

Schizophrenia Facts for Families



Understanding symptoms: What you can do

more info:

For further information, please contact us at:

Schizophrenia Society of Ontario
130 Spadina Ave., Suite 302
Toronto ON M5V 2L4
Phone: 416-449-6830
Toll Free: 1-800-449-6367
Fax: 416-449-8434
E-mail: sso@schizophrenia.on.ca
Website: www.schizophrenia.on.ca

*This information should not be used as a substitute for medical advice.
Consult a physician or a lawyer to discuss your individual facts and circumstances.*



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
THE SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF ONTARIO
SOCIÉTÉ ONTARIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.

5399

Supported by an educational grant from JANSSEN-ORTHO Inc.



JANSSEN-ORTHO



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
THE SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF ONTARIO
SOCIÉTÉ ONTARIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.

Is there something I can read?

There are many books to help families dealing with mental illness. One of the most popular books is *Surviving Schizophrenia: A Manual for Families, Consumers and Providers*, by Dr. E. Fuller Torrey (ISBN 006 0959193). *Learning about Schizophrenia: Rays of Hope*, is another excellent resource book that can be obtained through the Schizophrenia Society of Canada.

Where can I get more information?

The **Schizophrenia Society of Ontario** is here to help. We're a family-based organization that understands what it's like to live with schizophrenia. Our objectives are to:

- > Provide family support and education
- > Promote public awareness and understanding
- > Advocate for better legislation and services for people with schizophrenia
- > Promote research into the causes, treatment and cure of schizophrenia

"to alleviate the suffering caused by schizophrenia"



Lack of awareness that they are sick:

- > Be patient. Lack of awareness is often part of the illness. People usually come to realize that they are sick after having been on medication for a while.
- > If you feel they are losing insight, talk about the changes you've noticed.

Flat emotions ("blunted affect")

- > Ask how they are feeling. They may be feeling emotions, even if they aren't showing them.

Hearing voices:

- > Encourage them to ignore the voices as much as possible by trying to think about something else, telling the voices to stop, or repeating that everything is okay.
- > Provide distractions, e.g. headphones and music.
- > Help focus attention on something else, like a conversation or an activity.
- > Talking or being with other people may help. Sometimes isolation can make the voices seem louder.

Hallucinations or delusions:

- > If they are irrational, don't try to reason with them.
- > Let them know that you understand the beliefs/voices/hallucinations are real for them, but also that they are not real for you.
- > Avoid being sarcastic or trying to be humorous. Don't treat these lightly—these are very real for your ill relative.
- > If they are upset, try to turn the attention to something else. Don't get into a debate or discussion about the hallucinations.
- > Ask what will make your family member feel safe. Try to make that happen.

What are the symptoms of schizophrenia?

Schizophrenia is a brain disease with many symptoms, often described as "positive" or "negative".

With negative symptoms, it seems as if something is missing from the person, such as:

- > Having little energy or interest in life.
- > Showing little or no emotion,
- > Avoiding contact with others,
- > Feeling depressed.

Positive symptoms are behaviours that should not normally be present, such as:

- > Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not real),
- > Delusions (beliefs that aren't based on fact),
- > Talking to oneself,
- > Bizarre mannerisms or facial expressions,
- > Being obsessed with something, such as religion,
- > Laughter at odd times.

These behaviours are usually harmless. Schizophrenia is a brain disease that creates confusion between what is real and what is not. Try not to be embarrassed or take these behaviours personally. However, if your family member behaves in a way that is dangerous or threatening, contact a health care professional right away. If you feel you are in a crisis situation, call the police.

"Sometimes I just don't know what to do"

People with schizophrenia, their family members and friends have to deal with many issues in daily life. Some of these are symptoms of the illness, while others may be a result of medications.

There are many things you can do that will help you both cope. Understanding the illness and its symptoms will make a big difference. In general:

- > Be patient and non-judgemental.
- > Encourage appropriate behaviours. Look for opportunities to boost their self-esteem.
- > Respect the activities they choose to do.
- > Be honest and direct about the things that concern you.
- > Help them set realistic expectations to avoid frustration and create more chances for success.
- > Keep a positive, supportive attitude.
- > Encourage them to be independent.
- > Keep your sense of humour.

Planning ahead, being organized, and staying alert can help you avoid or cope with difficult situations:

- > Set routines with your family member and stick to them.
- > Try to avoid stressful or uncomfortable situations.
- > Work together on one problem at a time. Start with something simple.
- > Schedule events and activities for short periods of time.
- > During stressful times, reduce the amount of time they have to spend with other people (e.g., holidays, large family gatherings, weddings).

There are things you can do about certain behaviours, but others you may have to accept as part of the illness. Over time, you'll learn what works best for you both. What's important is that they know you are willing to help where you can.



What can I do about...?

Excessive sleep:

- > Help them find more daily activities to relieve boredom.

Hygiene and grooming:

- > Encourage good self-care by providing an incentive, e.g. "After you shower and shave, we'll go out for a coffee."

Weight gain:

- > Keep high calorie, junk foods out of the house so there is no temptation. Replace these foods with more nutritious snacks like fruits and vegetables, cereal bars, or yogurt.
- > Involve your family member in day-to-day activities, such as running an errand that involves walking somewhere.
- > Encourage activity like walking, swimming, cycling, or anything else that involves movement. It may be easier if you or another family member get involved too.

Smoking:

- > Many people with schizophrenia are heavy smokers because nicotine dampens sensory overload. You may want to establish a smoking area, such as a particular room in the house or outside. Ensure that smoking is only allowed in that area.
- > Help them find activities and interests to distract them from smoking.

Sexual issues:

- > Ensure that they have information about the possible sexual side effects of medications and the illness, including reduced desire.
- > Provide access to information about contraception and safe sex.
- > If you are uncomfortable talking about sexual issues, a doctor or other health care professional can provide them with information and answer questions.

Social isolation, apathy:

- > Start conversations with your family member.
- > Include them in family activities.
- > Schedule activities that you know they will enjoy, with people they like and in places that are familiar and pleasant.

Limited concentration:

- > Speak in short, clear sentences. Give one instruction at a time and allow for the information to be processed.
- > Look for opportunities to communicate when they seem interested.
- > Help them find things to do at their own pace.

Anxiety and restless behaviour:

- > Be calm, supportive, and reassuring.
- > If anxiety is preventing your family member from doing something, encourage them gently, but don't push.
- > Reduce the amount of stimulation from loud noises, voices, or too much activity – turn off the radio and TV.



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
THE SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF ONTARIO
SOCIÉTÉ ONTARIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHÉNIE
UNE SOURCE D'ESPOIR, DE SOUTIEN ET D'ENTRAIDE.