

## Schizophrenia & Psychosis - Ways to Speed Recovery and Prevent a Recurrence

*The following document is a handout that is used at the University of California, San Francisco program for early psychosis and schizophrenia treatment. It is something that is given to all family members and individuals that join the treatment program. Feel free to pass it along to anyone you think might benefit from it.*

There will be a fair amount of uncertainty about causes and outcome, but providing treatment quickly and early has been shown definitively to greatly improve prospects and outcome.

Believe in your power to affect the outcome: you can.

Make forward steps cautiously, one at a time. Go slow. Allow time for recovery. Recovery takes time. Rest is important. Things will get better in their own time. Build yourself up for the next life steps.

Consider using medication to protect your future. A little goes a long way. The medication is working and is necessary even if you feel fine. Work with your doctor to find the right medication and the right dose. Have patience, it takes time. Take medications as they are prescribed. Take only medications that are prescribed.

Try to reduce your responsibilities and stresses, at least for the next six months or so.

Take it easy. Use a personal yardstick. Compare this month to last month rather than last year or next year.

Use the symptoms as indicators. If they reappear, slow down, simplify and look for support and help, quickly. Learn and use your early warning signs and changes in symptoms. Consult with your family clinician or psychiatrist. Anticipate stresses.

Create a protective environment

Keep it cool. Enthusiasm is normal. Tone it down. Disagreement is normal. Tone it down too.

Give each other space. Time out is important for everyone. It's okay to reach out. It's okay to say "no".

Observe limits. Everyone needs to know what the rules are. A few good rules keep things clear.

Ignore what you can't change. Let some things slide. Don't ignore violence or concerns about suicide.

Keep it simple. Say what you have to say clearly, calmly and positively.

Carry on business as usual. Reestablish family routines as quickly as possible. Stay in touch with family and friends.

Solve problems step by step. Make changes gradually. Work on one thing at a time. Look for coping methods that work for you, and work with your clinicians to find other methods when yours don't work.

Watch for large reactions to even little changes in relationships. Have a plan for what to do and where to get help. Don't get too vigilant.

Keep a regular sleep and wake cycle. Don't fly more than four time zones in one day. Avoid night shift or rotating shift jobs. Don't do all-nighters, for work or play.

Keep a balanced life and a balanced perspective.

Keep up an outside occupation, but don't work too hard for a while.

Take time to cool out. If it's in your nature, use Zen or other meditation techniques to keep stress, strain and anxiety to a minimum.

Watch out for the effects of street drugs and alcohol. They make symptoms worse and may cause relapse.

Never use cocaine, amphetamines (meth, Adderall) or hallucinogens at all for any reason. Avoid over-the-counter stimulants like pseudoephedrine, diet pills, No-Doze, and inhalants. They're internal stimulants and can cause biologically rapid onset of psychosis. Keep alcohol to a bare minimum, or use not at all if possible.

Stay away from nicotine and caffeine, as hard as that might be.

Explain your circumstances to your closest relatives and friends, and ask them to help and stand by you.

Learn to accept support from your network of family and friends.

Don't move abruptly or very far from your family home or home town until this period passes and stability returns. If you have to move prepare well in advance.

Dodge the bad scenes and look for the good ones.

Keep a social network intact and try not to change it without lots of preparation.

Decide who you want to know about your situation. You may have to play the system to protect yourself.

Keep hope alive.