

# Talking to Your Friends & Family

## Helping Your Child Cope with Mental Illness

### Helping Your Child Return to School

- Talk with your child's teacher(s) first. Most teachers are experienced and will have their own ideas. They may be able to pick up on your child's cues. They can assist in your child's transition back to the classroom. The school can talk with your child's therapist. The school counselor and you can create a good plan of action.
- Some tools may be needed to help your child adjust. These may include seating with fewer distractions, planned and unplanned breaks, and shortened assignments.
- Remind your child he/she is not bad but they have an illness. Also remember that your child did not cause this disease.
- Your child may need help catching up with school work. They may need extra time to finish their work or make up tests.

### Some Questions Your Child May Be Asked:

- Where have you been?
  - I was in the hospital.
- Why?
  - I was sick, but I am better now.
- Is it something I can catch?
  - No, you cannot catch it. It is not a germ.
- Will you get better?
  - With the right medications and therapy, most people get better.
- Are you crazy?
  - No I'm not crazy. I just needed help dealing with some problems.

## **When You Return to School - Teens**

Sometimes kids at school can be mean. You need to choose carefully who you share this information with. Not everyone will understand. Some may be very uncomfortable. Some may not know how to treat you after they learn you have been in the hospital.

- Explain to those who ask that you were sick but are taking medicine and are better.
- If you are not sure about whether or not to tell, then don't!
- If you want to prepare yourself for questions, it might be helpful for you to practice "what if" with someone you trust.
- You may even just simply say you were sick. You don't have to give any more information.
- It may be difficult to talk to people about your diagnosis. You may be concerned about how others will react to this news.
- This handout is designed to help you prepare for different situations you may face when returning to your daily routines.

### **Examples of Difficult Situations that May Arise:**

**My child can't go out for the basketball team because of his court-ordered therapy sessions. These sessions would interfere with his practice. What should I do?**

Many therapists would encourage your child's participation in after school activities. It is important to discuss this with your therapist when scheduling appointments. They should be able to work around your child's activities.

If not, you may want to talk with the coach about alternative times for practice.

**My friends have shut me out. How do I help them to understand my condition?**

You can tell your friends that you are the same person you were before they knew about your illness. Some friends may shut you out because they don't know how to help. They might not know what to say. You can explain to them that they can best help you by continuing to do things together as you had in the past.

You can also talk to your therapist. They can advise on how to talk about your child's situation to your friends and family.

## Talking to Your Family & Friends About Your Mental Illness

It may be difficult to talk to people about your diagnosis. You may be concerned about how others will react to this news.

This handout is designed to help you prepare for different situations you may face when returning to your daily routines.

### Talking to Friends and Family

Remember that mental illness is not your fault. It needs to be treated. If your friends and family are supportive, tell them about your condition. Teaching others about your condition helps others understand how to help you. It also helps you understand their thoughts and feelings.

Your friends and family can be a vital part of your support network by:

- Giving encouragement.
- Being there for you.
- Helping you follow your treatment plan.

### Talking to Your Child

During your treatment, you may need to explain your mental illness to your child. Your illness could cause stress in your relationship with them. Children may sense this stress and think it is their fault. Your children may be genetically at risk for your condition. It is helpful for them to learn the signs.

When explaining to your child:

- Tell your child that you love him or her.
- Tell your child that you do not feel well.
- Explain that your condition (depression, bipolar disorder, etc.) is an illness.
- Tell your child you need support from your family.

### Talking to Your Employer

You don't have to tell your employer that you have a mental illness. But if your symptoms are causing problems at work, you might want to explain that you don't feel your best because of an illness. If you have been open with your supervisor about your diagnosis, but don't wish your coworkers to know, make this clear. When you go back to work, you may find that you may need special accommodations. Some examples of phrases you may say to your employer are:

- I have a medical condition that requires more frequent breaks to do my work.
- I take medicine for a disorder that makes it hard to get up early in the morning. I will need to come in later and stay later.

## What Should You Say?

Even though you don't have to tell your coworkers, it might become clear that you are getting different treatment. How can you handle this?

For example: one of the other employees approached you about why you are "going home early" or getting "special treatment"

If you want to keep your health information confidential, you might say:

- My boss and I have an agreement that lets me take care of personal matters during work hours, but I make up the time.
- I have an appointment each week that I can't schedule for evenings or weekends, so I changed my work schedule to make up the time.

If you feel comfortable discussing the fact that you have a health problem you might say:

- I have a medical condition that requires me leaving early for treatment, but I make up the time at lunch and in the evening. Request assistance from Human Resources and EAP for your transition back to work.

## Some Questions You May Be Asked:

- Where have you been?
  - I was in the hospital.
- Why?
  - I was sick, but I am better now.
- Will you get better?
  - With the right medications and therapy, most people get better.
- Are you crazy?
  - No. I'm not crazy. I just needed help dealing with some problems.

## Examples of Difficult Situations that May Arise:

• I can't make my tennis lessons or book club meetings because of my therapy sessions. What should I do? Many therapists would encourage your participation in your activities outside of work. It is important to discuss this with your therapist when scheduling appointments. They should be able to work around your schedule. If not, see if there are other times that you can participate in the activities you enjoy doing.

• My friends have shut me out. How do I help them to understand my condition? You can tell your friends that you are the same person you were before. Some friends may shut you out because they don't know how to help. They might not know what to say. You can explain to them that they can best help you by continuing to do things together as you had in the past.

You can also talk to your therapist. They can advise on how to talk about your situation to your friends and family.