

# NAMI Homefront Mental Health Resources

## for Military Service Members, Veterans and Their Families

### Limit Setting

#### Behaviors That Shouldn't Be Tolerated

Even if they are a result of the mental health condition, the following behaviors shouldn't be tolerated:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Destruction of property (example: punching holes in walls)
- Setting fires or creating fire hazards (example: smoking in bed)
- Stealing
- Abuse of illegal and/or prescription drugs
- Severely disruptive or tyrannical behaviors (examples: walking around the house with a weapon, blasting the stereo, intolerably loud screaming)

Allowing yourself or other members of your family to become a victim of any of these behaviors not only poses danger, but sets up an atmosphere that is extremely stressful for everyone, especially your loved one.

#### Behaviors That Are Typical Symptoms of a Mental Health Condition

- Trying to stop any of the following behaviors in someone with a mental health disorder can be like trying to stop someone with a cold from sneezing:
  - Periodic departure from normal eating habits
  - Unusual sleep/wake cycles (example: sleeping all day and staying up all night)
  - Delusions or disordered thinking
  - Hallucinations
  - Withdrawal to a quiet, private place
  - Exhibiting behaviors that fall outside social norms
- The reasons for these behaviors are much more complicated than attempts to manipulate. They are symptoms of a disorder or attempts to cope with symptoms in which manipulation may play only a small role, if any.
- Even if a behavior is a symptom or attempt to cope with a symptom, you shouldn't tolerate it if it's destructive or severely disruptive (see above), or if it is driving you or someone else in the house to absolute distraction.

# NAMI Homefront Mental Health Resources

## for Military Service Members, Veterans and Their Families

### Limit Setting (continued)

#### What You Can Do to Manage Violent or Disruptive Behavior

- When you and your relative are BOTH calm, explain to him/her what kinds of behaviors you will not tolerate, as well as the specific consequences upon which you (and other family members) have decided (and agreed) for specific violent or disruptive behaviors.

Example: “Next time you threaten to harm any of us, law enforcement will be called.”

- Get to know and recognize cues that your relative is becoming violent or disruptive (your own uneasiness or fear is usually a good cue).
- Tell your relative that his/her behavior is scaring you or upsetting you. This feedback can defuse the situation but proceed with the next suggestion if it doesn't. Saying you are scared doesn't mean you act scared.
- If you (and other family members) have made a limit-setting plan, now is the time to carry out the consequences. If you haven't already warned your relative of the consequences when he/she was calm, use your judgment and past experience to decide whether to warn him/her or to just go ahead with the plan without saying anything.
- Give your relative plenty of space, both physical and emotional. Never corner a person who is agitated or whose symptoms are escalating unless you can safely restrain them. Verbal threats or hostile remarks constitute emotional cornering and should be avoided.
- Give yourself an easy exit and leave the scene immediately if they are scaring you or becoming violent.
- Get help! Bringing in other people, including law enforcement if necessary, can quickly defuse the situation.
- If you or someone else has witnessed your relative recently committing or planning a violent or dangerous act, that is grounds for involuntary commitment.

#### What You Should NOT Do

- Don't ignore violent or disruptive behavior. Ignoring only leads your loved one to believe that this kind of behavior is acceptable and “repeatable.”
- Don't give your loved one what they want if they are bullying you. Giving in reinforces this bullying behavior and makes it likely that your loved one will use it again. Give in if it is the ONLY way out of a dangerous situation.
- Don't try to lecture or reason with your loved one when they are agitated or losing control.
- NEVER be alone with someone you fear.

Example: Don't drive them to the hospital by yourself

Source: *The Training and Education Center Network, Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*