

## HELP SHEET: **CONNECTING WITH YOUR LOVED ONE**



### **SCHIZOPHRENIA: TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS**

As a caregiver, you know that some of the symptoms of schizophrenia may make connecting with your loved one difficult. Because your involvement is so important, here are some tips to help make it easier to work together:

#### ***Speak slowly and clearly***

- Keep sentences short and simple
- Wait to see if you were heard and understood before going on
- Avoid arguing or raising your voice
- Be friendly and encouraging

#### ***Keep things calm***

Experiencing the symptoms of schizophrenia can be very stressful for your loved one and for you. Here are some helpful ideas:

- When your loved one has a delusion or hallucination, remember that to him/her it feels real
- You can sympathize with your loved one without confirming the hallucination or delusion
- Make and stick to routines, like setting times for eating, taking a walk, and going to sleep every day
- Talk to your loved one in a comfortable space with minimal distractions

#### ***Include your loved one***

It's important for all of us to feel productive and have a say in our daily lives. To help your loved one do this,

- Suggest a simple chore, like making the bed — understanding that it might be difficult or take longer
- Offer choices so your loved one can have a sense of control — even if it's just deciding what's for dinner
- Talk to your loved one about treatment — and encourage him/her to talk to you and the Treatment Team about how he/she is feeling
- Go over your emergency plan for what to do if your loved one experiences an acute psychotic episode



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### A SAMPLE CONVERSATION

These are the kinds of topics that **loved ones** with schizophrenia and their **caregivers** may talk about, along with some communication tips that can help. Of course, every relationship and situation is different. One way to improve communication between you and your loved one is with the help of your Treatment Team, including your psychiatrist.

#### Taking medication

**SON**

"I'm not taking that."

**MOTHER**

"Let's talk to the doctor. Maybe there is a different medication that would work better for you."

**Tip:** If a medication is causing unpleasant side effects, encourage your loved one to talk with the doctor. He/she may be able to change the dose or prescribe a different medication. Patients should not stop taking a medication without talking to the doctor first.

#### Dealing with delusions

**DAUGHTER**

"They're following me again."

**MOTHER**

"You're here at home, and we're safe."

**Tip:** You can comfort someone without agreeing that a delusion or hallucination is real.

#### Seeing signs of relapse

**SISTER**

"Seems like you're experiencing more symptoms lately. Let's talk to the doctor."

**Tip:** If you see signs of a relapse, acknowledge how your loved one is feeling. Try to be calm and talk about how important it is to reach out to get medical help. Meanwhile, do what you can to help your loved one feel more secure.



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### **FACING ACUTE EPISODES**

Acute episodes are when symptoms are typically severe and may lead to hospitalization. Sticking with a treatment plan may help reduce frequent acute episodes, but they may occur and it's best to be as prepared as possible.

One of the first things to do is call the Treatment Team immediately. Meanwhile, here are a few things to remember:

- Acute symptoms like strong hallucinations, delusions, or paranoia can't be argued with. To your loved one, these experiences are real and hard to ignore
- Stay as calm as you can. Don't argue or show anger. Don't raise your voice
- "De-fuse" the environment. Turn off electronics that make noise or hum like the TV, radio, etc. Ask any casual visitors to leave
- Ask an agitated loved one to sit down, and then you can calmly sit down too

### **REACHING MAINTENANCE**

Reaching a Maintenance Phase, when schizophrenia symptoms are mild or may even disappear completely, is an important treatment goal. You can help your loved one reach maintenance by encouraging him/her to stick with the treatment plan, which may include both medication and psychotherapy. He/she may also need help getting to medical appointments, picking up prescriptions, and understanding when to take medications. Talk to your loved one about how you can best help him/her reach maintenance.

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