

Tips for Families of People with Schizophrenia

Developed in Collaboration with Foothills Behavioral Health Partners, Jefferson Center for Mental Health, Mental Health Partners and the Member and Family Advisory Board

- 1. Participate in treatment and learn** about schizophrenia. Research tells us that being involved in a family member's treatment and learning about schizophrenia helps in recovery. Knowledge helps you support your loved one in managing symptoms, working towards recovery, and handling setbacks. Check with the provider about psychoeducation for families. Also, see the attached resource list for more information.
- 2. Support treatment.** Seeking help when symptoms first become noticeable can improve recovery. When helping a family member in treatment decisions work with them and encourage them to have a voice, so they don't feel forced. Adult clients have the final say about their treatment, even when you don't agree with their decisions. If possible, provide choices such as the treatment provider and who could come with them to their visits.
- 3. Encourage consistent use of medication.** Taking medication regularly can reduce relapses. Take side effects seriously as this causes many people to stop their medications. Encourage your loved one to talk to their prescriber about side effects to increase the chances of finding the right medication. Assist in tracking side effects and improvements for prescriber visits.
- 4. Be aware of signs of relapse.** The disorder may come and go, with times of improvement and worsening, regardless of your hopes or actions. When your loved one is doing well and having fewer symptoms, it is a good time to agree on a crisis plan or plan to handle warning signs.
- 5. Don't be afraid to ask your family member if he is thinking about hurting himself.** About 40 of 100 people with schizophrenia attempt suicide and 10 of them succeed. One out of 1000 people in the general population commit suicide. Don't be afraid to talk about it openly.
- 6. Create a calm and safe environment.** Stress can increase symptoms. You can help by providing a structured and supportive environment, where your family member knows what to expect and is able to feel calm. Avoid criticism as much as possible.
- 7. Empower loved ones.** Try to support and encourage independence. Avoid taking over and not allow your family member to do things that they are capable of doing. Recognizing that your loved one has some limitations doesn't mean that you expect nothing of them.
- 8. Take care of yourself.** It is easier to support your loved one when you are supported. Join a support group, and make time for yourself to do things you enjoy. Recognize your limits and don't be afraid to ask for help. Avoid self-blame. You can have a positive impact on recovery, but you aren't to blame for the illness or responsible for your loved one's recovery.
- 9. Acceptance of the disorder and patience** will help your loved one as well as family and friends deal with the challenges while still enjoying life. Symptoms change over time, but the underlying disorder remains. A delusion will not go away by reasoning, therefore, empathizing with their feelings is often more helpful than arguing the delusion. Recognize that recovery is a process; set realistic expectations and help your loved one set doable goals.

10. Try to be hopeful. People with schizophrenia recover and live full and productive lives. Don't forget your sense of humor; find ways to have fun and enjoy time with your loved one.

Resources for Clients and Families

- National Institute of Mental Health (1.800.421.4211 or www.nimh.nih.gov , or <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/schizophrenia/index.shtml>)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (<http://www.nami.org> or <http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=schizophrenia9>)
- WebMD (<http://www.webmd.com/schizophrenia/default.htm>)
- <http://schizophrenia.com>
- <https://www.achievesolutions.net/achievesolutions/en//Home.do>
- Bernheim, K., Lewine, R. & Beal, C. (1982). *The Caring Family: Living with Mental Illness*. New York: Random House.
- Marsh, D. & Dickens, R. (1998). *How to Cope with Mental Illness in Your Family: A Self-Care Guide for Siblings, Offspring and Parents*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.
- Mueser, K. & Gingerich, S. (2006). *The Complete Family Guide to Schizophrenia*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Torrey, E. F. (1995). *Surviving Schizophrenia: A Manual for Families, Consumers and Providers*. New York: Harper Perrenial.