

Family Resource

How Do You Help Someone With Mental Illness Who Doesn't Want Help? This question has been asked by many people. If you are asking it too, you are not alone.



When Someone Doesn't Want Help

Why is it so hard to make a loved one with a mental illness accept that they have one, and what can be done about getting them to realize that they need treatment? These questions have been asked by many people, hundreds of times. If you are asking them, too, you should know you are not alone.

According to Xavier Amador, clinical psychologist and expert on mental illness and family relations, it is partly because it is human nature that we don't accept

weakness or major challenges that need help. But the nature of mental illness also makes it difficult to grasp the reality of the problem and how it is affecting one's family and loved ones. This, of course, can be the source of a great deal of tension in family relationships and friendships. This guide is intended to provide some tips for those who wish that their loved one would "recognize and accept" their mental illness. This is not a substitute for professional or legal help! While figuring out what to

do and what may work is not a linear path, nor a predictable one, these tips may help in communicating with and better understanding your loved one. Start with listening, not an easy task and something you probably feel you have already done. See if you are able to try it with a fresh perspective. Be a patient listener. Listen to your loved one's problems. Put yourself in their situation to gain a better understanding of what they may be going through.

Listening Guidelines

1. **Set time aside** to be able to talk to your loved one without getting distracted.
2. **Create a stress free** environment like going on walks or having a morning coffee.
3. Sometimes they may not say anything at all to you or say a lot that doesn't make sense, but keep listening so that they know you are there for them. This helps build trust.
4. If your loved one refuses to take medicine or see their doctor say something like, "I hate to see what you are going through. Tell me why you are scared or against taking your medicine?"
5. **Try to understand** if your loved ones think that medication will cause their mind to get weak or develop any short and long term problems for them or is it just the embarrassment

Additional Resources

I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help, by Xavier Amador

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Treatment Advocacy Center

SAMHSA: What A Difference A Friend Makes

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

of taking medicine.

6. Don't show any strong emotions like anger or frustration. For example, if they are talking about hearing voices or believe they are being possessed by someone just listen to them and reassure them that it must be hard for them to go through this in their minds.

7. **Let them talk** as long as they want to and do not interrupt them; rambling will help

them release their frustration. The trick is not to try to guide the conversation.

8. **Repeat what they say.** When you have made a point of communicating your understanding of what they have said, you insure that you have understood them correctly and convey empathy. When it is your turn to talk, repeat what they said in your own words; if your loved one feels you understand he

thoughts and feeling on a specific matter, she will open to hearing your opinion later.

9. **Make a note.** Record what you have learned about your loved one's inner life and emotions.

Additional Resources for Help

If you believe your loved one is dangerous or you are concerned for his or her safety, or the safety of others, there are legal procedures in Virginia that you may want to check into. Call 911 or the Emergency Services Unit at your local Community Services Board (local public mental health provider). If you call 911 you want to explain that you are calling about a loved one that has mental illness.

Sometimes the best thing you can do is get support for yourself. Talk to a friend or family member, or someone you trust who will be sympathetic to what you are experiencing. Join a support group (NAMI has local affiliates; find one at www.namivirginia.org or 1-888-486-8264. Join an online community of support.