

Living Life with Chronic Illness

Is someone you love suffering from a chronic illness? Are you suffering from a chronic illness?

Over the years many people have come to me for help with coping when they or a family member are diagnosed with a chronic medical illness. The need for the support of caring others intensifies at these times for many people. I am grateful for the many hours spent listening to their stories of struggle and triumph. I honour their courage to transcend the illness to live a positive and enriched life experience.

Research shows that the psychological experience of chronic illness may include a wide range of thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions. Some of those are highlighted below. This is to be expected considering the complexity of the human brain, mind and the human experience in general:

- ✚ *Stressed Out.* Feeling overwhelmed. Difficulty managing responsibilities and activities of daily living.
- ✚ *Grieving.* Shock, disbelief, denial/complete disregard for the facts. Anger, fear, sadness. Loss of hope, depression/low mood. Excessive worry, a sense of panic. Difficulty sleeping, or eating. Muscle tension. Not feeling like you. A sense of emptiness or disconnection from others. Excessive need to be with others. Feelings of guilt.
- ✚ *Feeling helpless and desperate.*
- ✚ *Worrying about the future:* How you will go about daily activities (physical care, eating). How you will work or pay the bills. Who will care for you if you can't do it on, your, own.
- ✚ *Fear about death and dying:* For some it is not the idea of death, but the idea of dying, and what the dying process might be like.
- ✚ *Feeling Alone.*
- ✚ *Fearing Judgment from others, for instance if your illness includes physical or other noticeable changes, such as speech.*
- ✚ *Loss of self-confidence.*
- ✚ *Loss of, or increased spiritual, religious or philosophical beliefs.*
- ✚ *Moments of acceptance that this is your life, which increase over time as you, adjust.*
- ✚ *Eventually regaining hope and motivation to, re-engage, move forward and live life.*

Some Ways to Help Yourself and Others Live with Chronic Illness

- ✚ Show that you care. Say that you care. Be kind to yourself.
- ✚ Be a good listener.
- ✚ Offer your presence, even silent, companionship.
- ✚ Learn about the illness.
- ✚ Practice open and direct communication. Keeping secrets about the illness can lead to further problems in family relationships.

- ✚ Tell the children using age appropriate terms. Children need to be informed and reassured by the trusted adults, to help them adjust also. Sometimes children feel responsible and fearful. This may be prevented if they are told what's happening and reassured that it is not their fault.
- ✚ Be cautious in deciding who to tell outside of your family or close trusted circle of supporters/loved ones. Share your news carefully. Some relationships become strained and distant when someone is unwell, while others grow and strengthen.
- ✚ Ask for help with what you need. Ask the person what he/she needs from you, and help him/her to figure it out if unsure. Be clear about what favours or errands etc. you need, and what you're not okay with.
- ✚ Ask for emotional support from loved ones and others. Give emotional support.
- ✚ Seek outside help from a support group, Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC), or other qualified professional who is knowledgeable and with whom you feel comfortable.

I welcome the opportunity to provide counselling/therapy support for you and your family. I hope you find the information offered in this article helpful.

Wishing, you peace, hope and joy.

Karen

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Resources (books you may also find helpful)

A Delicate Balance: Living Successfully with Chronic Illness
Susan Milstrey Wells
When Someone You Love Has a Chronic Illness
Tamara McClintock Greenberg, PsyD, MS.
Helping Grieving People: When Tears Are Not Enough
J. Shep Jeffreys