

Family Support & Education

What is family support and education?

When we talk about family support and education, we mean getting information and support from another person who has cared for someone who has experienced mental health symptoms.

Participating in family support and education can be an important part of managing your own wellness and being a better supporter for your loved one. It can also help you find comfort and community with people who have shared a similar journey.

Who is family support and education for?

Family support and education is for all family members, including parents, siblings, and adult children, as well as partners, friends, and other people in non-clinical caregiver roles.

Some options are for caregivers of people with any mental health diagnosis or experience, while other options are tailored to caregivers of people with a specific diagnosis or experience.

What does family support and education look like?

Family support and education comes in many forms. Find what works best for you!

Family Support Groups

In a family support group you can share your experiences as a family member, and get empathy and validation from fellow participants. Although participants may share resources and strategies, the primary focus is on mutual support.

Family support groups can happen in-person, online, or by phone, and are led by facilitators who are also family members themselves. Most family support groups are drop-in, meaning you can start attending at any time and attend as long as you need.

what veteran facilitators say about family support groups...

- there is solace in being in the company of others who understand what you're going through
- the format is informal, bring whatever concerns you may have
- you have the opportunity to learn from others, and shared what you have learned
- everyone is encouraged to participate, but it's okay if you don't want to speak
- this is a place where you can give voice to your fears, frustration and anger
- sometimes we just need to express our feelings, even when there is not an answer available
- each support group is different, so don't be afraid to try more than one

Family Education Programs

Family education programs are structured, time-limited programs where participants can learn things like communication skills and coping strategies. Family education programs can happen in-person, online, or by phone.

Family education programs are led by teachers who are also family members themselves. Although people get support from teachers and fellow participants throughout the program, the primary focus is on learning.

what veteran teachers say about family education programs...

- attending gives you a chance to learn with others who are sharing the same journey
- the material covered is important, but so too is building the sense of trusted community
- learning more about what your loved one is going through can help you feel stronger
- attending may realign your expectations, and help to change the way you communicate with your loved one

One-on-One Family Support

One-on-one family support is a combination of support, mentoring, teaching, and learning. People in family support roles have experience supporting their family member as they navigate the mental health system.

Often called Family Partners, Family Connectors, or Family Support Specialists, they bring their own experiences and know-how to the role.

If you are the family member of a child or teen, one-on-one family support may be available for you and your family through:

- MassHealth's Children's Behavioral Health Initiative
- Insurance-Based Access to Parent/Family Partners
- Family Support Programs
- Family Resource Centers
- Caring Together Continuum
- Department of Mental Health (DMH) Young Adult Centers
- Early Psychosis Programs
- other community-based programs or clinics where your family member receives services

If you are the family member of an adult, one-on-one family support may be available for you and your family through:

- DMH Adult Community Clinical Services
- DMH Young Adult Centers
- Early Psychosis Programs
- other community-based programs or clinics where your family member receives services

what a veteran family supporters say about one-on-one family support...

- your family supporter can be your - and your family's - greatest advocate
- we've faced many of the same challenges and roadblocks as you
- no one understands what it's like better than someone else whose been there
- we're here to help with ideas and strategies, and also when you just need to vent

How can I find family support and education?

Visit the NAMI Massachusetts website to find family support groups and family education programs that work for you: www.namimass.org/family-support.

The COMPASS helpline can also help you identify other family support and education options. Learn more about COMPASS on our website: www.namimass.org/nami-mass-compass-helpline.