

Understanding and Coping with Mental Illness...

14 PRINCIPLES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

1. Realize that mental illness is not rare.
2. Learn as much as possible, as soon as possible.
3. Never become a moth around the flame of self-blame. It can destroy your chances of coping FOREVER.
4. Seek professional helpers who are EFFECTIVE. Identify them by their compassionate natures, informative style, eagerness to have you as their ally, and their ability to ensure you receive comprehensive education about how to understand and cope with mental illness.
5. Contact a self-help group for families.
6. Accept that mental illness is complex and that our natural instincts are often an unreliable guide to coping and caring. We, the relatives, do need training.
7. Get to know the origins of pressures to which family members are subject.
8. Pay special attention to the needs of the other family members.
9. Remember that unlimited, unconditional self-sacrifice on behalf of someone with a mental illness is fatal to effective caring and coping.
10. Be aware that spending massive amounts of time with the person who has a mental illness can make matters worse.
11. Maintain and establish friendships, activities and hobbies, particularly those that take you outside the home.
12. Set your sights on appropriate independence for your relative AND yourself.
13. Don't be surprised to discover that—in the end—it is the ability to change and to look at things differently that distinguishes relatives who will cope from those who will not.
14. Take very good care of yourself.

- Adapted from Ken Alexander's *Understanding and Coping with Schizophrenia: 14 Principles for the Relatives*



A REASON TO HOPE. THE MEANS TO COPE.
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