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## **Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services**

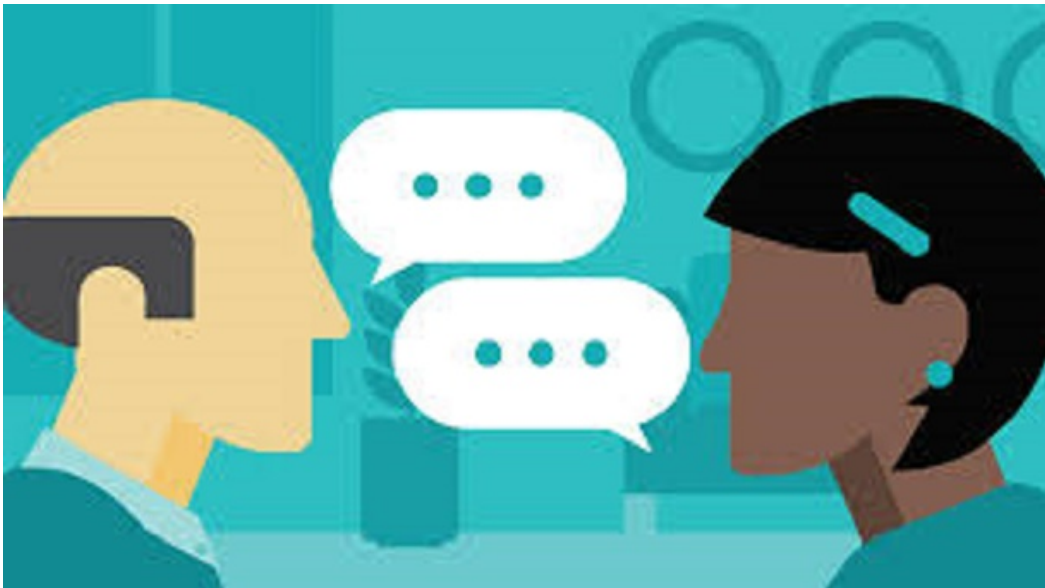
**Tips and resources for people who want to be more effective in supporting adults with mental health/substance use concerns.**

### **MESSAGE FROM YOUR HOST**



Welcome back! Over the last number of months our newsletters focused on topics relating to your relationship with your loved one and the extended family, and our May edition focussed specifically on managing and supporting your loved one through Covid. In this month's edition, the discussion is how best to navigate your relationships with your loved one's mental health team. Conversations with the mental health team and/or hospital staff may be difficult if your loved one has not given you permission to speak with staff about their recovery. If you find yourself in this situation it can feel frustrating and scary, not having information about your loved one's progress. There are some things you can do to help improve the communication between you and the team even if your loved one is saying 'no' to sharing information with you. For those of you whose loved one is **not** connected to a team at a community mental health centre, this information will be useful when communicating with hospital staff during emergency and/or in patient psychiatry unit (IPU) visits.

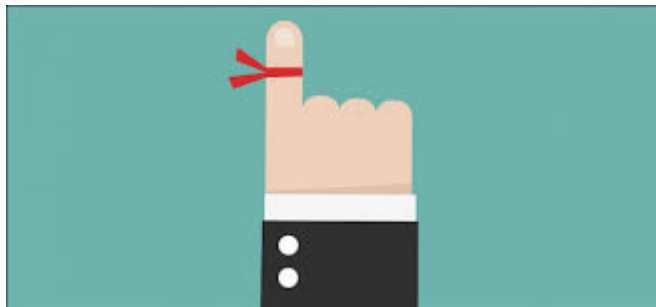
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## Communicating with staff

It is best if you first start with your loved one, asking them if it is okay for you to be included in their recovery process. Let them know you are there to support them and ask what they would need from you to feel supported in their treatment and recovery. Encourage your loved one to sign a consent form with their team

support your loved one and the team.



## 5 Helpful tips when communicating with staff

### 1

#### Partner with staff

- This may seem obvious but when communicating with staff at the hospital or at the community mental health team, make sure you let them know you are seeking a partnership. Tell them you want a mutual relationship that both of you can benefit from. Stay away from any statements that convey judgement or criticism no matter how hard that may be for you because of negative past experiences. The priority is to get them on your side!

### 2

#### Validate staff efforts

-If you have difficulties in specific areas with your loved one, most likely the staff would be experiencing the same in their relationship with your loved one. Let staff know this and validate their efforts. For example, if you are having a hard time motivating your loved one, chances are the staff are too.

