

Tip Sheet:

Partner with Family to Strengthen Depression Care

Strategies

Lay the ground work for family involvement

- Consider patients who already have a “built in” family partner (patients with neurologic conditions and mobility issues are often receptive).
- Help patient accept the diagnosis and need for treatment before involving family.
- Allow patient time to “warm-up” to the idea of family involvement.
- Understand patient’s preferences, values, and any concerns around having family involved in treatment.
- Together with patient, identify best person (e.g., friend, family member, in-home care worker) to involve in patient’s treatment.
- Be aware of when involving family may be counterproductive.
- Address patient’s concerns about burdening family members.

Define family roles and involvement

- Assess strengths and weaknesses and limitations of family member as a partner.
- Describe flexibility in family role and extent of involvement.
- Focus on specific behavioral tasks that can be shared with family.

Preserve autonomy and manage privacy concerns

- Assess preferences for family role in specific aspects of treatment.
- Educate clinicians about guidelines for involving family members (e.g., HIPAA guidelines).
- Ask about topics that are “off-limits” in discussions with family.
- Allow flexibility for care manager to meet individually with patient.

Minimize family tensions

- Set ground rules for joint sessions.
- Make clear that this is not couples therapy.
- Educate family about nature of depression.
- Develop a jointly agreed upon agenda for each treatment session.

How can organizations partner with families in depression care?



Ideas for Practice

Educate family about the nature of depression in first session.