



Impact of Mental Illness on Families

Part A: Impact of Mental Illness on Families

1. Understanding Denial

When mental illness strikes, family members normally deny the person has an illness. The family members are alarmed and lot of questions are asked each other. Some family members may understand the reality of the illness, others do not. Some people have some understanding of mental illness and often their knowledge is based on religious experiences and are hearsay.

2. Understanding the Stigma

Stigma is a major problem all the world. The family members fear that the neighbors and friends may react negatively if they come to know somebody "in my" family has a mental illness.

The people fear that others may think that "something" is wrong with my family. The family members do not want to take the "sick" person with them outside the family for weddings, meetings and functions. These put lot of pressure on family members.



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3. Understanding frustration, helplessness and anxiety

The family members and friends become helpless to deal with “strange thinking” and bizarre and unpredictable behaviors of mentally ill person.

When the bewildering, frightening and exhausting things are happening it is painful for family members.

The family members struggle to understand the sudden and abrupt behaviors of their loved ones. These bring lot of stress and concern to the loved ones.

4. Understanding Exhaustion and Burn Out

The family members are often discouraged as their efforts are not helping the “sick”, abnormal person. They go from pillar to post, this hospital to another hospital, this person to another person and get frustrated.

The families may feel completely out of control and could be “mised” by other people who take advantage of the family’s miserable condition.

5. Understanding Grief

The grief, associate with helplessness is very acute. Families struggle with accepting the realities of an illness that is treatable, but not curable, in many cases.

Family members may find that mental illness is so devastating that it is hard to bear. The family must guard against pity or placing the ill person in the role of victim. Even though people are willing to accept physical illnesses as “ok” they find very hard to accept “abnormal behaviours” in mentally ill person.

6. Understanding the need for Personal Time and to Develop Personal Resources

The family members are going through lot of stress and over work. They have very little support system. They need to keep themselves physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually healthy. To face these problems, they need to find various resources and support system.

Develop spiritual resources, look for support, seek relief from stress are learned to gain control of your life, continue outside interest like leisure activities and learn about illness.

7. Avoid Placing Blame & Guilt

Most people blame themselves for their loved one’s mental illness or behaviours which cannot be explained or understood. Do not blame yourself or others if limit is reached in helping mentally ill person. You may have no/very little control over other’s behavior.

8. Understanding the Effect of Inappropriate “Professional Assistance

There are lot of theories created by people about mental illness. These self styled all knowing “professionals and guides” can be dangerous to the society. These “all knowing people find reasons for all sicknesses and have ready made answers for which science has found no answer yet.

Part B: Advice for People Who have a mentally ill family member who refuses treatment

- Until only a few years ago, psychotic individuals (those who have lost all touch with reality) were often put in the back ward of mental health facilities and basically forgotten by the family and society. But now we know many forms of brain disorder are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain that can be treated with prescription medication. Just as a patient does not choose to have diabetes or cancer, the patient with a brain disorder does not choose to be mentally ill.
- Telling a depressed person to “cheer up” or “get over it” doesn’t work because their body chemistry just won’t allow them to. A person who is psychotic is even harder to deal with than one who is suffering from depression. Their altered reality is “their reality” : they don’t even recognize that they have a brain disorder. No amount of reasoning will convince them that they do, because their ability to reason is “not functioning”
- Not all persons who have a brain disorder become violent, but symptoms may be mild at the onset and become more severe over time if the patient does not get treatment. Anti depressant and anti psychotic drugs may produce some unpleasant side effects, and the patient /family may discontinue the medication without doctor’s knowledge or approval.
- Dealing with a friend or family member with a brain disorder can be very stressful. We must seek professional/trained persons support to help the mentally ill people.
- Seeking legal assistance may become a necessity but you have to protect yourself. Seeking police help can be helpful specially if the mentally ill person threaten to hurt themselves or others. Involuntarily committing to hospital may be painful but can help the mentally ill person and family.
- Please do not give up hope. There are alternatives to living in chaos and fear.
- Arrange an intervention and join support group.
- Arrange /offer the help and strive hard to help the person with mental illness.

Part C: Emotional responses of family members those who are suffering because of a “member’s” mental illness

- Grief
- Loss
- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Relief/Respite
- Acceptance

Mixed messages from the mental health system can be painful.

Family members must be included in the

treatment and support process. There must be a very clear communication between the treating professional, family member and the mentally ill person.

Educate the public about mental illness

Always remember that mentally ill person is like any one of us in many ways except he/she is sick. They are part of the society and have rights and privileges like the rest of the society.

Part D:

Living with a mentally ill Person: Crisis after Crisis

1. Living with someone with a mental illness is a series of crisis. When you have a crisis, you handle it, and it is over. With mental illness, there is no rest. There is always another crisis.
2. There is so much drama, in living with a mentally ill person.
3. Is it a disease? What is it? Am I responsible for it? Questions are many.
4. You put your head down and deal with what's next. Always expect another crisis.
5. There is always a sense of shame and embarrassment.
6. There is a always a fall out for the family – hostile, angry and disturbed neighbors and the society.

Mentally ill people are human, too.

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