

Session 2: COVID-19 ADDENDUM

It is important to recognize the additional challenges, demands and stresses placed on you as a family caregiver in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This addendum to Session 2 will provide information on how to:

- Adapt strategies for providing support to your family member during COVID-19
- Effectively manage additional stresses associated with the COVID-19 pandemic
- Reimagine your self care plan in the face of COVID-19
- Pay attention to your own needs and limits, and take care of your own health and hope during this unprecedented time.

The “Treatment Battle” and COVID-19

Providing care for a family member who has schizophrenia or psychosis is an important role, but it can also be challenging. Supporting and encouraging your loved one and collaborating with treatment may be more difficult during COVID-19 for many reasons, including:

- Routines may be disrupted
- Usual ways of communication and support might not be possible
- Physical distancing requirements may hinder ability to provide both practical (doing laundry, preparing meals, etc.) and emotional support
- Family member’s psychotic symptoms may exacerbate
- Access to mental health services for your family member may have changed
- Uncertainty about the availability of mental health services and supports during COVID-19 and/or temporary disruptions to services
- Inpatient units may have reduced or suspended visiting hours, or may only permit essential visitors

While all of the communication and support strategies you have learned in this session still apply, it is important to consider how additional challenges may impact the ways in which you can provide this support. Some additional strategies are listed below:

Strategies for Encouraging Collaboration with Treatment

1. Become knowledgeable about how supports and services will change during COVID-19
2. Help your family member make alternative arrangements to access medication if necessary. (For instance, there may be an ability to sign up for repeat prescription delivery if your family member requires an ongoing prescription medication.)
3. Help your family member make alternative arrangements to access required services and supports.

Strategies for Social Withdrawal and Isolation (While Physical Distancing)

1. Agree to connect at certain times, either over the phone or via a video call
2. Encourage your family member to take part in online social activities, such as online peer support
3. Suggest other online activities for you to do together, such as playing online games or sharing your favorite photos
4. When safe to do so, certain in-person physical distancing activities may be appropriate, such as meeting outside in an open space or going for a walk (while maintaining a safe distance).

Strategies for Encouraging Protection from COVID-19

Family caregivers often need to anticipate the level of assistance and encouragement their family member will need to take care of themselves and to keep themselves safe, especially during COVID-19. Many of the strategies previously discussed apply to assisting your family member with taking the appropriate safety precautions for COVID-19, including:

1. Use the LEAP (listen, empathize, agree, partner) approach to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of taking safety precautions
2. Remind your family member to wear a mask, wash their hands, and physical distance when appropriate
3. Provide support for accessing the equipment required to stay safe (mask supply, hand sanitizer). In some situations you may have to provide these to your family member yourself.
4. Encourage learning about COVID-19 and prevention strategies
5. Follow the tips you learned for supporting good personal hygiene

Self Care During COVID-19 – Tips for Family Caregivers

In addition to causing challenges for supporting your family member, the additional stress due to change and uncertainty can have a negative impact on your own mental health. With the addition of these extra stressors, it is even more important to ensure that you pay attention to your own mental health and self care. The following provides a few additional tips related to COVID-19 and emphasizes some tips that you have already learned about:

- **Be media mindful:** try to limit the amount of COVID-19 news you consume, and only seek information from trusted sources that allow you to make informed plans to protect yourself and your family member. Avoid inaccurate or overly sensational news stories and outlets.
- **Have a routine:** as much as possible, try to keep to the routines you were used to before COVID-19. If some of your daily routines have been disrupted, try to find alternatives or develop a new routine.
- **Stay healthy:** Try as much as possible to keep a regular exercise routine, and maintain healthy eating

habits. In addition, try to take time to engage in activities that you find relaxing and that you enjoy.

- **Stay connected:** Though at times you may not be able to share the same physical space, try to stay connected and in regular contact with people in your social network. Make sure to reach out to your own support network if you are feeling overwhelmed.
- **Check in with yourself:** Though it is perfectly normal to feel anxious or overwhelmed during this challenging time, try to be mindful of your thoughts and mental states, and challenge unhelpful thinking.
- **Be patient with yourself:** If you feel that you are not doing enough or operating at your usual capacity, remind yourself that you are doing your best in this uncertain and difficult time! Celebrate your resilience and what you have been able to accomplish, and give yourself space to adjust to this new and unpredictable situation.

Reimagining your Self-Care Plan

You learned a lot about self care and making a self care plan in session 2 today. In your previous self care plan, you may notice that some self-care activities that you previously engaged in are no longer available to you due to social distancing measures. Taking some time to think of some similar alternatives may help you to feel more prepared to manage your self care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

| Pre-COVID-19 Self-Care Activity | Alternative Activity |
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Additional Supports for Family Caregivers During COVID-19

The specific supports available for caregivers will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and it is important to reach out to your regional health authority and local organizations to understand what supports are available to you. In addition to the resources provided in the participant notes for this session, an extra collection of online resources that can help caregivers deal with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic is included below.

Recommended Online Resources

- https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2020-04/fact_sheet_caregivers_eng.pdf
- <https://www.iamentalhealth.ca/Find-Support/Resource-Hub/Support-During-COVID-19>
- <https://www.camh.ca/-/media/files/covid19-infosheet-help-when-feeling-worried-pdf.pdf?la=en&hash=9599BDB0FC3DFDCF4AF57A4555E11D9461D8A83C>
- <http://howrightnow.org/>

