

# Information for Carers

## Hints for people caring for someone with schizophrenia

1. The most important thing is acceptance. Don't criticize all the time. You ought to have a shave, get your hair cut, do the washing-up. Why don't you do this, why don't you do that? Don't talk nonsense. That can't possibly be true...

Avoid saying these things, for even if they are meant to be helpful they can seem like criticism. When your self-esteem is pretty fragile already, this does not help. Just like anybody else, if he were able to do it, he would.

When my son first became ill, a friend, who had some experience with a girlfriend's schizophrenic brother, said, "You have to remember that when he behaves strangely, when he gets angry and hostile, it is not him. It's the illness."

2. Hearing voices, hallucinations, funny ideas, talking nonsense... no matter how crazy these things may appear to a "normal" person, they are real enough, not to say even terrifying, to the person experiencing them. You have to try to understand that and accept it, though I don't see any harm in trying gently to explain that while those experiences may be real enough to the sufferer there is still a more normal kind of reality: for example, that what you may be hearing is an inner voice rather than some real and hostile, malevolent other party.

3. My experience is that you need to keep the emotional temperature as low and calm as possible when dealing with schizophrenia. It is better not to react at all than to over-react. Don't challenge people, don't tell them off, don't even overload them with information or instruction, no matter how anodyne or well-intentioned. Keep things calm. Don't raise your voice. And just remove yourself if the situation looks like getting out of hand. "Bye, bye. I'll give you a call later and see you tomorrow," I say when I sense that my son is getting angry or paranoid. Don't justify yourself, don't try to "win" the argument.

4. There are those who recommend what they call hard love. Don't do too much for the person you are caring for, they will say. You have to help them help themselves, empower them, as the fashion has it. My response to that is, again: if he were able to do it, he would. Simple everyday things, like washing up, clearing up, doing the laundry, preparing basic meals, dealing with routine paperwork. If he does not do it, it is because there are, for him, insuperable obstacles in the way, even if they do not appear problematic to me.

Living in a nice clean warm place, having something nice to eat and drink, at least some of the time, is good for everyone's spirits and general health, in my opinion. So, if the person you are looking after does not do it for himself, do it for him. I have often been told by others and I think I can see it for myself after so many years, that the time and effort I have put into helping my son out in these ways has contributed significantly to his being better and having a reasonable standard of living.

5. Above all: hang in there, love him, let him know that whatever happens you will stand by him. Once, when I went to visit my son in hospital, a young woman of about thirty came up to me, thinking I was a new patient. No, I said, I am so-and-so's dad. "I wish I had a dad," she said rather poignantly.

## References

1. The content of this information sheet is based on the author's personal experiences.

Many thanks to Tim Salmon for contributing this information sheet. Tim Salmon's moving account of caring for his own son with schizophrenia: "Schizophrenia - Who Cares? A Father's Story", is published by Blackbird Digital Books and is available in paperback and Kindle editions. Go to Tim's own website for more

details