

Mental illness doesn't have to be a solo journey

By Jeanne Nelson

As an active leader in the South Lake Tahoe chapter of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, I work closely with family members who have loved ones with mental health issues. For many, one of the hardest times was learning about their child, partner, or friend's diagnosis and not knowing what to do next. Some were shamed for not addressing their loved one's needs sooner and others were told they were too protective or doing too much.

I have been in this same position as a parent and unsure what to do for my adult child. Based on what I have learned and heard, here are few tips about what to do after you learn about your loved one's symptoms or diagnosis.

- Avoid the blame game. Mental illness is not someone's fault. Avoid blaming yourself or others.
- Get informed. Learn all you can about your loved one's diagnosis. Seek out ongoing educational opportunities to stay abreast of brain research and discoveries. It is important to keep current on brain science to the same degree as behavioral science.
- Keep the communication lines open between you and your loved one. NAMI has many resources, including family-to-family program available in South Lake Tahoe, with suggestions for best communication practices.
- Know the resources available. Familiarize yourself with resources and services in the community. Visit one of the six mental health resource kiosks in South Lake Tahoe or find an in depth list of services **online**.
- Find a community of support. It's not just about getting help for your loved one, but also for you. Attend the

NAMI family support group at the South Lake Tahoe Library on the second Tuesday of each month from 6-7:30pm.

- Avoid hiding. The more we talk, the more we learn, and the more we reduce the stigma.

Imagine how we would think about mental health if we assumed all our children, colleagues, or neighbors had a mental health condition. Maybe we would be more proactive in getting timely healthcare and supporting prevention education. We might focus less on “what ifs” and more on solutions.

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