

## **FRIENDS & FAMILY – What You Do Makes The Difference.**

Most of us rely on sharing worries and talking things through with a sympathetic family member or friend when we experience times of illness or stress. Imagine if you couldn't do this for fear of being shunned.

### **Families living with mental illness:**

Mental illness affects ordinary people. It can affect anyone at any time, regardless of age, culture, income or gender. 47% of New Zealanders will experience mental illness in their lifetime and many more will experience periods of stress or life events such as grief or loss that affect our mental health.

The vast majority of people with mental illness recover, raise their families, work in paid employment, and contribute to society.

The support of family, whanau and friends makes a real difference.

### **Stigma and Discrimination is Damaging:**

The biggest barrier to recovery for people with experience of mental illness is stigma and discrimination. It stops people from feeling part of their community, maintaining wellness, seeking treatment and from having the support and love of their family and friends. It affects their access to employment, housing, family life, and a valued place in society.

The fear of stigma and discrimination may also discourage families/whanau from seeking the support and encouragement they need to support their loved one and each other.

### **What you can do:**

Strong and conflicting emotions can arise in families/whanau when a family member is living with mental illness including compassion, concern, anger, fear and rejection. You can help to support whanau and friends by:

- Seeking information, education, and finding support groups so you can help your loved one to achieve wellness.
- Respecting that some people with experience of mental illness prefer not to involve their family in their treatment.
- Asking your family member how they wish you to support them.
- Remembering that the mental illness experienced by your family member is only a part of who they are.
- Remembering to make time for yourself because supporting someone experiencing any sort of illness can be hard.
- Encouraging open and honest communication within your family that always involves the family member with experience of mental illness.
- Not using language that creates discrimination for people with experience of mental illness.
- Speaking up for your friend or family member by challenging derogatory comments or behaviour that excludes them.
- Providing hope – believing that your loved one will make a full recovery and making sure they know that's how you feel.
- Overcoming your own fears and stereotypes and seeing the person for who they are.

This resource was produced by the Mental Health Foundation of NZ on behalf of the Ministry of Health's Like Minds, Like Mine project. For further resources, contact the Mental Health Foundation Resource and Information Centre or see their website: [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)