

HOW TO SUPPORT A LOVED ONE

Here are some ideas for you. I have included tips for the supporter, and tips for the sufferer. I can be reached anytime at my email below.

First and foremost, alongside finding a psychiatrist, the biggest thing any parent, sibling, or friend can do for someone who is struggling, suffering, or even dying ... never leave their side. Never let them go. That is the most important thing anyone can do. Never ever let go of your son, your daughter, your mom, your dad, never let go of anyone who is suffering.

I honestly put my family through worst. The moaning, the groaning, the yelling, the screaming, the arguing, the bickering, the throwing, the pushing, the punching of walls, the swearing, for someone who never swears. Sickness turned me into a person I was not ... I was different in every way from the normal Chris Nihmey. Sickness made me say, do, and think things that were completely irrational. But no matter what I put my family through, they never let me go. Letting me go would basically mean I would find some friend's couch to sleep on ... the next step, the streets, where I could be lost forever, literally.

Parents sometimes don't realize that when you kick someone out who is suffering, they are hit very hard. They process it more intensely than you can imagine. You are their salvation. They have depended on you their whole life and then BAM, they are sent out. This destroys, this depresses ... this is agony for a sufferer. They are suddenly lost, in the midst of a world they cannot comprehend, and could never predict. NEVER LET GO.

What if your child, or loved one decides to leave on their own ... GO GET THEM. If they won't return, do your best to always know where they are. Never let them go, and always welcome them home. In my illustrated picture book, *Sally*, I never let the reader know WHY Sally has left home. Was she kicked out, did she leave, does it matter? It led to the street life and, for many, it is lifelong, alone, isolated, and secluded. It is not a place for anyone. Why should it be a place for you or yours? The consequences could be, and likely will be, disastrous.

As well, NEVER stop searching for a psychiatrist for your loved one. This is a MUST. A sufferer needs to be able to talk to someone outside of family, and they need consistent doctor-prescribed medication and the dosage must be monitored. A doctor, medication, and therapy are vital. At all costs, you must steer your loved one away from self-medication of any kind (drugs, alcohol, etc.). This will destroy them and send them in the wrong direction. With proposed legislation for legalized marijuana in Canada, it is extremely important that they know that this drug will damage anyone suffering from a mental illness, or anyone under 25, or anyone at all. Drugs kill the brain, and they will never help a sufferer to heal. They take steps in the opposite direction. Instant relief, but at what cost? I've seen it destroy many people in my life. Marijuana is a depressant. I

can't stress this enough. Once the initial relief is gone, a sufferer goes backwards in their healing process. The cost? Worst case scenario ... isolation. This can lead to many drastic measures. What good is a bit of relief if your brain is ultimately dying?

“Give me calm and take away my pain, but please, please don't destroy my brain.”

Need I say more? That's what street drugs will do. They destroy the brain.

Now here are some further things a loved one can do for their loved one. I have added two quotations from Helen Keller, a person who experienced the worst, and because of perseverance, resilience, and support beyond anything she could ever imagine, she made the best of the worst. Even the worst couldn't stop her ... as a sufferer or a supporter, it is a lesson best taught through experience. Never lose hope.

WHAT CAN WE DO HERE? WHERE DO WE TURN?

AS A FAMILY MEMBER

*I could go on and on forever, but here's a good start. There are several tips for helping someone suffering with bipolar disorder, but all of these can be used for someone suffering from any disorder.

- be supportive – SUPPORT is a must.

- do NOT be overbearing or pushy, especially if someone is on the high part of the bipolar cycle. But this applies to any disorder that a person may be experiencing. They can be very defiant, where they "know" they are right in whatever they are doing. I did everything to avoid friends and family during my mania, because I knew that I was "right". Little did I know at the time ... I was heading down a very dangerous path.

- assure that your loved one is ALWAYS WELCOME in your home, despite any defiance, and despite any anger. Never let your loved ones go. My parents never let me go. I would have ended up on the streets, or worse ...

- they must always know that YOU ARE THERE. They are in an area of uncertainty and these feelings can be strange and confusing.

- provide LOVE at every cost - they always need it badly.

- give a SHOULDER to lean on, to cry on if needed.

- make sure they know that they are not bad, or mean. Sickness hurts - let them know it is NOT THEIR FAULT. This is HUGE! They did not ask for it, and it is not welcome. Since sickness is often genetically inherited, parents must always receive their child with open arms. Do not put guilt or blame on the sufferer. The majority of environmental triggers we go through are often beyond our control as well, triggering and causing damage. It is not the sufferers fault for getting sick. Ever.

- They will THINK, SAY, AND DO things that they would normally never do, that are not normal, and completely irrational. Sickness causes this. Know that they are in an irregular state, with chemicals highly active.

- they need to know you are there and that they can TRUST in you no matter what happens, even in betrayal or deceit. Again, sickness controls the mind and anything is possible.

- in depression, I "felt" totally alone. Even though I was surrounded by my family, I felt none of it. However, knowing they were there had a huge effect on my healing and was pivotal into building me back up again.

- be a family member, but also be a FRIEND. Try to guide their actions and always know their whereabouts. Don't be overbearing, just be a guide and a support.

