

Tara Rolstad

SPEAKER . AUTHOR . ADVOCATE

“When we get it right on mental health, people get real, people get help, and lives are saved.”



MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

When people we know struggle with mental health, we don't always know what to do. I hope the following pages offer guidance and encouragement to help you be there for those you care about.

If I can ever provide you or your family with additional information or resources, I'm here for you. Please reach out.

Find out how I can help your business, school, church or community talk about mental health and learn ways to be more effective helping those who struggle with mental health. Contact me today for more information on speaking, parent coaching and other programs.

Tara Rolstad

www.TaraRolstad.com
tara@tararolstad.com
cell 503-756-9135

Mental Health Conditions

HOW TO HELP WHEN THEY HAPPEN TO SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE



YOUR JOB IS SUPPORT, COMFORT, AND CONNECTION

Remember, *your job isn't to "fix it", anymore than you would try to fix a heart attack.*

- Remind them that with time and treatment, **recovery is possible**, there will be better days.
- Mental illness is often a marathon, not a sprint. **Encourage ongoing self-care**, important both for individuals living with mental illness and for caregivers/family members/close friends.
- Encourage them to use coping skills and tools they've developed, and **help them nurture their own resiliency**.
- If a person is suicidal, especially if they have a plan, they need to go to the ER immediately. **Always take it seriously**. Even if suicidal thoughts are common symptoms, if they are actively suicidal, stay with them. Help them get help.
- **When they are well, develop a plan** with your loved one for how you can to help when they are sick. For example, "when you're extremely anxious, I can remind you to do your meditation exercises, or we can go on a walk." Or, "If you are planning to hurt yourself, I should encourage you to go to the ER, and get help if you can't."
- **Encourage them to connect** with support groups and their local NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) chapter.
- **Ask them what THEY would find helpful**, and listen to them talk about their symptoms and treatment so you can better understand their experience.
- If faith is a helpful part of their life, **offer to pray with them** or connect them with their faith community.
- Often, your emotional support, patience, encouragement, **your PRESENCE, is the best gift** you can give. Be a good friend.
- You know all the things you'd do for someone who is just home from surgery, or who's had a baby, or been through some other tough life event? You can do all of those things for people experiencing difficult times with mental illness and their families. **Bring a casserole**, or another meal! **Visit**, take them to coffee, send an encouraging card. Go for a walk, or offer to drive to a doctor's appointment. **Show up!**



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Tips for Talking to Teens

ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

NORMALIZE IT BY TALKING ABOUT IT, BECAUSE THEY ALREADY ARE!

Mental health might be private, but it's not secret or shameful. Treat it like any other health issue, and discuss your family mental health history openly.

MAIN LESSON—BY TALK, I MOSTLY MEAN LISTEN.

- Try to just be QUIET
- Be curious, don't assume you know what they are going through
- Don't rush to reassure, or tell them what they are feeling is silly or explain how they are wrong, EVEN if it's out of love and the need to make them (and you) feel better
- Do your best not to overreact. If your teen feels they need to protect your feelings they will be less likely to share with you. Assure them that even thoughts about things like suicide, while scary, are normal, and you will work with them to get help.

WHEN YOU DO TALK—HELPFUL PHRASES TO USE:

- I wonder... • Help me understand...
- That sounds hard/sad/difficult/scary. Tell me more...
- How would you like it to turn out... • What can we do to get there?
- "How can I best support you right now?" instead of "Everything will be fine, you're ok, it's not as bad as you think"....
- It's scary to hear you talk this way, I'm going to need more information.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIX IT

Sometimes being heard, loved and understood really is enough.

VALIDATE THEM

When kids feel validated, they are better able to receive feedback and change their own behaviors. Validation does NOT mean that you agree or like what the person is doing, feeling or saying. Validation means letting someone know you: are listening; understand how they feel; are taking them seriously; understand their behavior within the context of their life circumstances; accept them; and you have found the "kernel of truth" in their communication.



Building the Support You Need

BEING THE SUPPORT THEY NEED

LOVING SOMEONE WITH MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES ISN'T EASY, AND SELF-CARE IS NOT A LUXURY:

- Treat the stress as a physical job - get in shape!
- Focus on the Boring Basics: sleep, unplug, eat well, exercise
- Breath: Try these exercises - 4-7-8, deep breathing, equal breathing, breath focus, lion breath
- Meditation and prayer
- Practices, activities and hobbies that fill you
- Bless yourself with an open mind
- Focus on strengthening relationships that support you, including your spouse or partner
- Build a support team NOW
- Apply healthy supportive people liberally, unsafe people (judgmental, critical, "I would never") with great caution.
- Go outside!
- Self-soothing toolkit - know what works for you, all five senses.
- Know how to ask for and accept help
- Deal with what's in YOUR head! Adjust your own attitude, get your own mental health help.

THINGS YOUR LOVED ONE NEEDS THAT ONLY YOU CAN DO:

- Let them know they are loved unconditionally, even AFTER hearing their feelings & fears
- Listen, without judgment, with interest, "I'd like to know more, help me understand"
- Be the safe, calm space in their storm; let them know they are not alone
- Take them seriously, including safety. Don't brush them off or hope it's just a phase
- Don't be afraid to ask hard questions, and respond calmly to tough answers
- Hope FOR them when they do not feel hopeful. Help them see a future, and have dreams.
- **Remind them who they REALLY are, their strengths and gifts for the world.**



Resources for Mental Health

NATIONAL AND ONLINE

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): nami.org

National organization offers FREE, evidence-based classes on mental illness for family members, friends, parents, and people living with mental health challenges. Local chapters can sometimes offer helpful guidance on local resources.

Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 741741 for live counselor 24/7, or www.crisistextline.org

National Suicide Hotline: 800-273-8255; OR TEXT '273TALK' TO 839863

Good info sources:

teensfindinghope.org (for teens, and parents of teens living with depression)

psychologytoday.com

work2bewell.org (Providence-sponsored site for teens, parents, and curriculum for educators)

BPHope.com (online magazine on bipolar disorder)

ADDitudemag.com (comprehensive site on ADHD)

NAMI.org

Cool apps to try: Mind Yeti, Calm, Mindshift, Headspace, Insight Timer

NOTE: I have found value in all of these resources, but am not responsible for the content, claims or representations made within.



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