



# Helping Someone Who Has a Mood Disorder

It is very difficult for families and friends to help someone who has a mood disorder. You are concerned about your loved ones but are often frustrated, fearful, and yes, even angry, as you attempt to deal with your loved one's condition. We've put together a **few** helpful suggestions that may help you help someone receive treatment or help someone manage treatment once diagnosed. It's important to remember however, that these are just a few suggestions for you, your family member or friend. Please seek out **support for yourself** (see contacts listed below) as you support your loved one.

1. **It's not your fault.** You did not cause your family member's illness nor will you find a cure. A mood disorder is an illness, plain and simple.
2. **You are not alone.** Millions of families are caring for someone with a mood disorder. You can meet them through peer support groups. MDAO has support groups just for families.
3. **Your emotions and reactions are normal.** You may experience a variety of emotions from compassion and understanding to frustration, anger and even rage or hatred. These feelings are to be expected and understood but they should not get in the way of your relationship with your loved one. Try not to take your loved one's behaviour personally. Remember, it is often the illness not them that you're witnessing.
4. **Take care of yourself.** Set healthy boundaries and limitations on how much you will do. Make sure you take time for yourself and for pleasurable activities away from your loved one. Remember... you are no good to your loved one if you get sick too.
5. **Find social support.** Dealing with a mood disorder in your family can be very lonely and isolating. Your friends may not understand what you and your family are going through. Make sure you find sources of social support in your community. We recommend MDAO's peer support groups or one of the family focused organizations listed below.
6. **Knowledge is power.** Learn as much as you can about your loved one's illness and the treatment options. Don't be afraid to advocate for the best possible care on behalf of your loved one.
7. **Remember that life is a marathon not a sprint.** Progress is made in small steps and sometimes there appears to be no progress at all. Applaud progress and provide encouragement during the low times.
8. **Remember that you are only human.** Don't forget that you are not omnipotent and that you do not have the power to change the neurochemistry in your loved one's brain. You can only do the best you can.
9. **Develop a crisis plan.** Talk to your loved one about what will happen in the event of a crisis, under various circumstances. Put the plan in writing.
10. **Never lose hope.** Remember that mood disorders are treatable illnesses. They can be cyclical so sometimes the going will get real tough. Sometimes you will feel overwhelmed. Just remember that the right treatment is out there. Stay optimistic... for you and for your loved one. And never forget... you are not alone.

## Recommended reading

- **All Together Now: How families are affected by depression and manic depression.** Health Canada, CMHA, 1999
- **Family Healing: Strategies for Hope and Understanding.** Minuchin, Salvador & Nichols, Michael P., Touchstone, 1993
- **My Sister's Keeper: Learning to cope with a sibling's mental illness.** Moorman, Margaret, Penguin Books, 1993
- **Nothing to Be Ashamed Of: Growing Up with Mental Illness in Your Family.** Dinner, Sherry H., Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1989

## Websites

- Family Association for Mental Health Everywhere (FAME), [www.fameforfamilies.com](http://www.fameforfamilies.com)
- Families for Depression Awareness, [www.familyaware.org](http://www.familyaware.org)
- National Family Caregivers Association, [www.nfcares.org](http://www.nfcares.org)
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, [www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)  
For Ontario programs – select “Find Support” > “Education Training” > “Family to Family Programs”

The Mood Disorders Association of Ontario provides support, information and education as a complement to traditional and alternative therapies. MDAO services are not intended as a replacement for other treatment options and encourages individuals to seek treatment by a qualified health professional.

### Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO)

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