- be KNOWLEDGEABLE. Learn everything you can about what your loved one is going through. Visit bookstores, libraries, go online. Find out everything you can. Look up ideas online for how supporters can be there for their loved ones. Be educated. It is key. EDUCATE YOURSELF by visiting credible websites that provide support and hope for sufferers.

- provide love at ALL COSTS – never ever let them lose hope. Never lose hope. This goes for the supporter as well. Always believe that the next day will be a better one.

- if you have FAITH, go to prayer with your loved ones, and the sufferer if possible. My parents did everything they could to bring faith into my life. Although the candle was down to the smallest flicker, they never let go of their faith. I fought it, I denied it, I did everything to avoid hope, but my parents didn't. It made a huge difference. If you don't practice your own faith, no worries. We can have faith in family, friends, anyone that we believe in and trust. The sufferer needs to know, again, that they are never alone. My faith life is now solid and well-balanced.

HEALING TIPS FOR THE SUFFERER WHO IS SUPPORTED BY A LOVED ONE

WILL IT GET BETTER?

YES! I never thought so, but it did ...

These will help push anyone forward to the next level. Remember, for any of these to be effective, your loved one must have a trusted doctor (psychiatrist) who will provide the medication they should be taking. They must be surrounded by loved ones they can always trust. With a doctor, prescribed medication, and support, they will have a solid foundation and can begin to build themselves stronger and stronger. They must find a desire within to change if healing is going to happen. As sufferers, WE are the key to our own healing. Once healing has begun, these healthy steps can be taken to move forward. Healing builds faster and goes further as someone heals. Healing builds exponentially, faster and faster, which is a very positive thing.

1. **EXERCISE DAILY** - start small and build up

2. **SLEEP** - 8 to 9 hours a night ... a MUST!

3. **WRITE IN A JOURNAL or JUST WRITE** - it changed my life forever – writing my memoir took my healing to a new height. It was amazing. It pushed me forward in a big way. It was the driving force because it gave me purpose, passion, and meaning. A reason why I had to go through sickness the way I did. I realized that it was not a waste.

4. **VOLUNTEER work** (in mental health) - I highly encourage this - it also changed my life in a big way. We were created to give. Did you know that when we give of ourselves, cortisol levels in our brain drop (depression and anxiety decrease), and our positive neurotransmitters kick into gear. We are created to give, and healing builds.

5. **HEALTHY EATING** – limiting sugar intake and eating a well-balanced diet.

6. **PRAYER** – of any type ... this is so important. Know you are never alone. There is a grander plan, and suffering is only for a time.

7. **READ, READ, READ** – I hit the Self-Help section constantly and found books for defeating anxiety, obsessions, and depression. Reading is really good for your mind. It is brain food. There are many of books on every type of disorder, and tons of books for those supporting.

8. **EXPLORE AND PRACTICE A TALENT** – huge for strengthening the mind and releasing anxiety. Piano has been a godsend for me. Talk about therapeutic. The frontal cortex is highly active when talents are practiced.

9. **STRENGTHEN THE MIND** through mind games like Scrabble, Checkers, Chess, word searches, puzzles, board games, Sudoku, crosswords, colouring books ... build mental/motivational strategies to motivate yourself to want to heal and get better. Reward yourself as well when you accomplish milestones in your journey.

10. **EARLY INTERVENTION** – if they are really struggling, they must see you, then their doctor immediately - don't let things build up.

11. **FULL-TIME JOB** – make healing a full-time job. Your priority is to be healthy. The sufferer must make their lives a priority. They matter in every way.

12. **SUPPORT FROM LOVED ONES** that they can trust and confide in. Only share their story with those you can trust to avoid any stigma. Stigma hurts. As a family, or a supporter, protect your loved one from any hurt.

13. **MEDICATION** – never miss a day. I haven't in 17 years! Even when I arrived at a cottage after 2 hours of driving and realized I had forgotten my meds! Did I stay? NO! I went back home and got them, and drove up the next day. My mind, my life is too important.

14. **PSYCHIATRIST** – never EVER miss an appointment!! Talking to a professional is extremely critical. It was crucial in my healing. It is a must.

Finally, they must never give up and **NEVER LOSE HOPE**. The supporter must not lose hope either. Hope for each day to be better than the last. They need to know they can do this. Even a step backwards or a fall can push someone forward. It sets the sufferer up for a leap the next time. It is in suffering that we find purpose and meaning in our life, a reason to continue on. I am stronger than I've ever been. I was a millimetre from death: it was in my hand, it was sharp, it would cut if sickness had boiled over. It was in my grip, the speed was ridiculous, the wheel would turn so easily ... the pain could have ended just like that. **NEITHER CIRCUMSTANCE HAPPENED**. I held on. Never lose hope ... remember, no one in their right mind chooses to die. It is not a choice. Sickness makes that choice. If things boil over, sickness wins. That's why support is essential. A sufferer must know they are never alone.

I am here for a reason. It was not a waste. I did not suffer for nothing. Healing is exponential - it builds up and builds speed as you continue to better your life. Faster and further. **HEALING IS POSSIBLE**. Hold onto your faith, your hope, and your loved ones. Know that you are not alone. Whether you feel God in your corner, or a trusted love one, you have faith. You have a beacon of light to trust and believe in. Trust that you have love in your corner.

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“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

Helen Keller

“I am only one, but I am still one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

Helen Keller