

How to Help Someone Who Refuses Professional Help

It can feel frustrating to support a loved one going through a rough patch, especially if they refuse to seek professional help. Try to remember that getting help is a very difficult decision, and they might be feeling afraid. You may feel powerless in the situation, since you lack the expertise your friend needs to get better – but you can still be there for your friend; you might just need to take a different approach. Here's how:

- 1) **Listen actively** and carefully to what they say. Reflect their emotions back to them. *“Yes, it can be really scary to see a therapist and tell a stranger how you feel.”* Help them explore their concerns and options by asking questions. Try to resist telling them what to do. They need your attention more than they need your advice.
- 2) **Treat them like an adult** by asking if they want you to help. Give them control over the options: *“We could do this or this. What do you think?”* Respect how they feel and think and their ability to make choices.
- 3) **Be Informed, and Inform.** Do some research to find out what help is available in your area. This will be useful to give them if they decide they're ready to seek help. Seek professional help for yourself too, so you know how to best support them without causing harm or distress.
- 4) **Be Patient:** Your loved one might need some time to let themselves get help. Don't hurry them. Let them know that you respect their decision to not seek help immediately, that you are here (within set boundaries), and that they can take their time.
- 5) **Follow-up without being aggressive:** keep checking in on your friends but don't be aggressive. Set these expectations from the start by asking permission to check in on them periodically.
- 6) **Set Boundaries:** You cannot be there for your loved one every moment of every day. Set some limits on what you can and cannot do - and stick to them! It is important to take care of your own mental health too.
- 7) **Mobilise Support:** You don't need to be the only one offering support. Involve their trusted friends, family and colleagues for support. Seek the consent of your friend before involving anyone else. Don't reveal any private details. You can break confidentiality if the person is suicidal (as a last resort).

Remember that if you try to pressure them to get help, it may come from a good place, but it can actually have the opposite effect to what you intend. It might turn your friend off seeking help altogether. Your help is not dependent on their seeking help. You need to be there for them, to let them help you help them, and trust you to collaboratively develop a solution that keeps their best interest in mind.