

# Supporting a Friend/Family Member

A friend or family member with an anxiety disorder needs good support in addition to effective treatment. Criteria for effective helpers include: knowledge of anxiety, an understanding of the recovery process, compassion, sensitivity, patience, and strong boundaries. If you are that special person in their life, here are some suggestions.

## HELPFUL SUPPORT

1. **DO** educate yourself about anxiety disorders. A good support is informed.
2. **DO** let them set the pace for recovery. You may want to take a trip to Hawaii this winter, but it may be more realistic to plan for next year. Follow their agenda.
3. **DO** ask them what they need from you. When they are anxious, do they need a hug/space/talk or quiet. You can't assume what they need; they are the expert.
4. **DO** become familiar with the way they calm them-selves, then you can work together when they are anxious.
5. **DO** give praise for every achievement, no matter how small. Sitting in a restaurant for 15 minutes may be a big step for someone who has avoided eating in public.
6. **DO** suggest recording each of their gains. On a discouraging day, they can review their notes and see their progress.
7. **DO** acknowledge their fear. Reassure them that anxiety feels terrible but isn't life-threatening.
8. **DO** allow yourself, at times, to feel resentful, helpless, frustrated or afraid. You have taken on a difficult task.
9. **DO** give yourself the care you need. Maintain your social supports. Take breaks. Tell them you are needing a time-out and reassure them that you are not abandoning them. By doing so, you are modeling self-care and healthy boundaries.

## UNHELPFUL SUPPORT

1. **DON'T** blame them or yourself for their problems.
2. **DON'T** minimize their fears. Don't say 'get a grip', 'think positive', 'relax'.
3. **DON'T** panic if they panic. Read the literature on controlling anxiety and practice how to manage yours.
4. **DON'T** pressure them to take bigger steps than what they are ready for. Every little step builds self-confidence.
5. **DON'T** encourage avoidance. If they panic and leave a situation, allow them time to calm themselves and then suggest gradually returning to the situation.
6. **DON'T** be domineering and insist they take a particular step. Their ability to choose decreases anxiety and helps them feel in control.
7. **DON'T** be overprotective. They don't need a parent, but need to build self-confidence by facing their fears.
8. **DON'T** rearrange your life to accommodate their recovery. That is not healthy for you or for them.
9. **DON'T** take on the burden of recovery. You are not responsible for their wellness - only they are.
10. **DON'T** quit. Persevere. There is effective treatment for anxiety, but time and patience are needed.