



LEAFLET 6

How do I help a person cope with the symptoms of Schizophrenia.

This leaflet is one of a series that have been designed to give you a better understanding of Mental Illness.

This leaflet provides carers with information on how to help a person cope with the symptoms of schizophrenia. These symptoms are also known as 'psychotic symptoms.'

Please refer to Leaflet 2 where these symptoms are described.

It would probably be of help if you ask a key worker to explain how this leaflet relates to you.



TYPES OF SYMPTOMS

There are two main types of symptoms, positive and negative.

Some people have more trouble with positive symptoms:

- Hearing voices
- Having unusual ideas

while other sufferers are more troubled by negative symptoms:

- Lack of energy
- Social withdrawal

Carers often get more troubled by the negative symptoms because they can seem like just 'being lazy' or 'not bothering'.

Positive symptoms usually seem more like part of an illness, so carers can sympathise more easily with these – even though they may find these symptoms quite worrying.

In this leaflet we give some suggestions for coping with both positive and negative symptoms.

People who have lived with voices for a while develop 'coping strategies'.

Please see leaflet 5, 'How Do I Cope With The Symptoms of Schizophrenia?' for examples.

COPING WITH POSITIVE SYMPTOMS

Hearing Voices

You might also want to discuss this in more detail with the key worker.

Encourage the sufferer to try out coping tactics, which work for them. Remember that hearing voices is usually an upsetting experience for the sufferer. Try to sympathise with how they feel, even though you may not share their explanation about the voices.

Often voices say unpleasant, critical things. It can help if you remind the sufferer of their good points and about things they do well.

Delusions

Remember that, however silly, frightening or offensive the delusional idea may be to you, for the sufferer it seems like reality.

Try to sympathise with how the sufferer feels, but don't agree with their delusional ideas.

You could say something like "I don't believe the people next door are trying to harm you, but I can see you're really worked up about it."

Encourage the sufferer to discuss their delusional ideas with a therapist they can trust.

COPING WITH NEGATIVE SYMPTOMS

A gradual step by step approach is best.

Having this sort of illness can make it hard to:

- Think straight;
- Keep going;
- Take an interest in other people.

This can be demoralising for the sufferer and is frustrating for the carer.

The sufferer will recover gradually but do not expect too much too soon.

You need to strike a balance:

- Gently encourage the sufferer to do things around the house;
- Accept their limitations as part of their illness;
- However difficult it may be, try not to get angry if you think the sufferer is being lazy;
- Remind the sufferer of things they used to enjoy doing and encourage them to have a go at these;
- Praise achievements, however small;
- Remember, progress is sometimes very slow;
- Don't expect the sufferer to read your mind, (eg "He should have known I wanted him to help");
- Schizophrenia jumbles up sufferers' thoughts, so it's hard for them to realise what other people want them to do;
- Give the sufferer a clear, calm message, (eg "I'd really like you to help me with the dishes").

HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- Keep a life of your own
- Don't build your whole life around the sufferer. They need your help to get better but they also need their own space – and so do you!

- Take time to recharge your batteries by going out when you can
- Ask for help when you need it. This may be from family, friends, or professional workers

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

People often use the word 'psychotic' to mean very angry or irrational. However, what it really means is that your ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imaginary is seriously affected. This is also known as 'psychosis'.

If you think back to when the sufferer first developed psychosis you might remember certain tell-tale signs that things were not quite right.

With the benefit of hindsight you might now blame yourself for not acting quicker.

DON'T

It's nearly always incredibly difficult to prevent a first episode of psychosis.

However, it is a good idea to make note of the tell-tale signs in care plans and discuss them with a key worker, so that they could alert you to any future episodes.

We call these 'early warning signs' and they vary from person to person. Often they are not very dramatic on their own (eg sleeping less, eating more, being more moody than usual, taking an unusual interest in religion or philosophy), but taken together they may suggest that something is not quite right.

Try to discuss this with the person you care for. If possible, arrange to see the GP, as increasing medication for a short period can help a lot.

Acknowledgments: Rick Budd and Ian Hughes.

Personal Notes
