

*31 Days,
31 Ways,
2 Pray 4 Families*



A monthly prayer guide to aid
intercession for families dealing
with mental illnesses

31 Days, 31 Ways, 2 Pray 4 Families with Mental Illness

Families who walk alongside their loved ones in the labyrinths of mental illnesses are often hesitant to ask for prayer. They might feel others will judge them or their loved one, offer uninformed advice or initiate the gossip chain. But friends who observe or are aware of their journey don't necessarily need specific details to pray effectively.

Families need God's provision for themselves and their loved ones in these areas:

Day 1: Peace. Fear, worry and confusion can stir up an oppressive cloud when a loved one is struggling with a mental health condition. *Pray families will experience the presence and love of God that will drive out fear. Pray they will receive Christ's gift of peace, even amid the storm.*

Day 2: Financial resources. The financial burden of caring for a loved one cannot be overestimated. In addition to costs for medical care, there are, in some cases, expenses related to fines, legal fees, unconstrained spending sprees, accidents and property damages. *Pray that God will provide the resources for families to pay for these extraordinary expenses and that they will not be overwhelmed by the added financial responsibilities.*

Day 3: Community. Many families go into hibernation mode when their loved one is experiencing a severe episode. They can feel isolated and emotionally spent. Pray God will bring people to come alongside to support them, comfort them and pray with them. *Pray caregivers will have the energy to reach out to local mental health support groups.^{1,2} Ask God how you can be a part of His redemptive grace during difficult times.*

Day 4: Healing. Although there is no medical cure for most severe mental health conditions there is always a spark of hope within families that their loved one will be healed. As Christians, we know that God can and does bring His supernatural healing to many. Therefore, we never stop asking Him to intervene and touch our loved one. *Join families in asking for such a miracle.*

Day 5: Children in the family. Whether they are siblings or offspring, children are the forgotten. They are often overlooked when adults are trying desperately to cope with the family member. *Pray that those who are responsible to care for the children will stay aware of and be able to meet their needs. Pray the children will be protected from finding attention in unhealthy or unsafe ways from others who would do them harm.*

Day 6: Protection. Those who deal with mental health difficulties are often victims of exploitation, abuse and crime. When severely depressed, there is an increased possibility that they will try to harm themselves. When in the grip of mania or psychosis, there may be increased aggression or high-risk behaviors. *Join families in praying that God would surround their loved ones with His angels. Pray He would direct them to places and people who are safe and caring. Pray for protection of caregivers and others when the ill family member is violent or abusive.*

Day 7: Wisdom. The mental health systems in most states are complex, difficult for family members to access and constrained in their ability to respond. Family members need wisdom regarding what kind of help to look for and where to get it. *Pray they will find the kind of help they need at the time they need it.*

Day 8: Companionship. Ignorance and stigma are just two reasons many people don't reach out in friendship to those dealing with mental illnesses. It is common for families to be the only source of companionship for their loved ones. *Pray with the families that others will bring friendship and build community with their family member. Pray the loved one will be willing to participate in peer support groups. Pray that churches will become places of acceptance and inclusion.*

Day 9. Medical treatment. In the last 20 years there have been great advancements in pharmaceutical treatments for mental health conditions. But there is no perfect medication. Many have unrelenting side effects. Others lose their efficacy quickly. Some work only in combination with other medications, so there can be a complex combination of drugs. For those reasons and others, there is often resistance or noncompliance in taking medications. But when the right drugs are found and are taken, the results can be spectacular. *Pray with families that the most effective treatments can be found for their loved ones and there would be a willingness to take—and keep taking—the medications.*

Day 10. Forgiveness. A lot can go wrong in a family dealing with mental health difficulties. Harsh words, broken promises and destructive actions can shred trust and build thick barriers between family members. *Pray God would pour forgiveness generously upon each person in the family—forgiveness for each other, and for themselves. Pray a spirit of forbearance and grace would create a healthy environment of kindness and love.*

Day 11. Dual diagnosis/addictions. It is estimated that at least 35% of those suffering with a mental health condition are also dealing with some sort of addiction issue. For families coping with a loved one who has a brain disorder and is abusing alcohol or drugs, challenges compound exponentially. *Pray for families to be able discern what is going on. Pray for the individual to see and acknowledge the addiction and be willing to get treatment.*

Day 12. Legislative support. The U.S. mental health care system, along with the regulations and funding surrounding it, can easily be labeled “dysfunctional.” Family members are often limited in the generous care they would and could give by laws impeding their involvement in their loved one’s treatment. *Pray for legislators to become aware of and concerned for the welfare of those struggling with mental illness and of the families who love them. Pray for groups like NAMI that are speaking out to inform and influence laws that better serve the mental health community.*

Day 13. Spiritual growth. As with other aspects of life for those dealing with mental health difficulties, their spirituality and relationship with God can become muddled and confused. They rarely have the opportunity to experience a life-giving and encouraging spiritual community where they are accepted and belong. Even churches are often not welcoming toward those who deal with mental illnesses. *Pray for the Holy Spirit to work mightily to bring about salvation and sustained faith for all those touched by mental illnesses. Pray for opportunities to participate in Christian community and benefit from biblical teaching.*

Day 14. Meaningful use of time. For those who suffer with severe mental health conditions, full-time work or frequent interaction with strangers may not be possible. How can their hours be spent in meaningful and productive ways? Families look for outlets for their loved ones but few are available. *Pray for direction and creativity to discover good options. Pray for ministries and programs that offer safe places where those with mental disorders can belong and participate in meaningful activities.*