### 3

#### Know the language

-The use of acronyms in the mental health system is prevalent. Although most staff try to avoid acronyms, some will not. Take the reins into your own hands and learn some of the common acronyms used in mental health. This will make you feel confident when talking to staff. See list of acronyms in Resources section.

-Know what information it is you are asking from staff and be clear and concise about this. This is very important, especially if your loved one has not given permission for you to speak with staff. Most families agree that they do not need or want to know everything about the person they are supporting, just the information that helps them in their supportive role.

-If you have questions for staff, write out your questions before engaging with staff. The staff at Family Support Services can help guide you with your questions.

## 5

### Be specific about time frame

-If you are seeking information from staff, ask what is a reasonable time frame for them to get back to you about their decision regarding the information you requested. Staff may have to consult with their coordinator before a decision is made. This way you will know when exactly to call back if you haven't heard from them.



## Know your rights when requesting information

### Sharing of information policy

Sharing of Information is an 'umbrella' term. Under this term 4 ways on how information can be shared are identified and briefly explained:

1. Receiving information
2. Giving information
3. Pro-actively seeking information
4. Pro-actively giving information

#### **Receiving information given by others about a patient/client**

This is when the staff at the mental health centres and/or hospital can receive information from you. Staff cannot refuse taking the information from you. The information you provide to the staff will be documented but your identity will be kept confidential, if this is what you prefer. Your identity is considered 3rd party information, and this information is not shared even when the file has been subpoenaed by a court order. For example, you call in to let your daughter's case manager know she has been responding to voices and is becoming agitated. The staff will document this information but will not share

Based on the information received and knowing the importance of it to the recovery of your loved one, as well as, acknowledging you know your loved one better than the staff do, they may seek your assistance to explore how best the information could be brought into conversation between staff and your loved one.

There is a caveat to protecting your confidentiality and that is, if staff determine there is any concern for fear of injury to anyone, or child abuse issues, they do have a legal obligation to follow up with the appropriate people.

### **Giving information to others that is requested by them about a patient/client**

Here the staff is giving specific information to you: it could be directed by your loved one (our preferred option); or, if the staff member has a clear understanding of the role you play in your loved one's recovery, as well as factoring in the impact on your own health by not having certain information, they can share information with you. An example would be when your daughter's case manager may call you to inform you that she just saw the psychiatrist and wants to book a follow up so you can provide transportation. No information is shared about the details of the appointment, except that there was one, which she showed for, and a follow up is going to be scheduled.

This is not always a straight forward exercise for staff. No two lives or recoveries are the same, so staff will want to check with your loved one to find out who you are, what role do you play in patient/client's life before and after treatment, etc. As staff protect your loved one's right to confidentiality, and to prevent harm from happening as best they can, staff will weigh a number of factors before just openly giving information to anyone who just calls in. This is where having conversation with your loved one regarding them signing a consent to share information can be very helpful to everyone, as staff can have this on file, and can easily reference it when you call for information.

### **Staff pro-actively seeking information from others**

In this situation, the staff are allowed and encouraged to call you to ask questions: these questions may help inform the assessment and proper diagnosis, discharge planning, and/or about any changes in behaviour possibly pointing to a possible relapse happening, or, confirmation that your loved one's recovery is going well.

### **Staff pro-actively giving information to others**

This is where staff are encouraged to give information to family/friends. They can do this with the agreement from your loved one, or, if your loved one disagrees with the staff member, the staff member can still give you information but will need to weigh various

prevent harm from happening. In this scenario, the mental health and/or hospital staff may be calling you to inform you that your daughter has not been taking her medications and is becoming unwell. They may want to help you formulate a crisis plan in response to your loved ones' emerging symptoms.

**How much information, who receives the information and when information is shared is a fluid process that includes YOU! It is meant to be a collaborative process between you, your loved one and staff.**

## **Family of natural supports inclusion and support policy**

The Family and Natural Supports policy states that family and others who are supporting a person who is accessing services in Fraser Health mental health and substance use services be given the opportunity to be included in the treatment planning of your loved ones as follows:

1. You shall receive information and education from staff about resources and services available within Fraser Health and community service providers;
2. Staff will encourage your loved one to consider the involvement of you (Family) and Natural Supports) in your loved ones' treatment and recovery plans;
3. You (Family and Natural Supports) will be given the opportunity to collaborate with your loved ones and staff at all stages of treatment including assessment, treatment and discharge decisions, and decisions that may be determinants of health (e.g. housing, income, employment supports, etc.);

4. Staff will be actively encouraged to share collateral information with you and your loved one that may be relevant to their service on a regular, ongoing basis;
  
5. If your loved one does not want your involvement, and staff have assessed that your involvement would be harmful to your loved ones treatment and recovery, non-involvement will be regularly reviewed.

