



## **Effective Limit - Setting for Families**

**Goals:** Regain authority over the household. Create an environment that's comfortable and manageable for you and other family members. Do not attempt to control your relative's life outside of home.

**Attitudes:** Effective limit-setting requires a spirit of determined toughness, not kindly persuasion or angry criticism. Nagging is particularly unproductive.

**Tactics:** Focus your efforts on one or two aspects of behavior that especially trouble you. Ignore other matters until you have these issues under control. Focus on behavior you can consistently monitor and influence. Determine consequences for non-compliance that will inconvenience your ill relative yet will not be too difficult to follow through with.

**Communication:** Clearly state expectations for appropriate behavior and consequences for non-compliance. Expect that these limits will be tested and you will have to administer consequences. It is unnecessary and even a sign of weakness to ask for your relative's verbal or written agreement. You are unilaterally informing him / her that if they do A you will do B. Do not engage in lengthy discussions of the appropriateness of your expectations. In your home the patient needs to learn to live with your idiosyncrasies.

**Byproducts of Effective Limit - Setting:** Besides establishing a more livable family environment, effective limit - setting greatly enhances the credibility of family members and can lead to more productive discussions of other issues. It can also motivate your ill relative to work toward independence in order to escape from rules they do not prefer to live under. Learning that one must conform to the expectations of others in order to enjoy satisfying social relations, patients often behave more appropriately outside the home.

*Adapted from Coping Strategies for Relatives of the Mentally Ill by Joel Kanter, MSW, LCSW*

## **Behaviors That Should Not Be Tolerated**

- A. Even if they are part of the mental illness, the following behaviors should NOT be tolerated :
1. Physical, Verbal, Emotional or Sexual Abuse
  2. Destruction of Property (ex : punching holes in a wall)
  3. Setting fires or creating fire hazards (ex : smoking in bed)
  4. Stealing
  5. Illegal drug abuse & misuse / abuse of prescribed medications
  6. Severely inappropriate or disruptive behaviors  
(ex: walking around the house naked, blasting the stereo)
- B. Allowing yourself or other family members to become a victim of any of these behaviors not only poses danger, but sets up an atmosphere of waiting for a ticking bomb to go off. Such an atmosphere is extremely stressful for everyone.

## **Behaviors That Are Typical Symptoms of Mental Illness**

Trying to stop any of the following behaviors in someone who is mentally ill can be like trying to stop someone with a cold from sneezing :

1. Changes in normal eating habits
2. Unusual sleep / wake cycles (ex : sleeping all day & staying up all night)
3. Delusions or disordered thinking
4. Hallucinations
5. Withdrawal from family members or friends
6. Inappropriate social behavior