



## When should I get my family member help?

Seek help from a GP or mental health professional if you notice:

- An inability to function at their normal role, for example they can't manage school/work;
- They have become suspicious, fearful, questioning others' motives;
- Preoccupied with unusual thoughts;
- Distinct changes from their normal personality;
- Their speech is jumbled, hard to make sense of or either very slow or faster than normal.

Explain to your young person what you have noticed and that you will support them throughout the process of getting help. Prepare them for what to expect when they access help. Be patient with them, when someone has psychosis it is very difficult to take in a lot of information. Ask questions and ask for the help you need to solve the problems that arise.

It is normal to feel shocked, panicked and overwhelmed. These are normal responses to difficult and new situations. However try to remain as calm as possible in front of your family member. Your anxiety will only increase their worry at this time. It is also important to present a unified front despite differences in how family members react.

Listen to their concerns and make what attempts to decrease their stress levels if you can. Pay special attention to their thoughts on their safety. In emergency situations utilise emergency services such as the emergency department of your local hospital. Remember to maintain hope and to share this. Reassure them that the majority of young people who get help get better and that is what you are helping them do: get help!

## How do I help them get better?

- Encourage contact with their treatment team and medication adherence. Sometimes in the early days your supervision of the taking of medication and reminding them about appointments is extremely helpful.
- Discourage the use of street drugs as they can interfere with medication, delay recovery and trigger a relapse.
- Modify everyone's expectations. In the early phase of recovery it is important to be realistic about what your relative can cope with at any one time. Encourage them to be engaged in activities that are meaningful but not over demanding, such as small chores, hanging out with the family and activities they use to enjoy. They may seem distant and on the periphery but be patient as slowing down and resting gives the brain the opportunity to heal. As their functioning improves so can a gradual increase in expectations.
- Ensure they get time out. When recovering from a psychosis a person may need more quiet time than they did prior. They may also sleep more and be slower in doing things.
- Like other elements of recovery the rebuilding of self-esteem takes time and the support of friends and family. Often the person recovering is very self-defeating. Focus on gains and let the small stuff slide. Making critical remarks or nagging is extremely unhelpful. Reinforce a more accurate self-description and remind them of their positive attributes and accomplishments.
- Carry on as usual. Normal routine can be reassuring for everyone.
- Don't attempt to engage your relative in an argument about unreal beliefs. Nor should you play along with their delusions. Explain that you understand that what they are experiencing is real for them and that is causing them distress.
- Be clear and calm when communicating. Keep things simple and to the point. Avoid emotional outbursts and attempt to defuse situations before they escalate.
- Look after yourself. Your well-being and the other members of your family are vital if you are to provide the support required. Sometimes talking to other carers is helpful. Mental health services have 'Carer Consultants' who have experience caring for a member of their family with a mental illness. If you are struggling seek help before caring for your relative becomes overwhelming.

- Be mindful of your other children. This can be a very confusing time for them and as a result it is not surprising if they act out. Give them the opportunities to talk to someone outside the immediate family about their concerns.
- As recovery progresses and your relative develops more insight, discuss with them what you observed about them becoming unwell. Often they will show similar signs if they are becoming unwell again or are becoming stressed. Develop a list of early warning signs that everyone will look out for and have a plan of what to do if they occur.

### What should I tell other people?

Explain to family members, friends and neighbours that your child is unwell and you would appreciate their help. Concentrate on sharing the symptoms of emotional disturbance that the young person is experiencing such as anxiety or confusion. These are easier for people to comprehend and relate to than medical diagnoses. Help them to understand the recovery process and the time needed for the brain to heal. Sometimes it helps to explain that it is similar to breaking your leg, a person needs time to recover. If you talk in a matter of fact way you will decrease some of the apprehension people develop when they come to their own conclusions. Encourage them to relax and be themselves around your relative.