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TIPS: How to Help Older Adults Experiencing Signs of Depression

Six Tips to Support Them and Get the Help They Need

Palo Alto, CA -National Mental Health Awareness Month is dedicated to raising awareness of those living with mental or behavioral health issues and helping reduce the stigma that so many experience. When it comes to older adults, depression affects more than 7 million of the 35 million Americans aged 65 years or older, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Getting a family member or a close friend who is an older adult to seek and use mental health help can be a challenging task, especially when it comes to dealing with depression, says Lisa M. Brown, Ph.D., ABPP, a professor and licensed clinical psychologist. Dr. Brown specializes in geropsychology, which is the application of psychological knowledge and methods to understanding and helping older persons and their families to maintain well-being, overcome problems and achieve maximum potential during later life.

“If an older adult you know is exhibiting signs of depression, the tips below can help you better communicate with the individual and guide them in seeking the professional help they need.” On May 31st at 6:30 pm EST, Dr. Brown will present a free live webinar entitled, “Depression and Older Adults: Is it Just the Blues or Is Help Needed?” The [one-hour presentation](#) with a Q&A session will address why late-life depression can be challenging to recognize, the warning signs, and tips for getting help.

TIP SHEET

Older Adults & Depression: Six Tips to Getting Them the Help They Need

1. **Start by having an open conversation.** One of the most effective ways to get older adults to seek mental health help is to have an open and honest conversation with them. Make them feel comfortable by allowing them to express their feelings and concerns. Many older adults may not understand what depression is and may believe it is normal to feel sad given their health, a loved one’s health, or being isolated. Let them know they are not alone.
2. **Explain that depression is a treatable illness.** Share that for most people, depression gets better with mental health treatment. Therapy, medication, or a combination of both can help. Make clear to your friend or loved one that they do not need to suffer.

Encourage them to talk to their doctor and to use professional mental health care. Let them know that seeing a mental health professional is essential for treating depression.

3. **Help them overcome barriers to treatment.** Serve as their advocate. Older adults may face several barriers to accessing mental health care, such as transportation, cost, or stigma. Identify and overcome existing barriers to treatment. Help set up medical appointments or accompany the person to their therapy appointment or support group.
4. **Promote Social Activity.** Studies show that loneliness and social isolation are associated with higher rates of depression. Try staying in touch by phone or encourage the use of social media as a means for them to communicate with other friends and family members. Plan activities with your friend or loved one that they will enjoy.
5. **Encourage physical activity.** Exercise is not only good for your physical health, but it also supports emotional and mental health. If possible, invite your friend or loved one for a walk. Talk with them about physical activities they might enjoy doing and then plan to take part in that activity with them.
6. **Provide ongoing support.** Seeing a mental health clinician for therapy is an important first step. However, assistance with attending appointments and following through with their treatment plan may have to be offered. Be there to support them throughout their mental wellness journey.

About Palo Alto University - Palo Alto University (PAU), a private, non-profit university located in the heart of Northern California's Silicon Valley, is dedicated to addressing pressing and emerging issues in the fields of psychology and counseling that meet the needs of today's diverse society. PAU offers undergraduate and graduate programs that are led by faculty who make significant contributions to in their field. Online, hybrid and residential program options are available . PAU was founded in 1975 as the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology and re-incorporated as Palo Alto University in August 2009. PAU is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). PAU's doctoral programs are accredited by the [American Psychological Association](#) (APA) and its master's in counseling programs by the [Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs](#) (CACREP).