

How to React and Respond to Psychosis

Practical Tips for Caregivers

- **Talk** to your loved one about their experiences with psychosis. They may be reluctant to introduce the subject on their own due to social stigmas related to *mental illness*. Openly discuss their thoughts, feelings and symptoms in a non-threatening environment. This can ease their anxiety and will allow you to have a better understanding of the situation.
- Try to **stay calm and patient**. Caring for an individual who is experiencing psychosis can be very challenging and frustrating. Remember that the patient cannot control these symptoms. If you become angry, aggravated or demanding, the patient's own aggression and agitation can worsen.
- **Be prepared** and know how to handle the situation if your loved one should become agitated or aggressive:
 1. Provide space without crowding.
 2. Talk calmly and evenly. Do not raise your voice.
 3. Provide reassurance. ("Everything is fine. You are safe.")
 4. Keep your hands in view and your movements to a minimum.
 5. Inquire about their feelings and their reason for being upset.
 6. Listen to their responses and comments.
- **Examine the environment** and make necessary adjustments. Below are several examples:
 - *Visual hallucinations*: Lighting at night can help reduce shadows and the risk for visual illusions.
 - *Delusions and confusion*: Keep dangerous objects in secure locations. Make sure furniture is arranged so that a confused patient cannot trip and/or fall.
 - *Agitation or aggression*: Make sure the environment is quiet and calm without disturbing noises or distractions.
- **Do not challenge** hallucinations or delusions by saying "*They are not real*". Alternatively, **do not reinforce** psychosis by endorsing the illogical behaviors or ideas. Try generic phrases instead, such as:

*"I understand that the children appear real to you but I cannot see them.
I wonder if they might be a hallucination."*
- **Educate others** who are frequently around your loved one about psychosis and *mental health* issues in PD. This will allow them to better understand the odd or unusual behaviors that they may observe. It can also relieve their fears and inhibitions while interacting with the patient. These individuals can be helpful in many situations, especially when you need immediate help.
- **Allow others to help**. Caring for someone with Parkinson disease can be challenging enough. Psychosis can make it significantly more difficult. You cannot properly care for your loved one if you do not care for yourself. Do not be afraid to ask for assistance from family or friends or seek assistance from social services or home health agencies.
- **Safety must be a priority**. Always ensure your own safety as well as the safety of your loved one. A patient who is experiencing psychosis can be confused, agitated, aggressive, suspicious and argumentative. If the situation becomes out – of- control and/or unsafe, leave the room and get help either from a family member, friend or neighbor. You can also call your local police department or 911. They can help gain control of the situation and will be understanding of the circumstances.
- **Explore available resources and options**. In rare cases, psychosis may progress despite treatment. This can make home-based care extremely difficult. It is appropriate to consider placement in a facility that can provide constant supervision to ensure that the patient is not a threat to himself or others. This can either be on a short-term or long term basis. Social workers can be excellent resources when considering alternative care options.

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