared about. What matters most is how people interact with the sick person.

Here are some ways that patients and their families can get the kind of support they want from others:

- Put an end to family secrets. In other words, honesty is still the best policy. We often try to protect our families and loved ones from bad news, but hiding a person's serious illness from the rest of the family can backfire. Communicate directly and be open with family members.
- Include your children. Although their understanding of the situation may be limited, children still appreciate being told what's going on around them. Children can sometimes view themselves as the cause of problems or major events that happen around them. They may view a parent's illness as being caused by something they did. Be open, honest, let children know it's okay to ask questions. This will help relieve some of their anxiety. Remember, a child can be a great source of laughter and warmth for a sick individual.
- Be selective. Everybody under the sun doesn't need to know about your illness or your loved one's illness. Choose who you care to share your news with carefully. Some relationships will prosper and some will become strained. What's important is that you feel that sharing the information with an individual will provide a stronger sense of support and strength.
- Be clear about how family and friends can help. People want to feel useful. Don't be ashamed to ask for help or favors, such as cooking a meal or helping with the school carpool.

Finally, if someone you love is suffering from a chronic illness, learn about the disease, help out with daily errands and chores, and give emotional support. Sometimes we all need a shoulder to cry on.

Click here to take the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory (<http://cust-cf.apa.org/ptgi/>) .

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