How to Help a Loved One With Anxiety

by ANNA JACKSON

How to Help Someone With Anxiety

The first piece of advice I would give to anyone who is looking for information on how to help someone with anxiety is to be patient. Of course, this is my personal opinion but it is also something I have learned, first hand, many times.

Not everyone experiencing anxiety wants to be helped right away. It can sometimes be a real struggle to get someone with anxiety even to accept help, and you may find yourself facing a serious challenge.

However, many people are struggling with anxiety who have, what I would call, a "coping process." It is important to give the person some space to breathe, to think, and to gather their bearings before they even think about the idea of talking about their anxiety.

If you are reading this article and searching for ways in which you can help a loved one or a friend with anxiety, you are already on the right track.

Symptoms of Anxiety

If you are not sure what the some of the symptoms of anxiety are, below is a short list of symptoms to look out for in someone living with anxiety:

- Irritability
- A sense of impending doom or worry
- Feelings of dread, apprehension, and fear
- Insomnia
- Inability to concentrate
- Muscle tension, aches and pain
- Difficulty breathing or hyperventilating

Don’t Push

Forcing someone to talk about their anxiety, before they feel ready can be incredibly stressful and can cause their anxiety to escalate with the pressure. Have patience; let the person know that you are there for them when they feel ready.

Listen

If you really want to help someone with anxiety, listening to them and giving them your full attention is one of the most important steps you can take in helping.

Do not assume you know the cause of their anxiety, do not try to push your own understandings of anxiety on them either, in fact, it is best to forget everything you think you know about anxiety.

Start some fresh research on anxiety disorders, while also gently encouraging your friend or family member to explain to you what anxiety feels like for them. Everyone is different and everyone experiences the effects of anxiety in their own way.

Understanding

If you have never experienced anxiety yourself, it can be difficult to understand what someone with an anxiety disorder is going through. Anxiety disorders are very different from the normal anxiety people experience in their everyday life.

There is no easy "quick-fix" for anxiety and something your friend or family member can just "shrug off." Saying things like, “Just don’t think about it,” or “You are worrying over nothing,” are not going to help.

Anxiety can also cause people to become irritable more quickly. It is not in their control, they are aware of this and they will most likely feel the guilt over this long before you bring it up. Try to be forgiving and let them know that you understand that they don’t mean to act this way.

Be Encouraging

It is important to let your friend or family member know that you acknowledge their improvements. Let them know that you are proud of them.

Show them how happy it makes you to see them making positive strides. Be enthusiastic with your encouragement; it can have the most positive of effects.

Activities

Suggest going out and trying some new things. Think of something that you can both enjoy together that is engaging and may help take your friends or family member's mind off of their anxieties.

Studies have shown that exercise can help reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression. So maybe suggest a walk, a hike or see if you can find a fun class to take together.

Don’t make it about the anxiety; make it about spending time and having fun together. Focus on creating great, new memories.

Be Available

Let your friends or family member know that you are there for them and that they call you, any day and at any hour. If they are not the type that likes to talk on the phone, let them know that they can also text you whenever they feel that they need to talk.

Knowing that someone is there for them, at any time, can be incredibly comforting and help reduce those anxious feelings of being lost and alone. Remember to listen, be patient, be understanding and do not push.