Day 15. Housing. The numbers tell part of the story. Twenty-six percent of the homeless population (including those staying in shelters) have diagnosable serious mental disorders. Even more struggle with depression and addictions. Boarding homes for those disabled by mental illness rarely have openings and many are located in high-crime areas. For families caring for adult loved ones, the housing dilemma is an overwhelming challenge. Safe, affordable, sanitary, wholesome options are very limited. So, often, families provide a place in their own homes. This means the families are on 24/7 caregiver duty. *Pray for families to find suitable and caring housing for their loved ones. If in their own homes, pray for strength, stamina and ongoing good relationships within the family.*

Day 16. Grief/loss. There is an undercurrent of sadness in families where there are mental health issues. Families grieve as they watch illness steal the quality of life from their loved one. They mourn over the losses in their own lives as they release many of their own plans and dreams to care for their family member. *Pray for comfort and for daily joys that can lift their spirits.*

Day 17. Communication. Clear, constructive communication is often the key tool a caregiver needs to help a loved one through a difficult episode. However, each individual and situation requires a unique approach. Choice of words, tone of voice and timing of conversation combine to create a complex communication map. *Pray caregivers will listen with discernment to what their loved ones are trying to express. Pray for wisdom in how and when to respond. Pray those with many voices in their minds will be able to listen to good counsel from those who love them and be able to know the gracious love of God.*

Day 18. Self-care. Those who care for loved ones struggling with mental illnesses also struggle with taking care of themselves. *Pray they would develop and maintain good rest, exercise and eating habits. Ask God to provide healthy relationships, strong faith and clear thinking.*

Day 19. Guilt. Second-guessing decisions, revisiting the past and taking on some level of blame for a loved one's mental illness are haunting companions for caregivers. *Pray for relief from these internal accusers. Pray family members will be able to rest in the comfort of a God who knows, who understands and who pours out His redemptive grace.*

Day 20. Recognize triggers. Episodes of mania, depression or psychosis don't just randomly appear. They are usually triggered by an event, stress, change in routine or medication. *Pray families can help their loved ones identify their triggers and have a good plan for dealing with possible scenarios in healthy ways.*

Day 21. Boundaries. Mutual respect, personal space, interaction intervals and financial support are just some of the areas of life in which caregivers must "draw the line" to create a healthy environment for themselves and their loved one. However, in a family unit, some members may need to set their own boundaries differently than others in the family. *Pray for wisdom in defining boundaries and consistency in keeping them. Pray for understanding and respect within the family when members have differing perspectives.*

Day 22. Discernment. There is no one right way to help a loved one who is dealing with depression, mania or psychosis. The volatile nature of some mental health conditions means that what was helpful yesterday may not be accepted today. Families have to continually assess their loved one's moods, cognitive capacities and medication compliance. *Pray they will be able to understand the factors at play so they can make good intervention plans.*

Day 23. Reasonable expectations. Caregivers must continually adjust their expectations of their loved ones who struggle with mood swings and daily stressors. Exercising forbearance when more sleep is needed, when social interactions are difficult or when irritability is acute can be supportive and loving. *Pray for family members to discern the need of the moment and respond with wisdom, compassion and grace.*

Day 24. Impact on job. The unpredictable nature of some mental health conditions means that family members often miss work as they tend to their loved ones in crisis. *Pray that caregivers will find support from their employers and flexibility in their jobs. Pray for good contingency plans and that others will be willing to help when needed.*

Day 25. Endurance. Because there is currently no cure for major mental illnesses, families look at a future of lifelong caregiving. Emotional, spiritual, mental and physical stamina are required, as is ongoing agility to adjust to the ever-changing moods and needs of loved ones. *Pray for family members to find a sustainable pace with opportunities to rest along the way. Pray for daily refreshment and peace.*

Day 26. Rest. Worry robs caregivers of sleep. Keeping vigil to watch for suicide attempts is emotionally and physically exhausting. Considering options and making difficult decisions during a crisis is a heavy weight on heart and mind. Praying without ceasing requires the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. *Ask God to grant family members restorative sleep and opportunities for emotional, spiritual and mental refreshment.*

Day 27. Health. Good eating and sleeping patterns, personal hygiene care and treatment for medical issues are difficult for those who deal with mental illnesses. *Pray they will respond to prompts from caregivers and will have access to nutritious food, safe places to sleep and other resources necessary for good health.*

Day 28. Faith. Trusting in God and His goodness can be the sustaining lifeline for caregivers in times of confusion and crisis. *Pray their faith would be refreshed by God's faithfulness. Pray He would show them sparks of redemptive grace along the way that can reassure them of His presence, love and active care.*

Day 29. Good counsel. Both caregivers and the loved ones they care for need wise input from clergy, friends, family, mental health professionals, legal representatives and medical personnel. However, the counsel they are given is often uninformed or inadequate. *Ask God to help them find knowledgeable advisors. Pray they will be able to sift through the ideas and information from others and recognize what is truly helpful.*

Day 30. Legal issues. Whether trying to get SSI disability status for their loved one or dealing with court cases related to manic behaviors, caregivers can find the legal system a maze of confusion and mystery. *Pray God will lead families to compassionate, competent and caring attorneys, judges and law enforcement officers. Pray responses and outcomes will always be what is best for the one struggling with the mental health difficulties. Pray for those who are incarcerated to be protected and to be swiftly released to medical care.*

Day 31. Prayer. Like Aaron and Hur who helped Moses keep his arms raised during the battle with Amalek, friends of caregivers give tremendous help when they come alongside to share the burden of prayer, especially during times of crisis. Knowing that others are praying for their loved one when they have run out of words or energy is a great comfort to families. *Ask God to raise up intercessors who are dedicated to pray fervently and faithfully for caregivers and their families. Ask Him to show you how to pray for specific situations.*

Written by Catherine Downing. These suggestions of prayer topics are written from the Christian tradition, but can be used and adapted by people from other faith traditions.