

User Interview Guide: Family Members & Caregivers

Research Goal: Understanding caregiver and family members' perspectives on why patients with depression or bipolar disorder abandon mental health apps

Duration: 45-60 minutes per participant

Format: 1-on-1 semi-structured interview

Target Participants: 2-3 family members/caregivers of people with MDD or BP1 (parents, partners, siblings, adult children)

Opening Script

"Thank you for participating in this research. I'm studying why people with depression or bipolar disorder sometimes struggle to use mental health apps, even when they want help. As someone who supports a loved one with mental illness, you have a unique perspective on what actually helps versus what creates additional burden.

I want to understand what you've witnessed as someone supporting a loved one with mental illness, and what you've seen work or not work."

Interview Questions

Question 1: Observing App Usage During Difficult Times

"When your loved one is having a really hard time, like being depressed, anxious, or in crisis, have you considered using a mental health app? What happened?"

Follow-up probes:

- What did they need in that moment that the app did or didn't provide?
- What would you have wanted the app to do actually to help them?
- Have you seen them give up on using an app during a difficult period? What made them stop?
- What's the difference between what apps expect from users vs. what your loved one can actually do when struggling?

Question 2: Helping With App Setup

"Have you ever helped your loved one set up a mental health app? Or watched them try? What was that process like?"

Follow-up probes:

- Did they finish setting it up, or give up? What happened?
- What would have made it easier for them?
- Were there questions that seemed too personal, confusing, or overwhelming for someone in their state?
- If you were designing the setup process, what would you change?

Question 3: Supporting Medication Management

"If your loved one takes medication, do they use any apps to track it? How does that work for them?"

Follow-up probes:

- Have you seen the app help them stay on track, or create more stress?
- What happens when they miss doses—how does the app respond?
- Would you want to be notified if they miss medications, or is that crossing a boundary?
- What would a truly helpful medication support system look like from a caregiver's perspective?

Question 4: Recognizing patterns and warning signs

"Have you noticed patterns in when your loved one struggles more—certain times, situations, or triggers? How did you figure that out?"

Follow-up probes:

- Does your loved one recognize their own patterns, or do you see things they don't?

- Would it be helpful to have shared visibility into mood patterns, or would that feel invasive?
 - Have apps ever helped you or your loved one identify triggers, or do you rely more on your own observation?
 - If an app could alert you to early warning signs (like "they haven't been sleeping well, mood may decline"), would that be helpful or stressful?
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Question 5: Supporting Them During Crisis

"When your loved one is in distress, what helps them calm down or cope? Have apps ever been part of that, or is it more about human support?"

Follow-up probes:

- Would you want to be able to suggest coping strategies through an app, or would that feel intrusive?
 - What's the difference between the tools they'll actually use vs. the tools they ignore?
 - In a crisis, is your loved one able to use an app independently, or do they need you to guide them?
 - What role should technology play vs. human connection during acute distress?
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Question 6: Watching Long-Term App Usage Patterns

"Have you seen your loved one start using mental health apps and then stop? What happened?"

Follow-up probes:

- Did anything specific make them give up on it?
 - What would make an app valuable enough for them to keep using it?
 - Do they tend to stop using apps when they're feeling better or worse?
 - Have you ever encouraged them to keep using an app? How did that go?
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Question 7: Privacy and Shared Information

"If your loved one used an app to track their mental health, would you want to be able to see that information? Why or why not?"

Follow-up probes:

- Would shared visibility help you support them better, or would it feel like an invasion of privacy?
 - What information would be helpful for you to see vs. what should stay private?
 - How do you balance wanting to help vs. respecting their autonomy?
 - Would they trust an app more or less if they knew you could see their data?
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Question 8: The Ideal Support Tool

"If there were an app that could genuinely help your loved one manage their mental health, what would it need to do? What would give you confidence that it's actually helping them?"

Follow-up probes:

- What would make it easy for them to use even on their worst days?
 - How would you know if the app is helping or making things worse?
 - Would you want to be included in any way (notifications, shared data, caregiver resources)?
 - What would make you feel comfortable recommending it to other families dealing with mental illness?
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Closing Questions

1. Is there anything about supporting someone with mental illness—or your experiences with apps and technology—that I didn't ask about but you think is essential for me to understand?
2. If you could give one piece of advice to someone designing a mental health app that might involve family members or caregivers, what would it be?
3. Would you and your loved one be interested in testing an early version of an app we're designing and giving feedback together?