

Here's a question that comes up frequently: how can I be a good friend to someone I care about who has a mental illness or emotional struggles beyond the everyday ups and downs?

First off, here are some practical tips if you are concerned about your friend and are not sure how to approach the situation. These come from Active Minds and the JED Foundation, two mental health advocacy organizations that have a particular focus on young people and college populations:

<http://www.activeminds.org/issues-a-resources/be-a-friend>

<https://www.jedfoundation.org/mental-health-resource-center/>

Second, see below for a few first-person narratives that may offer you insight. Here are some highlights of their advice and some points I think are useful:

- Educate yourself about the illness or issue so that you have some perspective on what your friend is experiencing and why.
- Keep in mind that your friend is the expert on their own feelings. Make observations or ask questions respectfully if you need clarification.
- Talk with your friend about what kinds of support are helpful and unhelpful. Even if you don't fully agree, this can allow you to focus your efforts more productively.
- Set parameters that work for both of you. For example, having an understanding of what's okay to talk about or when to seek additional help can take some pressure off of the friendship.
- Remind yourself that it's okay to have feelings about how the mental illness or emotional struggle is affecting your friendship. Sometimes you may be able to talk about this with your friend, other times that may place too much stress on one or both of you. Find some other healthy outlets for yourself, like talking to another thoughtful and trustworthy friend or therapist, or journaling about your feelings.
- Remember the great qualities that made you friends. Try not to get stuck seeing your friend as a "broken" person or you as the "helper"; you can both have other roles.

<https://themighty.com/2017/01/maintaining-friendships-while-living-with-a-mental-illness/>

<http://www.upworthy.com/13-usually-unspoken-tips-if-your-loved-one-struggles-with-depression?c=ufb1&s=p>

<https://themighty.com/2017/02/supporting-friend-with-bipolar-depression-in-the-hard-times/>

<https://themighty.com/2016/10/what-to-look-for-in-a-partner-when-dating-with-a-mental-illness/>