

*Someone you love has schizophrenia.
You want to know what to expect.
You want to know how you can help.*

The BeST Kind of Help: Tips for Family and Natural Supports of Individuals Affected by Schizophrenia

1. Take care of yourself

Neglecting your own health can lead to increased stress. Make sure you are getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, eating a balanced diet and making time to address your own needs and interests.

2. Learn as much as you can about schizophrenia

There are many myths and misconceptions about schizophrenia. Knowing the difference between the myths and the facts can help you understand and empathize with what your loved one is experiencing. The Best Practices in Schizophrenia Treatment (BeST) Center at Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED)'s website is a good place to learn more about schizophrenia: www.neomed.edu/bestcenter.

3. Participate in family education and support programs

Family education and support programs teach family members and other natural supports about the illness, its treatment, coping strategies and developing the skills and knowledge to prevent a relapse. Research shows that family education and support helps to reduce relapse rates, enhance recovery and improve family well-being. To learn more, please contact your loved one's treatment team.

4. Listen to how your loved one is feeling

Really listen to your loved one and try to understand what he or she is feeling and experiencing. Remember that no two people experience psychosis in the same way and that your loved one's experience with psychosis will change over time.

5. Be part of a support network

You may feel as though nobody understands what you are going through, or you may even feel like you do not have time for friends or family anymore. Having a group of people that you can go to when you are feeling overwhelmed can decrease your stress and help you better understand and improve your relationship with your loved one who is diagnosed with schizophrenia. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers a variety of programs for families and friends of individuals affected by mental illnesses. NAMI's Family-to-Family course, a free, 8-week course taught by trained family members, is one of them. Visit nami.org/Find-Support.

6. Try to create daily routines and minimize stress for your loved one

Having a daily routine can be helpful – for everyone in the family system. Routines can reduce stress, and reduced stress can help prevent relapse or minimize return of symptoms.

7. Set realistic expectations

Having goals and setting reasonable expectations are very important for recovery. However, setting goals that are too high can lead to increased stress, frustration and feelings of defeat. Set small goals and work up from there.

8. Be prepared for a relapse or crisis

Learning what causes your loved one significant distress or what triggers a psychotic episode is very important during treatment and recovery. Knowing the triggers will help you to avoid or limit a relapse or subsequent crisis. Paying attention to your loved one will help you to recognize any early warning signs, such as change in sleeping patterns or drastic mood changes. Do not hesitate to seek help, consultation or treatment immediately. Intervening as early as possible decreases the likelihood of a relapse.

9. Know the laws in your state

To effectively advocate for intervention, it is essential to know the civil commitment standards for intervention in your state or the state where your loved one lives. You can learn more at treatmentadvocacycenter.org/browse-by-state.

10. Never stop loving your family member or friend

Research shows that when family and natural supports are engaged in the individual's treatment for psychosis, relapse rates decrease. When your loved one sees that you really do care for them and want the best for them, you are creating a supportive environment for recovery. Continue to communicate, be supportive, and have hope — even in trying times.

These tips were developed by family members in consultation with the Best Practices in Schizophrenia Treatment (BeST) Center at Northeast Ohio Medical University.

Promoting Innovation. Restoring Lives.

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