

Coping with Difficult Behaviour: Do's and Don'ts¹

Strange talk or beliefs

DO

- ☼ Gently and matter-of-fact disagree with strange ideas.
- ☼ Show some understanding for their feelings at the time (e.g. they may be frightened of the voices).
- ☼ Encourage them to talk normally or "sensibly".
- ☼ Change the subject to something routine, simple or pleasant in real life (e.g. what you are making for dinner).
- ☼ Say you don't understand and you would like them to talk clearly.
- ☼ Say when you think something is not real (someone persecuting them).
- ☼ Acknowledge that the voices or beliefs seem real to your relative.
- ☼ Help them to tell the difference between reality and "fantasy" by pointing out when you think "it's the illness playing a trick on you just now, it is not really out there".
- ☼ Tell them that if they feel they must talk about the strange ideas, to do this only to certain people who are not worried by it (e.g. the therapist or doctor).
- ☼ If your relative seems relieved by talking about delusions etc., you can listen for a while and then gradually change the subject.
- ☼ If they are distressed and talk a lot about delusions, change the subject or try to involve them in a distracting activity.
- ☼ If this happens often, check if they are talking prescribed medication and discuss the problem.

DON'T

- ☼ Don't allow the family to make jokes or criticise the person.
- ☼ Never argue about strange ideas – it never changes them and only upsets both of you.
- ☼ Don't spend much time listening to talk that makes no sense to you.
- ☼ Don't pretend to agree with strange talk or ideas that make no sense to you.
- ☼ Don't keep looking at them or nodding your head if they are speaking strangely.
- ☼ Don't try to enter their world and follow what they say.
- ☼ Don't look horrified or embarrassed by strange talk (it's better to say clearly that you don't like it).
- ☼ Don't keep up a conversation that you feel is distressing or annoying or too confusing for you – it's OK to say, for example, "I'll talk to you later"
- ☼ Don't argue or interrupt in this case.
- ☼ Don't encourage this kind of talk if it is upsetting.

¹Schizophrenia: A Self-Help Guide for Relatives and Carers by Olga Piatkowska and Maria Visotina (1989)