

A personal point of view...

A Little Support Can Go a Long Way

Reflections on Depression and Anxiety

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is simply not judging.

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As I move closer to health and further away from depression and anxiety, I find it easier to talk about my experience.

One of the most important things for someone living with depression and/or anxiety is to know that help is available and that illness doesn't have to be a life sentence. "Help" could mean many different things - counselling, meditation, exercise, medication, acupuncture and more - but, most of all, support from friends, colleagues and loved ones, any one alone or in combination.

People living with mental illness, such as me, often feel hopeless. And when they *do* muster up the strength to get help and that particular method doesn't work as expected, it can be devastating. Support and encouragement to try another approach can go a long way. There are many forms of help available, and there is one (or a combination) that is suitable for each person. For me, the first few attempts to get help were not the right match, but I did end up finding the right combination. The hard part can be reaching out or accepting help, especially if you feel weak or misunderstood.

Sometimes helping is simply not judging. When people told me to "suck it up," "get a grip" or "pull up my bootstraps," they weren't being helpful - it tended to make things worse. The people at the receiving end of these statements are often judging themselves already and don't understand *why* they can't just make their own mind think differently. These sorts of comments feed and fertilize self-doubt. If people don't feel that they can "suck it up," it can make them feel powerless and lose hope.

Rather than adding to these feelings, supporters can demonstrate their belief in those suffering and provide

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strength where they may not be able to find it in themselves. This is *not* to say that people with mental health conditions are weak - mental illness is neither a weakness nor the result of poor decisions. Compare it to a broken leg: if someone has a broken leg and they are unable to walk or run, is it fair to label that person as "weak"? No, the leg does *not* reflect the person that they are. A period of healing is required until the person feels able to move on. The same can be said for people with depression/anxiety: time for healing is needed before they can get back to being themselves.

Recovering and healing from mental illness isn't just about getting well: it's learning that the illness can be managed with help and support, and that success can be reached. This is where family, friends and colleagues come in. I lost my best friend to suicide and was close to losing my own life at a few points. I'm so grateful to be healthier now and I wish my friend were still here and enjoying life with me.

The right support can go a long way toward achieving success and happiness. In this respect, I am grateful to my husband, Jeff, who has always supported me and was able to see past my illness, even when I couldn't. ◀

Christy Buttigieg is campaigning for mental health awareness.