

HELP FOR THE HELPERS

by Eileen Hewitson

Much is written to try to help those with tinnitus, but little is offered to try to help those who live with or are close to those with tinnitus. It isn't easy being an onlooker. It's sometimes very hard for non-sufferers to understand what is going on. If you feel frustrated by your inability to help, just put a little distance between yourself and the sufferer for the time being. Try not to show your frustrations to the one you are trying to help, as this may make them feel guilty about spoiling your enjoyment. Try to keep a sense of humour. Try to laugh with not at the sufferer. Laughter is a great healer.

Here are some suggestions that may help you:

1. Try to be supportive and don't expect progress to be rapid. Learning to cope with something unwanted that is there all the time does take time, but it will be achieved eventually. Remind the sufferer of this, as well as yourself.
2. Try not to reproach a sufferer with spoiling your life. This would create extra anxiety and make them feel guilty.
3. Discuss your feelings about the problem, but talk positively, trying to find ways to resolve your differences.
4. Try not to allow your own life to become seriously disrupted. It's one thing to miss a night out at the pub. It's another to stop seeing family or friends because the sufferer finds it difficult. This may cause you to become resentful of the sufferer for spoiling your enjoyment of life, and this resentment could become a problem in itself. Instead try to support and encourage the sufferer.
5. Sufferers need reassurance that they are still loved. This is very important as it is easy to lose confidence. A squeeze of the hand or a little hug can do wonders!
6. Try to give praise when it is due when the sufferer makes progress. Don't criticise lack of progress. Sufferers know themselves when they are not coping very well.
7. Try not to make a sufferer feel an outsider because of the tinnitus. Keep inviting friends and family round and going out, even if it's been difficult before. This will act as a challenge to the sufferer, and remind them of what to aim for.
8. Try to encourage new pursuits, hobbies and interests, especially if the old ones are no longer so enjoyable. You too may find something to interest you.
9. Notice when the tinnitus sufferer seems better, more their old self, and see if there is a pattern (don't forget the onlooker sees most of the game). Is the tinnitus less of a problem after exercise (a walk, playing bowls), after watching a comedy programme, a film, a nature programme, after a period of relaxation, a day out, listening to music, etc? Then suggest such an activity when the tinnitus becomes distressing.
10. The group exists to support you as well, so do come to the meetings, read the newsletter, talk to the other members of the group.

And finally, find someone that you can talk to about your side of the problem. Remember, a trouble shared is a trouble halved.

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