



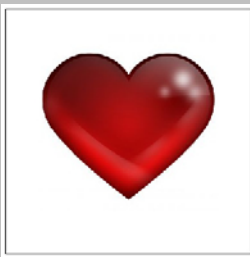
A service of
Agesian HealthCare

Focusing on Strengths. Finding Solutions

A Newsletter by the Clinicians of Doll & Associates

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Quote for the Month

*Love is an endless act
of forgiveness, a
tender look which
becomes a habit.*

-Peter Ustinov

About Our Clinic

Doll & Associates is a state-certified outpatient mental health clinic, part of Agesian HealthCare, offering:

- Child, adolescent, adult, couples, family and group therapy for a wide variety of emotional and behavioral difficulties
- psychological evaluations
- in-service training on various topics

The article is available online:
www.dollandassociates.com/newsletter.html

Loving Someone with Mental Illness

By Beth Rogers-Doll, PhD

Having a mental health concern is a tough "row to hoe." Whether you are facing anxiety and apprehension, alcoholism, fighting your way through depression, or yearning to fit in socially and have friends, it is hard to stay persistent in setting healthy routines and challenging yourself to reach new levels. But, what if you **love** someone who has mental health concerns? What if someone in your family has a mental health issue? Chances are that it affects you in some way. If you love someone who is wired differently, such as someone with Asperger's, ADHD or someone who has been badly traumatized, you find yourself noticing those differences in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways. You may find yourself struggling with how much to you should say to the loved one with mental illness/neurological differences. Below are some ways that individuals have found themselves hurting, not helping the situation.

Vigilance vs. Faith

Vigilance means you often monitor how they are behaving, looking for indications that things might be getting worse. You study their mood, their walk, or you sniff their breath and clothing for smells of alcohol. You partly want to be informed if they are relapsing, but you also want to be ready if chaos is coming. This is reasonable, is it not?

But, what if your monitoring is so intense that it is ruining your day, or

consuming all of your free thinking? You might neglect your own needs or the needs of other family members. This, of course, isn't helping anyone.

And what if your monitoring is troubling to your loved one? If he or she feels as if under a microscope? You are then becoming the concern because your monitoring is diverting your loved one's attention *away* from working on the mental health concern. If you add to the concern by interrogating through questions, your loved one is now defending him or herself from your prying. Try to have faith in the strength of your loved one to grow and evolve. Look instead for signs of improvement and progress. Monitor your monitoring, developing your awareness of times of day and moments when you are intently focused on studying your loved one for signs of trouble. Put yourself into other tasks.

Enabling vs. Challenging

If your child is afraid of something and you studiously protect that child from confronting the feared thing, you may be delaying any progress on the phobia. If your alcoholic wife begs you to go out and pick up a new bottle of vodka because she really needs it, you are allowing her to avoid confronting her day without alcohol to soothe her. If you try to set up everything to make the depressed person's life easier, then the depressed person does not get the opportunity to feel the satisfaction of pushing through the fog of depression to reach something better. If your child with Asperger's has a tantrum about doing an activity that will inevitably be good for him or her and you back down,

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***Focusing on
Strengths.
Finding Solutions.***

For more mental health
resources, visit our
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Who We Are...

- *Matthew Doll, PhD*
- *Beth Rogers-Doll, PhD*
- *Anne Brunette, MSW*
- *Sarah Arnold, PsyD*
- *Steve Roberts, MSW*

(Loving Someone with Mental Illness continued)

that is a lost opportunity too.

Note: Your child's therapist or doctor may have suggested ways to make things better for your child. This is not enabling. It is following treatment advice.

The tricky part about enabling our loved ones to stay unhealthy is that it contributes to their feeling controlled by things outside of themselves. We call this "external locus of control." People with an "internal locus of control" do better in life. Even when they make a mistake, they feel a sense of ownership over their life. We all like to own our lives. We have all met people who blame everything but the family pet for their issues. This is an example of adopting an external locus of control. It is usually good practice to let each individual be responsible for improving his or her own life. You will not always know the difference between enabling and just being helpful. Ask yourself if your loved one is capable of doing more for himself, but does not seem to challenge himself as much as he could.

Blaming the Disorder for Every Concern

Even though one may have a mental health problem, it does not usually cause every other problem, including **your** concerns. If you get angry or burned out, that is understandable. It may seem lonely and a never-ending hassle to love someone whose behavior makes normal functioning impossible. When you make poor choices, try not to blame it on the "disorder."

Take personal responsibility and help your

loved one to take responsibility for mistakes. Having a mental health concern does not make one incapable - only different. When something painful or difficult happens, it helps to think in grays. That means that the mental health concern may have been an influence, without being completely causal.

Below is a list of pointers on a healthy attitude toward your loved one's mental health issue:

- Know about the disorder and learn what you can. This may mean taking classes through our local chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) or reading several books on the subject.
- Remind yourself that your loved one is so much more than the illness! Related to this, remind yourself that your loved one isn't struggling with the problem JUST to upset you and make your life difficult!
- Reassure your loved one that you love him or her. This is especially important when behaviors and symptoms are flared up. Your loved one may feel unlovable.
- Be honest about your own struggle. You are not superhuman. That means you feel pain from time to time.
- Participate in treatment when your loved one asks. Go to sessions when invited.
- Try to avoid treating your loved one as "less than" because of the mental health challenges he or she faces every day.

What's Happening In the Community

Love Language Family Wellness Retreat

Featuring Dr. Jennifer Thomas, co-author of "The Five Languages of Apology"

When: Friday, February 11 at 5:30 p.m. - Saturday, February 12 at 2 p.m.

Where: Ramada Plaza Hotel, 1 Main Street, FdL

Cost: \$169/per couple includes all workshop materials and events; all meals and entertainment; overnight stay Friday \$99 without overnight stay

How much would you spend on jewelry or flowers? Can those things change your relationship forever?

Recommended Resources

NAMI-National Alliance on Mental Illness

www.nami.org

Fond du Lac Chapter link is on the web site
Friendship Corner, 27 Third Street, Fond du Lac

NAMI Wisconsin www.namiwisconsin.org

When Someone You Love Has a Mental Illness by

Rebecca Woolis