

Interacting with Persons with Mental Illnesses

Do:

- Collect as much information as possible from all possible sources prior to intervening.
- Take your time and eliminate noise and distractions.
- Ask permission first.
- Treat them with dignity and respect as you would a family member.
- Keep your distance and respect personal space.
- Talk slowly and quietly. Identify yourself and others and explain your intentions/actions. Your actions should be slow, and prior warning should be given if you intend on moving about the room.
- Explain in a firm, but gentle, voice that you want to help. Ask how you can be of assistance.
- Develop a sense of working together: “Help me to understand what is happening to you.”
- If they are fearful of your equipment, take the time to explain that you carry the equipment to enable you to perform your job, which is to protect the public and them.
- Give choices whenever possible to allow some level of control.

Do not:

- Deceive—be honest and open in all situations. You are reality.
- Challenge.
- Tease or belittle.
- Forget the pain and fear they are experiencing. Remember that emotions can be painful.
- Violate personal space.
- Forget to ask about medications used.

Source: Ron Hoffman and Laurel Putnam, Not Just Another Call: Police Response to People with Mental Illnesses in Ontario: A Practical Guide for the Frontline Officer (Sudbury, CA: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2004); 10.