McCaskill Family Services
Your Road To Success

***McCaskill Family Services, PLLC***
***Pediatric Psychologist & Psycho-Educational Evaluation Specialists***
*Main Business Office: 409 Plymouth Rd., Suite 250, Plymouth, MI 48170*
*Brighton Location: 2040 Grand River Annex, Suite 300, Brighton, MI 48114*
*Phone: (734) 416-9098, Ext. 1 FAX: (734) 416-0158*
*www.mccaskillfamilyservices.com office@mccaskillfamilyservices.com*

# SUPPORTING OTHERS

TOOLS 2 THRIVE

While 1 in 5 people will experience a diagnosable mental health condition in their lives, 5 out of 5 people will go through a challenging time that affects their mental health. There are simple things that every person can say or do to help the people in their life who are struggling to get through the tough times.

## HOW TO BE HELPFUL

**Practice active listening.** Active listening is different than just hearing what a person has to say. A good active listener puts everything aside and gives their complete attention to the person who is talking; asks open-ended questions to get more details about the topic that is being discussed (ex. "And how did that make you feel?"); and takes moments throughout the conversation to summarize what they've been told and make sure they are understanding clearly.

**Don't compare.** If a friend or loved-one is going through a tough situation and they come to you for support, you might feel tempted to tell them about something that happened to you and how you were able to get through it. It's okay to share about similar experiences, but be careful not to compare because it can make someone feel like their pain isn't valid. For instance, if they are telling you about a breakup, don't mention how you had a much harder divorce. Focus on what you did to cope with feelings of loss or loneliness.

**Ask what you can do.** It can be tempting to assume what would be helpful to someone who is struggling, but it's always better to ask them what they need from you. If you ask and get a response like, "nothing, I'm fine," offer up a few suggestions for things you would be willing to do (without being pushy). For instance, you could offer to come sit with them and watch a movie, cook them a meal, or pick up a few things for them at the store.

**Keep your word.** If you have offered your support to someone and told them you would do something, keep your word. When a person is struggling, the last thing they need is to feel abandoned by someone else. If you absolutely can't honor your promise, make a sincere apology and find another time that you can do what you said you would.

**Don't judge.** To be truly supportive of someone, you need to put your personal opinions and biases aside. They may be struggling because of a mistake that they made, or you may think that they are overreacting, but you will never know what it is truly like to be that person in this moment, and criticism is not helpful to their recovery.

**Offer to join them.** When someone is going through a time of sadness or uncertainty, their emotions can take over and leave them feeling paralyzed and unable to take care of life's obligations. Offering to go with someone to help them take care of responsibilities like walking the dog, going to the grocery store, attending doctor appointments, or picking up the dry cleaning can help them feel a sense of accomplishment and lift their spirits.

**Know when more serious help is needed.** Sometimes the support that you can offer won't be enough. If you notice that your friend or loved-one continues to struggle after weeks or months, they may be showing signs of a mental health condition and likely need professional help. Don't be afraid to encourage them to seek help from a mental health professional and offer to help them find a provider if needed. If someone you care about is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, seek help by calling 911 or going to the closest emergency room. Trained crisis counselors are available 24/7 by texting "MHA" to 741-741 or calling 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

## FAST FACTS

**A strong social support system improves overall mental health outcomes and the ability to bounce back from stressful situations.[1]**

**One study found that providing support to others increased activity in the part of the brain associated with rewards.[2]**

**For young people who came out as LGBTQ, those who had at least one accepting and supportive adult were 40% less likely to attempt suicide.[3]**

## IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT MHASCREENING.ORG TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.




It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

**Sources**
[1]Ozbay, F., Johnson, D. C., Dimoulas, E., Morgan III, C. A., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007). Social support and resilience to stress: from neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry* (Edgmont). 4(5),35.
[2]Inagaki, T. K., Bryne Haltom, K. E., Suzuki, S., Jevtic, I., Hornstein, E., Bower, J. E., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2016). The Neurobiology of Giving Versus Receiving Support: The Role of Stress-Related and Social Reward-Related Neural Activity. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 78(4), 443–453. https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000302
[3]The Trevor Project. (2019). National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health. New York, New York: The Trevor Project.

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