

Family Guidelines for Helping a Child at Risk for Psychosis

Families can play a powerful role in supporting and protecting a young person. Reducing stress and stimulation and providing specific supports may lower symptoms and prevent progression.

Consider:

- Psychotic illnesses are influenced by **both biological and environmental factors**.
- Reducing stress within family relationships, schedules, and daily interactions can make it easier for someone with psychosis to manage day to day life
- Family support can also provide a buffer against outside stressors
- *Family factors that have a high impact on symptom progression:*
 - **Warmth, structure, support, space:** help people recover at their own pace
 - **Criticism:** negative comments and interactions make symptoms worse
 - **Over-involvement:** intrusiveness or doing too much can overwhelm people
 - **Complex, unclear communication:** is hard to process and can worsen symptoms

Guidelines

- **Take one step at a time.** Go slow. Progress may be gradual. Recovery takes time.
- **Lower expectations for the short term.** Compare this month to last month rather than last year. Increase them only after a period of solid stability.
- **Use symptoms as a guide.**
 - If they worsen, slow down, simplify, reach out, or ask for help.
 - If they improve, continue forward gradually.
- **Know and watch for early warning signs.** Slow down or take a break if needed. Ask for help early, when a little may go a long way.
- **Keep it cool.** Enthusiasm is normal. Disagreement is normal. *Just tone it down.*
- **Give each other space.** It's okay to offer. It's okay to refuse.
- **Observe your limits.** It's okay to say "no". A few good rules keep things clear and safe.
- **Ignore what you can't change.** Let some things slide. Get support for yourself.
- **Don't tolerate aggression or threatening.** Get help immediately if there is any concern about suicide or violence.
- **Keep it simple.** Keep sentences short and to the point. Stay calm and positive.
- **Keep or reestablish family routines.** Stay connected to friends and family.
- **Solve problems step by step.** Work on one thing at a time. Consider alternatives.
- **Keep a regular sleep and wake cycle.**
- If it's in your nature, **consider meditation or mindfulness** to lower anxiety and stress.
- **Consider medication.** Discuss options with your doctor. A low dose may go a long way.
- **Minimize alcohol and street drugs.** These may impair your coping.

RESOURCES:

Connect with Family Support Networks such as: The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI www.namimass.org) or The Parent Professional Advocacy League (PPAL: www.ppal.net)