

IDEAS TO ASSIST FAMILY MEMBERS OF SYMPTOM BEARERS

Focus on self and not the other

- Rather than putting all the focus on how to help the person you are concerned about, it is usually helpful to focus on maintaining your own responsibilities. Take care not to take over the responsibilities/functioning of the other. Over-functioning may contribute to an increased sense of helplessness, dependence or resistance in the other.
- Consider the possibility that the more you monitor the other's symptoms and make suggestions, the harder it becomes for the symptom bearer to make changes for themselves.
- You can care without needing to make everything right for others. A good check is to ask: "Am I thinking, feeling or behaving on behalf of another rather than on behalf of myself?"
- Stay clear about what you are willing to do to support the other and what you are not willing to do which you believe is their responsibility to manage. E.g.: reminding them about appointments or when to take medication.
- You can express how their behaviour impacts you being able to deal with your responsibilities and say what you need to do with yourself to address this. This focus on self is very different to telling another how they should change.
- Be aware of reactions to the other in the form of attacking, defending or withdrawing (cutting off); any of these responses add to the intensity in the relationship and makes it harder for people to make any changes for themselves. Staying as thoughtful and calm as possible contributes to a healthier environment for everybody.
- A focus on helping or changing the symptom bearer can be a way of reducing your own anxiety about other challenges in life and relationships. Energy put into managing your own unaddressed vulnerabilities is a challenge but a contribution to the health of the system.
- Consider ways of balancing the relationship by asking the other for help and support for a genuine need of your own.

Focus on family relationship patterns that contribute to a disparity of coping resources

- Focusing on understanding the relationship challenges that your family has had to adapt to over the generations can be a useful way of moving from blame/frustration to awareness. Trying to change or blame others can drain a person's ability to manage themselves.
- Stay as connected as possible with all significant members of the family system. The more balance there is in person-to-person relationships in the family the less likely people experience themselves as outsiders which contributes to anxiety.
- When anyone shifts their attention to managing themselves differently in a relationship there is a period of often strong invitations/pressure to change back. If you can hold your new position of self-responsibility in the face of "change back" pressure, others will eventually make adjustments to this.
- Improvements in the symptoms may upset the family's equilibrium and therefore can result in a period of increased stress. After a time, the people can adjust to the new ways of relating.