Communicating with Someone Who Has a Psychiatric Illness

PROCEED TO INTERACT AS YOU:

1. **BE CALM** and **GIVE FIRM, CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS**;
2. **ASSESS THE SITUATION** for safety;
3. **MAINTAIN ADEQUATE SPACE** between you and the person;
4. **RESPOND TO APPARENT FEELINGS**;
5. **RESPOND TO DELUSIONS AND HALLUCINATIONS** by talking about the person’s feelings rather than what he is saying;
6. **BE HELPFUL, ENCOEURAGING and SUPPORTIVE.**

AVOID:

1. **REINFORCING** behavior related to the person’s illness;
2. **STARING** at the person, this may be interpreted as a threat;
3. **CONFUSING** the person;
4. **GIVING MULTIPLE CHOICES**, this increases confusion;
5. **WHISPERING, YELLING, RIDICULING, DECEIVING or TOUCHING**, this may cause more fear and lead to violence.

*More information on reverse side*
Someone with a psychiatric illness might...  

- have trouble with reality.
- be fearful.
- be insecure.
- have trouble concentrating.
- be over stimulated.
- easily become agitated.
- have poor judgment.
- be preoccupied.
- be withdrawn.
- have changing emotions.
- have changing plans.
- have little empathy for you.
- believe delusions.
- have low self-esteem and motivation.

So you need to...

- Be simple, truthful
- Stay calm
- Be accepting
- Be brief, repeat
- Limit input
- Recognize agitation
- Not expect rational discussion
- Get attention first
- Initiate relevant conversation
- Disregard
- Keep to one plan
- Recognize as a symptom
- Ignore, don’t argue
- Stay positive

NAMI SC HelpLine 1-800-788-5131
PO Box 1267, Columbia, SC 29202 (803) 733-9592
www.namisc.org  Email: namisc@namisc.org