

A Note to Caregivers*



Do your best to be part of the care team and listen to your loved one. You know your loved one well, allow them to lead as autonomy matters to youth and it is relationship building. Ask for what you need.

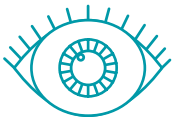


Coping with depression is difficult for youth, and it's also extremely challenging for other family members too. Here are some tips and resources from other caregivers of autistic youth experiencing depression who have offered some of their reflections and lessons learned about the process:



Education is key.

Depression can sometimes look like laziness or a lack of motivation. Learning about presentations of depressive symptoms in autism is key to understanding your youth and how to support them.



If you see depressive symptoms, trust your instincts.

You may see signs of depression in your youth that may not be visible or present at the time of the medical appointment. Share this information with the medical professional.



Establish trust and communication.

Have conversations with your youth so you know what they feel comfortable sharing with others. It is important to respect their privacy. Consider letting youth know that you may need to share private information when it relates to their safety.



It's not their fault. It's not your fault. It's not personal.

Recognize that depression may be expressed as hostility, rejection, and irritability.

* In this tip sheet, we use the term 'caregiver' to mean anyone who provides support and is caring for an autistic transition aged youth struggling with mental health, this could include: parents, siblings, grandparents, chosen family, etc.



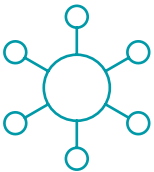
Journeying together: There will be much learning over time.

You and your family will learn new coping skills. Not every method or technique will be well suited for you or your loved one.



Self care matters.

Be kind to yourself and accept that you are going to make mistakes. Make sure to take care of your own needs, including time for activities that bring you joy.



You're not alone.

Reaching out and connecting with other caregivers can bring comfort and much needed support.



Take care and be kind to you.
Ask for help.
You are not alone.



Some helpful places to start are:

Mental Health Literacy Guide for Autism:

<https://www.yorku.ca/health/lab/ddmh/am-help/>

This guide was co-created with Autistic adults and family members from across Canada. The goal for this guide is to provide knowledge about the different factors that can impact Autistic mental health. Section 9 of the guide was created specifically for family carers.

The Family Care Centre by Children’s Mental Health Ontario and Parents for Children’s Mental Health:

<https://www.family.cmho.org/>

This is a network of resources focused on supporting the caregivers of youth with mental illnesses. The website provides a series of tip sheets that address a range of topics including, ‘recognizing symptoms in youth’ and ‘managing a crisis’. Guidance on emotional management, counseling and peer support for caregivers is also provided.

See “Parenting Survival Guide; under Resources” and chapter information under “peer support”.

The Ontario Caregiver Organization:

<https://ontariocaregiver.ca/>

This is an easy to navigate e-library of resources that are tailored to different demographics of caregivers. Support for caregivers includes one-to-one counseling support, access to mental health helplines, information about caregiving services and links to financial support for caregivers.

See “Find support” for more direct support resources.

The Family Connections Program overseen by The Sashbear Foundation:

<https://sashbear.org/en/family-connections/family-connections-2>

The family connections programme is a group-based training programme that aims to provide education and develop skills of those who are a loved-one or caregiver of someone with mental illness.

The page includes links to the online webinar sessions and an overview of the program.