

LIVING WITH A MENTALLY ILL RELATIVE - PRACTICAL ADVICE

from AMI Van Nuys Reference Book, Page 8

1. Although hope is needed, the family must work on accepting the diagnosis and recognize that treatment does not guarantee success.
2. It is essential to have realistic expectations of what your relative can accomplish. This is achieved through trial and error.
3. Plan smaller units of time. Plan short-term goals rather than long-term.
4. Handling anger is important. Recognize your typical angry response. Give yourself time to cool down. Try to separate what has made you angry from the person who did it. Train yourself not to exaggerate the severity of events. When necessary, express mild anger appropriately when it occurs.
5. Too much inconsistency can have a negative effect on your ill relative. It is important for family members to act consistently, although they may hold different opinions.
6. Find creative ways of reducing your own stress.
7. Hiding mental illness simply isolates the ill relative and family even more and helps maintain social stigma. There is a danger in allowing your relative to become increasingly isolated.
8. It may be necessary to push your relative into treatment in spite of his angry response.
9. Try to keep your criticisms to a minimum. Focus on one or two things at a time which are most important. Try to use positive reinforcement rather than nagging criticism.
10. While you can and should empathize with your relative's fearfulness, you ought to encourage independent behavior. But again, move slowly.
11. A supportive atmosphere should be accompanied by limit-setting and structure. A chronically ill individual is usually coping with confused thoughts and emotions. He needs a routine to add a degree of order and calm to an otherwise tumultuous state.
12. Do not get into an argument about whether or not your relative's thoughts are true or false. Acknowledge the reality of your relative's subjective experiences. Communicate that you understand what he believes and how he feels before you attempt to correct his perception.

13. If your relative does unacceptable bizarre things, request in a simple and non-emotional way that he change this behavior and also make a statement about consequences of future similar behavior.
14. Do not give in to a person's every demand in the hopes of preventing a crisis. Some limits are needed, particularly when your relative is acting impulsively or in a dangerous fashion.

Suggested Ways To Deal With Common Behavior Problems

1. Develop a list of behaviors that you would like to help your relative change. Begin with the most dangerous or disturbing behaviors and focus your attention and energy on them. Take first things first.
2. Develop a consistent and clear approach to the behaviors in question. Ideally, all family members should agree on how to respond to the problematic behaviors. If rewards and punishments are involved, make sure your relative knows exactly what is expected of him and is aware of the consequences you have specified. Be clearer and more specific than you think you need to be. Follow through.
3. Do not waste energy arguing, threatening, or pleading. This only raises the level of anxiety.
4. If the task is complicated, break it down into smaller units. Keep yourself and your relative going by acknowledging small steps forward.
5. Do not become upset with yourself when you fail to follow these principles - you are bound to make mistakes.

Take It One Day At A Time