



Canadian  
Consortium for  
**Early Intervention  
in Psychosis**

# CAREGIVER TIPS

**FOR HELPING A LOVED ONE WHO IS LIVING WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA**

**HOW TO SHOW SUPPORT AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF YOUR LOVED ONE'S JOURNEY**



**During the assessment process and early on in their illness:**

1. Accompany them to appointments (if they are agreeable), and come prepared with recent observations and any questions you may have.
2. Take notes during discussions with doctors, and other allied health providers, particularly when it comes to treatment recommendations.
3. Help your loved one set realistic goals, and then keep detailed records of their progress.
4. Be direct and honest about your concerns, but also listen to theirs. If they are not ready to acknowledge their illness just yet, be patient.
5. Take note of everything that frustrates or worries you and/or your family, but tackle only one problem at a time.



**During treatment:**

1. Talk to them about how their medicine is (or could be) helping—praise them for any positive changes you notice. Connect the medicine with helping them accomplish their goals (finishing school, getting a job, etc.).
2. Gently remind them that symptoms may come back if they don't take their medicine regularly. Remember that missed medication is a common trigger for a relapse.
3. Reassure them that antipsychotics are not addictive and are needed the same way someone with diabetes or high blood pressure needs their medicine.
4. If they have trouble remembering each dose, set reminders for them, or consider asking their doctor about other options with different dosing schedules.
5. Set routines and stick to them to reduce stress and help prevent a relapse.
6. Encourage your loved one to be an active participant in all components of their treatment, and to attend all appointments.
7. Engage in "recovery conversations" about what they believe helps or hinders their recovery process. Recovery is different for everyone but it is about personal management of their illness and living beyond the limitations caused by the illness with a sense of meaning and purpose in accomplishing some of their dreams, hopes, and wishes.

**At every stage of schizophrenia: Don't forget to take care of *yourself* too—both emotionally and physically—and make time for things you enjoy.**

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR MANAGING SPECIFIC SYMPTOMS AND/OR SIDE EFFECTS OF MEDICATIONS

### Hallucinations or delusions:

- Let them know that you understand that what they see/hear/believe is real for them but that these things are not real for you. A helpful statement is, "I believe that you believe that." Don't debate who is right!
- Avoid being flippant, sarcastic, or humorous when talking about their idea of reality.
- Ask what will make them feel safe and try to make that happen.
- Let them know that they can talk about their experience with you. Active listening and identifying with their emotional feelings can de-escalate tense situations. What they are feeling is real.

### Weight gain:

- Involve them in simple daily activities to get them out of the house, like running errands.
- Encourage regular physical activity like walking, jogging or swimming, and join in to motivate them.
- Stock the house with healthy snacks and get rid of junk food.

### Excessive sleep:

- Encourage more daily activities that would keep them engaged.
- Support them in getting outside daily, and engaging in some form of exercise.

### Trouble concentrating:

- Speak in short, clear sentences remembering that you may have to repeat yourself several times.
- Give one piece of information at a time and allow time for it to sink in.
- Communicate with them when they seem most interested.
- Make use of reminders (such as putting appointments into a phone calendar, or setting medication reminders).

### Social isolation or withdrawal:

- Schedule activities they usually like, with people and in places that make them feel comfortable.
- As much as possible, involve them in planning activities.
- Make accommodations like sitting on the edge of the crowd or near a door or window, and allowing them to take stress breaks.

### A lack of emotions:

- Ask how they are feeling—it may surprise you to hear they do have emotions, even if they aren't showing them.
- Share your emotions with your loved one. But do so in a calm, methodical fashion without a tone of strong intensity.

**If suicide is a concern, you can take action to prevent it by removing any weapons from your loved one's home and watching out for warning signs (such as depression or strong feelings of hopelessness, talking or writing about death, or frequent relapses).\***

**\*Note:** Contact a doctor immediately if your loved one threatens suicide or makes an attempt.

## HOW TO FIGHT STIGMA ABOUT SCHIZOPHRENIA AND "SHIFT" ATTITUDES

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### Set a good example:

- Be a role model when it comes to accepting your loved one's diagnosis and what it means for their day-to-day life.

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### Help your loved one open up:

- Encourage your loved one to talk about their condition and tell their story.

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### Inform yourself and others:

- Educate as much as possible—stigma is rooted in ignorance.

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### Focus on your loved one as a person rather than just their schizophrenia:

- Remind your loved one and anyone else in their circle that not all problems are related to their illness.

**T**

### Team up with others:

- Get involved in advocacy groups aimed at changing attitudes towards schizophrenia and the people who have it.

**For more information on living with psychosis and how to help a loved one with schizophrenia, visit [www.earlypsychosisintervention.ca](http://www.earlypsychosisintervention.ca).**



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.  
SCHIZOPHRENIA SOCIETY OF CANADA  
SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE LA SCHIZOPHRÉNIE  
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