

LIVING WITH **Schizophrenia**

How can you help a person with schizophrenia?

- People with schizophrenia can get help from professional case managers and caregivers at residential or day programs. However, family members usually are a patient's primary caregivers.
- People with schizophrenia often resist treatment. They may not think they need help because they believe their delusions or hallucinations are real. In these cases, family and friends may need to take action to keep their loved one safe. Laws vary from state to state, and it can be difficult to force a person with a mental disorder into treatment or hospitalization. But when a person becomes dangerous to himself or herself, or to others, family members or friends may have to call the police to take their loved one to the hospital.

Treatment at the Hospital

- In the emergency room, a mental health professional will assess the patient and determine whether a voluntary or involuntary admission is needed. For a person to be admitted involuntarily, the law states that the professional must witness psychotic behavior and hear the person voice delusional thoughts. Family and friends can provide needed information to help a mental health professional make a decision.

After a Loved One Leaves the Hospital

- Family and friends can help their loved ones get treatment and take their medication once they go home. If patients stop taking their medication or stop going to follow-up appointments, their symptoms likely will return. Sometimes symptoms become severe for people who stop their medication and treatment. This is dangerous, since they may become unable to care for themselves. Some people end up on the street or in jail, where they rarely receive the kind of help they need.
- Family and friends can also help patients set realistic goals and learn to function in the world. Each step toward these goals should be small and taken one at a time. The patient will need support during this time. When people with a mental illness are pressured and criticized, they usually do not get well. Often, their symptoms may get worse. Telling them when they are doing something right is the best way to help them move forward.
- It can be difficult to know how to respond to someone with schizophrenia who makes strange or clearly false statements. Remember that these beliefs or hallucinations seem very real to the person. It is not helpful to say they are wrong or imaginary. But going along with the delusions is not helpful, either. Instead, calmly say that you see things differently. Tell them that you acknowledge that everyone has the right to see things his or her own way. In addition, it is important to understand that schizophrenia is a biological illness. Being respectful, supportive, and kind without tolerating dangerous or inappropriate behavior is the best way to approach people with this disorder.