Please keep in mind that not all staff are aware of these two policies, and may be hearing it for the first time from you. It will work in your favour when referencing these policies with staff, that you do so with the intent of partnering with the staff when requesting information and/or seeking involvement in your loved one's care.

Remember, you have a lot of skills you can use when communicating with staff, as they are the same skills you use with your loved one. You will want to practise benign interpretation; remember there is no one absolute truth, and everyone is trying the best they can. You got this!

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### Article written by a family member

- <https://www.theprogress.com/news/chilliwack-father-says-family-involvement-can-be-key-to-mental-health-treatment/>
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## Did you know that ...

- **Up to 2% of Canada's population live with and are caring for an adult with mental illness**
- **91% describe the arrangement as long term**
- **~ Half of those with mental illness in Canada live with family**
- **Many families who don't live under the same roof provide daily and ongoing support to relatives**
- **Family members become the crisis worker, home care nurse, counselor, advocate and financial provider for their relatives; they're on call 24/7 and don't take statutory holidays off.**

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## RESOURCES

### Sharing of Information Policy

[https://mcusercontent.com/fa494eb238a58be26f6084f79/files/0b8cad8b-94ca-44e0-b0d8-e53681087848/Sharing\\_of\\_Information\\_Patient\\_Families\\_Health\\_Care\\_Providers\\_in\\_Mental\\_Health\\_and\\_Substance\\_Use\\_Policy.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/fa494eb238a58be26f6084f79/files/0b8cad8b-94ca-44e0-b0d8-e53681087848/Sharing_of_Information_Patient_Families_Health_Care_Providers_in_Mental_Health_and_Substance_Use_Policy.pdf)

### Family and Natural Supports Inclusion and Support Policy

[https://mcusercontent.com/fa494eb238a58be26f6084f79/files/e8b9c5f9-b55b-40ee-a1ac-dda53293dae9/Family\\_and\\_Natural\\_Supports\\_Inclusion\\_and\\_Support\\_Clinical\\_Policy.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/fa494eb238a58be26f6084f79/files/e8b9c5f9-b55b-40ee-a1ac-dda53293dae9/Family_and_Natural_Supports_Inclusion_and_Support_Clinical_Policy.pdf)

## Fraser Health complaint process (Patient Care Quality Office – PCQO)

<https://www.fraserhealth.ca/about-us/contact-us/complaints-about-patient-care-quality#.Xo3xIM5Kg2w>

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### Reflective Box

Preparing for a conversation with staff may be stressful. Stressful because you will want to get the staff on your side and hope to get what you are asking for. It's important to have this conversation when you are feeling ready and when the timing is right for you. You can use H.A.L.T.S. to help you know when to initiate the conversation. H.A.L.T.S is an acronym for noticing if you are hungry, angry, lonely, tired and using substances. If you notice you are feeling or experiencing any of these, then it would be a better time to practice some self-care before having the conversation. This will help you be successful and effective.

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WELLNESS TOGETHER  
**Canada**

Mental Health and  
Substance Use Support

<https://ca.portal.gs/>

The government announced new funding for virtual mental health and their resource is Wellness Together Canada. Free counselling, coaching and self help.

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### Family Support Services monthly support groups

There is still availability for our monthly support groups. Please contact our 1-833 phone number to request information about our support groups.

### Family Support Services summer education series

Please check on line for our summer education series.

<https://www.fraserhealth.ca/health-topics-a-to-z/mental-health-and-substance-use/mental-health-substance-use-family-support-services-and-resources#.Xt6QrRpKg2x>

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## CONTACT

Mental Health and Substance Use Family Support Services

(hours may vary to include evenings)

**1 (833) 898-6200**

## **Are you in a crisis?**

Call the Fraser Health crisis line:

**604-951-8855** or  
**1-877-820-7444** (toll free)

Trained volunteers provide emotional crisis support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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