

Helping a Young Person who is Losing Touch with Reality

Listen. You will be more helpful if you **understand** your child's experience and **avoid a power struggle**. Attend to her *feelings, interests, and goals*.

Consider:

- Each person's experience is unique. Find what is helpful to your child.
- Whether or not your child recognizes that she's losing touch with reality.
- Whether or not this is positive (empowering, an escape), distracting (keeping him from relating to others or going to school) or distressing (confusing, overwhelming, scary).
- Whether or not your child wants to talk about what's going on.
- How much time your child spends alone, playing online games, watching movies.
- Substance use/abuse can make the loss of reality worse.
- Medications may help and may need to be increased during times of stress.

Strategies:

- Work with your child, school personnel, and others to **minimize time alone or engaged with fantasy material** (e.g., online role playing games, movies). You may have to gradually reduce the time your child is allowed to engage in these activities.
- Establish and maintain **predictable, low stress, but highly structured routines**.
- See if it helps to **engage in an activity**, a game or project, to exercise or listen to music.
- Try doing a **very simple task** that requires attention to the current context, e.g., a counting things in the room that are a given color, then another color, etc.
- How about **doing something social** with friends or family? A game, a project, or talking.
- Consider ways to **reduce stressors that precipitate loss of reality**. Consider reducing or breaking down task demands. Try more or less stimulating settings or activities.
- Provide more **interactive support** at school, social skill practice, and frequent cues re: the child's setting, task at hand, time of day, or interpersonal context.
- Teach him to **self-talk**: "I'm in class with Ms. P" or "I'm confused but I can stay with this"
- **Engage her in physical or sensory tasks**, e.g., riding a bike, playing catch or basketball.

RESOURCES:

- See website for suggestions of books and other resources.