

WORKING WITH YOUR PROVIDERS

No matter what type of mental health services work best for you or your loved one, knowing how to work with the people who provide mental health care is essential.

Here are a few tips for people living with mental illness (this page) and family members (opposite page) to have productive relationships with mental health professionals.

DON'T BE AFRAID
to express your preferences.

You should never feel like your opinion is unimportant— you are the expert on your experience.



Bring a family member, partner or friend to the appointment to be your ally, advocate and a second set of ears.

If you need written instructions, request them.

If you are being discharged from an inpatient (hospital) stay, keep in mind that you have the right to important services before you leave:

- Assistance in securing appropriate housing
- Applying for appropriate benefits
- Obtaining community services

IF YOU FEEL TOO INTIMIDATED, confused or tired to ask all your questions, ask if you can follow up later. Or request an information release so that a loved one can follow up for you.

TIPS FOR EVERYONE!

- **Ask questions** and if you don't understand the answer, don't just let it go. Ask your provider to repeat the information or explain it differently. Do this until you TRULY understand.
- **Ask about “person-centered” care.** Does the provider value person-centered care? How will they ensure that their work with you is person-centered? For more info on person-centered care, see page 41.

WORKING WITH A LOVED ONE'S PROVIDERS

Understand that your involvement has limitations due to privacy laws. Generally, adults need to sign a “release of information” to allow providers to speak with family/friends. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Learn more at [hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/special/mhguidance.html](https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/special/mhguidance.html)

Your loved one can request an information release AT ANY POINT during their care.

If you are involved in your loved one's care (they have signed an information release), keep them informed about any **communication** you have with their providers.

YOU CAN SHARE INFORMATION that you believe will benefit your loved one's care at any time. You might say:

“I know you can't share information with me, but as a family member, I have important information to share with you. I think you should be aware that_____.”

The therapist can choose to tell your loved one that you shared information about them.

DON'T ASSUME that providers will not want to partner with you. Many providers feel that it is good practice to work with well-meaning, calm family members.

Do not “vent” to providers about your loved one. Instead, get connected with NAMI family support groups or consider finding a therapist of your own. **MANY** family members do this.



- **Report back your understanding** of the plan of action: “What I'm hearing is_____. Is that correct?” “As I understand it, you mean_____.”
- **Make a list** of your top questions/ideas and bring it to the appointment (find a sample appt. prep sheet on page 72!)
- **Make sure you have copies** of any document that seems important or official-looking. Keep these documents in one place.

“Mental health professionals are people too, and respond well to encouragement, guidance and patience.”

—Psychiatrist,
Madison