

[Loving the Person, Not the Stigma](#)



There are many different hurdles, compromises and challenges that come with truly loving another human being. When a mental health diagnosis is added into the equation, the real challenges begin.

We often ask ourselves, “What did I do to deserve this?”, “How can this have affected my life in such a profound way?”, “How can I change this?” and “What should I do?”

First, start by acknowledging you cannot change your loved one, you can only change yourself. We suggest you become aware of the behaviors that are being displayed and understand that those behaviors are not a part of who they are. Recognize who ‘the person’ your loved one really is.

Some individuals do not want to disclose their mental illness diagnosis due to the stigma surrounding what mental illness really is. As a family member, friend and/or associate, you may not understand this, but you have to respect their decisions as well. You can support them through their journey, you cannot live the journey for them.

However, we cannot deem ourselves helpless in this manner either. Take steps to research the diagnosis and seek input from available resources (for example: [NAMI-MC website](#)). Learn the affects, behaviors, symptoms and moods associated with that mental illness. Explore what steps can be taken to assist in their recovery. Ask your loved one if they need and want support in their recovery.

As for a loved one caring for someone with a mental health diagnosis, it is important to practice and apply self-care. Learn ways to assist with your own mental health well-being. Attend a [support group](#) for families that have loved ones with mental health concerns. NAMI McHenry County offers a twelve week Family-To- Family class that will assist family member with:

- ways of communicating effectively
- seeing the mental illness from the perspective of your loved one
- guiding ourselves away from contributing to the known stigma

It is crucial within in the recovery process that family members assess themselves so that they are not (unknowingly or knowingly) contributing to the stigma surrounding mental illness.

To maintain a healthy relationship with your loved ones, we must establish an environment that:

- utilizes strategies where you offer unconditional support and understanding
- which promotes better communication and
- is absolutely stigma free.

Assist with finding support groups and classes that will contribute to their recovery and stability. Lastly, take care of yourself!!! In order to support a loved one on their journey to recovery, we must be in a healthy mental state.

[NAMI McHenry County](#) has classes, support groups and [recovery support specialist](#) to assist.

Let’s start living in a world where mental health, and its challenges, are normal!

The next [Family-to-Family Class](#) will be starting February 26, 2019. Please call 815-308-0854 to register.