



## Talking to Family and Friends about Chronic Illness Fact Sheet

### DO:

- ➔ Gather information and resources to offer them, this is the first step in helping them to understand.
- ➔ Ask your medical provider for suggestions about what/how to tell them and possible support systems or resources.
- ➔ Provide concrete information based on qualified medical facts.
- ➔ Explain any medical terms or confusing explanations to get the message across.
- ➔ Keep it simple, so as not to overwhelm with medical or scientific terminology.
- ➔ Use age appropriate language for children and where possible story books can help enormously to convey the message.
- ➔ Talk to children of different ages and developmental stages separately.
- ➔ Encourage family members to attend appointments or informational meetings to learn more.
- ➔ Expect people to react differently and allow them to work through their feelings.
- ➔ Let people know that you realize they will need time and space to process this information.
- ➔ Encourage people to find a counselor or support group to help them cope with their feelings.

## **DON'T:**

- ➔ Overwhelm people with too much detail, go slowly, this will be a difficult time for them too.
- ➔ Be surprised if people need support and comfort after all they are suffering too.
- ➔ Think that it is your job to comfort others when you are also struggling with your emotions.
- ➔ Expect everyone to be on board with the recommendations – they also go through the stage of adaptation, including shock and denial and bargaining.
- ➔ Be surprised if some family members and friends avoid you; they don't know what to say or do or how to react.
- ➔ Ask for or expect support from people who don't have it to give – this only makes it harder for you.
- ➔ Discourage people from feeling their own feelings of loss.
- ➔ Be afraid to tell people that you can't offer support at times when you don't have it to give.
- ➔ Feel guilty about taking extra time for self care and emotional/spiritual nourishment without including family or friends.

**Need help coping with chronic illness? Contact a professional therapist**