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, ENCOEURAGING 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.

More information on reverse side
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- be withdrawn.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

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