



PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER WHEN DEALING WITH CRITICAL PERIODS IN MENTAL ILLNESS

- 1) In dealing with critical periods, it is essential to set limits on psychotic behavior and to have a plan for enforcing your ultimatum. You need to decide on the specific consequences and you need to be prepared to back them up.
- 2) **You must get help.** No one can handle these devastating crises alone. Your plan should always involve other family members, public authorities, crisis workers and professional assistance - notified ahead of time, if possible.
- 3) You must trust your instincts. If you are worried about violence or suicide, you can bet something is building up and that events are becoming overwhelming for your relative.
- 4) You can't keep your head in the sand about violence and suicide; you have to speak these fears directly and openly to your relative. You must show your reaction to these dangers: Tell him his behavior is making you feel afraid; ask, point blank, if he is contemplating suicide. In crisis, candor is essential. It reduces tension, "detoxifies" secret plans and lets a lot of air into a sealed off, turbulent mind.
- 5) Even though your relative is scaring you to death or making you angry, you need to approach him with respect. All good crisis intervention is calm, purposeful and respectful.
- 6) Acting to protect our mentally ill relatives is the highest form of caring for them, even if it involves force or involuntary commitment. And it is a difficult paradox to deal with: To keep them safe, we must let them go, even if they hate us for "locking them up," even if they break off with us, we have to move decisively to insure their well-being. We cannot hang back because we think they will no longer love us. Mental illness can put people in mortal danger. In this situation, love acts!
- 7) Acting to keep ourselves clear of danger is the highest form of self-care. We are really saying we have no intention of letting mental illness rob us of our life, and if that danger looms, we are ready to separate ourselves from this threat. In a much less dramatic form, this is what we learn to do, over time, to survive this illness in others.