

TALKING WITH YOUR FRIENDS

How much we tell our friends about schizophrenia is often a matter of how trustworthy we think they are. It is a good idea to seek guidance from your therapist on how much to share. In the case of a trustworthy and loyal friend, perhaps explaining your symptoms, and giving the person a copy of a National Schizophrenia Foundation brochure about schizophrenia, is a good start.

This is a touchy issue, because stigma and rejection are so often the experience of those with schizophrenia. For those of us fortunate enough to have genuine and steadfast friends, sharing the nature of our illness can make the friendship closer.

TALKING WITH YOUR FAMILY

For most of us with schizophrenia, our family is the core of our support system. It is our parents who initially provide the largest share of help; however, siblings or other relatives become involved as well.

If the family members are to provide needed support, it is important that they have adequate information on schizophrenia and our experience with the illness. You should tell your family what your mental health professional thinks the outlook is for recovery and your adjustment to the illness. This can help your family provide the right support and have a more realistic expectation of you during your recovery. You could pass this information on directly to your family or have them meet with your mental health professional.

Family members can educate themselves on their own through books, the internet, self-help support groups, and by attending conferences.

our recovery.”

National Schizophrenia Foundation

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WHAT IS SCHIZOPHRENIA?

The symptoms of schizophrenia produce suffering that keeps us from seeking help and moving forward with recovery. This brochure explains our experience with schizophrenia so that we become less alone and we open the door to the support of caring people.

Building trust with supportive people, and deciding when and how much personal information to share, is an ongoing process that requires a certain degree of risk. Trusting a mental health professional, such as a psychiatrist or a therapist, is essential to our success in recovery with our schizophrenia, and a trusting relationship has to be earned. That is what this publication is about—building trust while recovering from schizophrenia.

We all know the impact of stigma on the label of “schizophrenia.” We all know that some people look down on others with mental illness. So wise choices need to be part of the process of letting others know about the illness in such a way that supportive people can have an opportunity to help in our recovery. In this brochure, we will discuss how to talk with your psychiatrist, therapist, friends, family, significant

other, employer and co-workers so that you can begin the journey of rebuilding trusting relationships.

TALKING WITH YOUR PSYCHIATRIST

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in the care of the mentally ill. He or she has completed medical school and has taken additional study in psychiatry and psychology. The psychiatrist interprets medical and psychological tests and makes major decisions about diagnosis and treatment.

A psychiatrist makes diagnoses, prescribes medications, and has the authority to admit someone to the psychiatric hospital. In addition, some psychiatrists also provide psychotherapy (“talk therapy”).

When first meeting a psychiatrist, it helps to realize that the person on the other side of the desk is someone who has been schooled for many years and has an official license to practice.

At first, we might be sheepish about discussing our symptoms. Most likely, the psychiatrist has heard about every odd sort of symptom in existence, and nothing will be shocking to him or her. It is rare to find a psychiatrist who does not genuinely want to help the patient get better. So, the psychiatrist is on our side—an ally.

What many of us do is test the waters. We begin in small ways to be open with the psychiatrist and gradually find out that he or she is someone who can be trusted. Over time, complete openness is often the outcome, and one that leads to a better understanding of our symptoms, and the psychiatrist's improved ability to offer the best treatments.

In the early stages it is always helpful to talk to the psychiatrist about your treatment goals, to see where the whole process is going. You can find a symptoms checklist later in this publication so that you can make the best use of your visit.

Learn more about schizophrenia. Read about it. Talk about it with other patients to get a better understanding of what the psychiatrist says. Ask questions during the session about things that don't make sense or aren't clear. Rely on your psychiatrist to provide feedback and guidance

works. You will be surprised that things work about your issues. Give it a try and see how it out for the better once an open discussion happens.

TALKING WITH **YOUR THERAPIST**

In addition to medication received from a psychiatrist, most of us participate in various forms of psychotherapy. The therapist is usually a social worker, or counselor with at least a master's degree. Often a psychologist (a doctorate level mental health professional) will also provide psychotherapy and other forms of counseling.

Many of the ideas mentioned above for talking with a psychiatrist would also apply to talking with a therapist. While the psychiatrist has strong training in the medical aspects of schizophrenia, the therapist usually has expertise in how to help with the hang-ups we keep to ourselves. A therapist helps us to keep things in perspective. If we have life problems, the therapist wants to hear about them and wants to join us in coming up with solutions.

“Supportive people can have an opportunity to help in