

## Tips for whānau supporting a family member under stress

This information is for friends and family of someone who is experiencing a stressful situation, who want to support them.

If someone you're close to is feeling stressed there are lots of practical things you can do to support them – even though you probably can't change the situation they're in.

- **Help them reflect on whether they are stressed.** Often, people don't notice that some physical symptoms and behaviour (such as not being able to get to sleep, or drinking more than usual) are actually signs of stress. Sometimes you may be able to see it before they recognise it themselves. If you've noticed that someone seems particularly busy, anxious or unwell, you could gently let them know, and ask how you can help.

- **Listen to how they are feeling.** Having a chance to talk openly could help someone to feel calmer and more able to move forward. Just being there for them will probably help lots.

*"My friends can help by] making me a cup of tea, holding me while I cry, making me laugh..."*

- **Reassure them that stressful situations can pass.** For someone who is in the middle of a stressful time, it can be hard to see an end point. Let them know that situations can change and can get better. "This too will pass."

- **Help them identify their triggers.** You can be specific about things you've observed, but try to stay open-minded and non-judgemental. Your perspective might be valuable, but your friend or family member could find this conversation stressful, and being patient will help.

*"Not putting extra pressure on me... letting me know they're there but that I don't have to do anything."*

- **Help them address some causes of any other stress, if you can.** You might be able to help your friend or family member look for support around issues like debt, housing problems or difficulties at work.

- **Help them learn and practise relaxation techniques.** You could help them research good relaxation techniques and find ways to practise them, such as a weekly yoga class, or setting aside time for breathing exercises at home. This might become something that you could do together.

*"When I'm stressed I need friends to] hug me. It's amazing how good a single hug can feel."*

- **Support them to seek professional help.** For example, you could help them contact their GP, make an EAP appointment, go with them to an appointment or do some research on mental health and wellbeing.

- **Look after yourself.** If someone around you is very stressed, you might become stressed too. If this happens, try to take a step back and look after your own wellbeing. Being calm and relaxed will make you more able to help someone else.

*"I want them to] understand that I may be irritable but I don't mean to hurt them in any way."*

**EAPworks is there for support – call 0800 SELFHELP 0800 735 343**

[www.eapworks.co.nz](http://www.eapworks.co.nz) for resources online