

Tips for Communicating

For Young People Who Have a Loved One with Mental Illness

If you have a family member who has a mental illness, it can sometimes be extremely difficult to communicate with them. This is because mental illnesses may affect their ability to think clearly or concentrate. A person can also be more stressed when they have difficulty understanding what is said or what is expected of them.

So effective communication becomes an important skill that can help families and friends cope with mental illness. Because sometimes it is **not what you say** that is important, **but how you say it**.

Communicating with a Person with a Mental Illness

Sometimes a person with mental illness will experience symptoms that will make it harder to communicate with them. You may then need to adapt what or how you say something to increase your chances of being understood.

The following table shows some more common symptoms of mental illness and what you can do to more effectively communicate with them.

Symptom	What to do
Difficulty concentrating or remembering things.	Keep things simple, straightforward and brief. You may need to cover one topic at a time and repeat things.
Overstimulation	Avoid using a loud voice when speaking with the person and help them find a place where they can go to get away from overstimulation.
Preoccupation with their internal world	Get the person's attention before you begin talking to them
Fluctuating emotions	Don't take words or actions personally
Belief in delusions	Don't agree with and don't argue about their delusion.
Fear	Stay calm
Insecurity	Remind the person that you care and that you accept them. Listen carefully to what the person is saying and acknowledge their point of view and feelings.

RESOURCES

Kids & Teens in Control Groups

www.bcss.org/kidsincontrol

Canadian Mental Health Association - BC Division

www.cmha.bc.ca
1-800-555-8222

COPMI (Children of Parents with a Mental Illness)

www.copmi.net.au/kids-young-people

HeretoHelp

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

B.C. Schizophrenia Society

www.bcss.org
8-1-1

Foundry BC

foundrybc.ca

YouthinBC (online chat service)

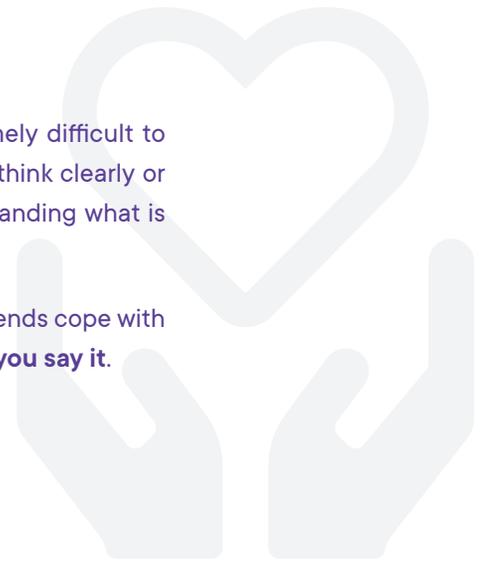
www.youthinbc.com

Kids Help Phone

www.kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-668-6868

Crisis Centre Suicide Line

1-800-SUICIDE
(1-800-784-2433)



Express Yourself Clearly

When you are talking to someone with mental illness, remember to be as specific as possible when you are talking or communicating with them. Below are some examples of phrases that are ambiguous and confusing and examples of how to express the same idea more clearly and concretely.

Ambiguous Phrase	More Direct Phrase
"You are inconsiderate."	"I would like you to know before you enter my room."
"I need more independence."	"I would like to go out with my friends on weekends."
"We don't spend enough time together."	"I would like if we could make plans to do things together this weekend."
"You never pay attention."	"I would like you to put down what you're doing and listen to what I am saying."

How "I Messages" Can Help You Communicate Effectively

Another simple method of clearly communicating your needs is called the "I Message." It is a basic communication tool that can be used to make a request or express negative feelings. It helps let the person you are talking to know how their behaviour is affecting you or others.

This method focuses on your feelings and thoughts rather than criticizing or blaming the other person. This may help you get your point across without your family member feeling defensive.

"I Messages" works like this:

I _____, when you _____.

Examples:

"Don't yell!"	"I get scared, when you yell at me."
"You're always late picking me up."	"I feel forgotten, when you are late picking me up."
"You don't listen"	"I feel angry, when you ignore me when I am trying to talk to you."

Remember you are not alone.

Having a loved one with mental illness is not easy. Find someone you trust (i.e. a parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, counsellor, teacher) and talk to them.

Additional resources for communicating with a loved one are also available through www.heretohelp.bc.ca and www.bcscs.org.

ANOSOGNOSIA: WHAT IS IT?

Anosognosia is a common symptom of some mental illnesses including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. The person is not simply in denial, rather they cannot understand that they are ill. Anosognosia describes the lack of insight into their own illness.