

WHAT HELPS AND WHAT HURTS:

Supporting Young Adults

Living with a mood disorder is a unique experience for every individual. Often times family members and friends of individuals living with these experiences need help providing effective support. From the transition of high school to work or college, living outside of childhood homes and starting families, life can be challenging but also provides many learning opportunities. This supplement to DBSA's *What Helps, What Hurts* brochure was developed in conjunction with the DBSA Young Adult Council and is intended to help those supporting young adults as they transition from family support to independence.

For Parents and Other Family Members

The transition to adulthood is filled with new experiences and uncertainties—for both the young adult and those who care for them. While there is no “one size fits all” solution, there are many things that both family members and young adults can do to help ease the transition.

How parents can help:

- Establish an effective communication system that will bring you both comfort. Sometimes parents struggle with how often to reach out to a newly independent young adult and young adults sometimes feel like they are not being trusted to manage their own lives by too much communication. It can be helpful to discuss how often communication is desired, by both sides, and reach a compromise that allows you to both feel comfortable.
- Express your confidence in your young adult to do what is best for them while also assuring them that you are always there to offer support. Allow them time and space to figure out what they need and how to best have those needs met. As difficult as it may be, avoid giving advice.
- Talk through any concerns you have. If you notice your young adult struggling, bring it up—without attempting to fix the problem. Sometimes it is hard for young adults to share what they are going through without prompting. They will be much more likely to open up to you if you are receptive to their feelings, remain calm and listen without judgment.
- Remind your young adult of strategies that have helped them in the past and that they have come through other difficult situations before.

How young adults can help:

- Be upfront about what is going on in your life and how you are doing emotionally. You may prefer to keep feelings hidden in an effort to not worry your family and possibly spur an over-reaction. However, trust is built by both parties being honest. The more you are upfront

about your situation and what you need from your family, the more likely they are to trust that you will reach out to them when they are needed.

- Consider offering your parents a close friend's contact information that they can reach out to if they are concerned and unable to reach you.
- Take responsibility. Make and keep appointments, refill medications as needed, work to maintain healthy eating and sleeping patterns and stick to wellness strategies that work for you.
- Be specific about any help you may need or support you would like. If you just desire an ear to listen, express that when starting the conversation.



*One of the most helpful things
my parents did was tell me it
was OK to take time off.*

—Young Adult council member

For Friends and Other Supporters

During the transition to adulthood, friendships may take on new and even greater importance. For many, this is the first time they have been away from their families and friends often fill the need for local support and understanding.

How friends can help:

- Educate yourself about your friend's condition. Often times what we have heard about certain conditions is not true. Support your friend by learning about the signs and symptoms that are unique to that person.
- Don't avoid or trivialize the issue. Listen without judgement or giving advice. It can be hard to watch your friend go through a difficult time, but the benefits of just sitting with your friend and listening far exceeds any advice you could give.
- When your friend is not feeling well, respect their decision not to participate in social situations that may feel too overwhelming. Instead, try to find something low-key and relaxing that the two of you can enjoy together.
- Encourage your friend to find and practice wellness strategies that are helpful to them. These strategies differ greatly for each person, but some examples may include eating well-balanced meals regularly throughout the day, taking a walk outside in the sun, or listening to music.
- Help distract your friend, if they wish, with fun activities and memories. Avoid situations that involve drinking or other activities that may make symptoms worse for your friend.
- Share what is going on in your life—the good and the bad. This helps your friend realize that they are not the only one going through difficult times and that they can offer support to you as well. Sharing the good can also serve as a nice distraction and remind your friend of some of the happier things in life.

How young adults can help:

- Don't hide your feelings. Decide who you can trust and open up to them. Express why it's important to you that they know about your condition.



My dad doesn't have depression, so I really appreciated when he told me, 'I don't know how this feels, but you can always call me.'

—Young Adult council member

- Learn your triggers and what wellness strategies work best for you. Then share these learnings with your close friends so that they can help support you.
- Share with your friends what they can do if you experience a particularly difficult episode or crisis situation.
- Listen to your friends as well. Friendship is a two-way street. Make sure you are also being supportive of them.

Young adulthood is an exciting and, sometimes, challenging time of life. Learning to communicate effectively and providing support without attempting to fix problems are keys to helping your loved one navigate a positive path towards wellness.



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading peer-directed national organization focusing on the two most prevalent mental health conditions, depression and bipolar disorder, which affect more than 21 million Americans, account for 90% of the nation's suicides every year, and cost \$23 billion in lost workdays and other workplace losses. DBSA's peer-based, wellness-oriented, and empowering services and resources are available when people need them, where they need them, and how they need to receive them—online 24/7, in local support groups, in audio and video casts, or in printed materials distributed by DBSA, our chapters, and mental health care facilities across America.

Through our extensive online and print resources and our more than 700 support groups and nearly 300 chapters, DBSA reaches millions of people each year with in-person and online peer support; current, readily understandable information about depression and bipolar disorder; and empowering tools focused on an integrated approach to wellness.

We hope you found the information in this brochure helpful. If you would like to support DBSA's mission, please consider making a donation by calling (800) 826-3632 or by visiting DBSAlliance.org/Donate.

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We've been there.
We can help.