

Communicating with Someone Who Has a Psychiatric Illness

PROCEED TO INTERACT AS YOU:

- 1 **BE CALM** and **GIVE FIRM, CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS**;
- 2 **ASSESS THE SITUATION** for safety;
- 3 **MAINTAIN ADEQUATE SPACE** between you and the person;
- 4 **RESPOND TO APPARENT FEELINGS**;
- 5 **RESPOND TO DELUSIONS AND HALLUCINATIONS** by talking about the person's feelings rather than what he is saying;
- 6 **BE HELPFUL, ENCOURAGING** and **SUPPORTIVE**.

AVOID:

- 1 **REINFORCING** behavior related to the person's illness;
- 2 **STARING** at the person, this may be interpreted as a threat;
- 3 **CONFUSING** the person;
- 4 **GIVING MULTIPLE CHOICES**, this increases confusion;
- 5 **WHISPERING, YELLING, RIDICULING, DECEIVING** or **TOUCHING**, this may cause more fear and lead to violence.

Someone with a psychiatric illness might...

- have trouble with reality.
- be fearful.
- be insecure.
- have trouble concentrating.
- be over stimulated.
- easily become agitated.
- have poor judgment.
- be preoccupied.
- be withdrawn.
- have changing emotions.
- have changing plans.
- have little empathy for you.
- believe delusions.
- have low self-esteem and motivation.

So you need to...

- Be simple, truthful
- Stay calm
- Be accepting
- Be brief, repeat
- Limit input
- Recognize agitation
- Not expect rational discussion
- Get attention first
- Initiate relevant conversation
- Disregard
- Keep to one plan
- Recognize as a symptom
- Ignore, don't argue
- Stay positive



South Carolina

NAMI SC HelpLine 1-800-788-5131

PO Box 1267, Columbia, SC 29202 (803) 733-9592

www.namisc.org Email: namisc@namisc.org