



### **Early Assessment & Support Alliance**

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Department of County Human Services  
**Multnomah County Oregon**



FAMILY HANDBOOK



# Family Guidelines

## **Go Slow.**

Recovery takes time. Rest is important. Things will get better in their own time.

## **Keep it Cool.**

Enthusiasm is normal. Tone it down. Disagreement is normal. Tone it down too.

## **Give each other space.**

Time out is important for everyone.

## **Set limits.**

Everyone needs to know what the rules are. A few good rules keep things clear and safe.

## **Ignore what you can't change.**

Let some things slide. Don't ignore violence or concerns about suicide.

## **Keep it simple.**

Say what you have to say clearly, calmly and positively.

## **Follow the Doctor's Orders.**

Take medications as they are prescribed. Take only medications that are prescribed.

## **Carry On Business As Usual.**

Re-establish family and/or personal routines as much as possible. Stay in touch with family and friends.

## **No Street Drugs or Alcohol.**

They make symptoms worse, can cause relapse, and prevent recovery.

## **Pick Up On Early Signs.**

Note changes. Consult with your family clinician.

## **Solve Problems Step By Step.**

Make changes gradually. Work on one thing at a time.

## **Lower Expectations, Temporarily.**

Use a personal yardstick. Compare this month to last month rather than last year or next year.

## **Attend the Multi-Family Groups.**

Identify and work on problems in group.

## **Follow the treatment plan.**

Follow the recommendations of all the professionals on your team.

## Table of Contents

Welcome to EASA	1
What is Psychosis?	2
What is EASA?	3
What to Expect in the Short Term	4
Common Reactions of Family Member	5 - 6
What Helps?	7
Learn to LEAP	8
Keep It Cool	9
Additional Resources	10
Family Guidelines	11

# WELCOME TO EASA

If you are receiving this booklet, chances are that you, or someone you care about, have started receiving services from Multnomah County's Early Assessment and Support Alliance (EASA). You may have a family member who has experienced psychosis or has even needed to be in the hospital. You may be feeling confused, worried, or shocked by your loved ones recent behaviors.

You are not alone. We are here to offer support and to try to answer questions you may have about what to expect.



In New Zealand, the Koru is the beginning of life. The Maori have taken their symbol from the unfurled new leaf of the silver fern. It depicts new beginnings, growth, and harmony.

## Additional Resources:

### Websites:

<http://www.psychosissucks.ca>

<http://www.gethelpearly.ca/>

<http://www.nami.org/>

<http://www.headspace.org.au/>

<http://www.multco.us/mhas/easa>

<http://www.easacommunity.org/>

### Books:

Amador, Xavier. *I Am Not Sick, I Don't Need Help!* (2007)

Jamison, Kay Redfield. *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* (1997)

Mueser, Kim T. and Gingerich, Susan. *The Complete Family Guide to Schizophrenia* (2006)

Saks, Elyn R. *The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness* (2007)

Woolis, Rebecca. *When Someone You Love Has A Mental Illness* (1992)

Watkins, John. *Healing Schizophrenia Using Medication Wisely* (2006)

Beck, Aaron T., Rector, Neil A., Stolar, Neal, and Grant, Paul. *Schizophrenia Cognitive Theory, Research, and Therapy* (2009)

## Keep It Cool:

When someone is experiencing psychosis, they may be sensitive to added stimulation including loud noises, bright colors, and intense emotions. We are not expecting families to stop showing emotion or to keep the house quiet. A peaceful, low stimulation environment may be needed to support recovery. Parents should continue to have expectations for their family member. EASA recognizes the challenges around this guideline, and is here to help support your family.

## Keep Hope Alive:

There is hope! The prognosis for someone diagnosed with a major thought disorder is quite different now than it was in the past. In January, 2009, EASA program statistics report that 85% of EASA participants have been able to stay out of the hospital since working with the EASA program. Studies have shown high success when a young person receives early intervention. **EASA participants attend college, hold jobs, attend high school, play music, date, write short stories, and play frisbee.**

## What is psychosis?

The word psychosis refers to a state in which a person experiences some or all of the following:

- Confusion or difficulty organizing thoughts
- Trouble related to seeing or hearing something that others do not see or hear
- Becoming unusually fearful of others
- Significant and unhelpful changes in beliefs or sense of reality
- Troublesome changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Problems due to increased sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells, or touch

## What causes psychosis?

There are many possible causes of psychosis, including: physical illness, drug use, trauma, prolonged insomnia, high levels of stress, and/or biological predisposition.

The EASA team works with individuals whose psychosis may be diagnosed as a schizophrenia-related condition.

Because every individual's experience is different, time is taken to identify the possible causes of the psychosis based on an individualized assessment.

Psychosis can happen to anyone. It affects approximately 3 out of every 100 young people and a full recovery is absolutely possible.

## What is EASA?

The EASA program is a trans-disciplinary team that provides:

### **Family Education Workshop:**

Each quarter EASA offers a full-day, interactive workshop for families to learn about psychosis and treatment.

### **Case Consulting / Counseling / Crisis Mgmt:**

Individual, family, or group counseling focused on achieving your goals and supporting recovery.

### **Occupational Therapy:**

We work with you to find healthy, meaningful activities to keep your day structured and to develop social and creative outlets.

### **Supported Education & Employment:**

Ready to take on school, work, or volunteering? We support you in finding and setting up opportunities as well as exploring new paths.

### **Multi-Family Groups:**

Staying on the same page as family members and other supports can be a challenge. Groups meet twice per month to work on brainstorming and problem-solving skills. Come alone or with family members.

### **Health Services:**

Nursing staff can assist you with accessing medical and dental care and advise you on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

### **Psychiatric Services:**

Our psychiatrists work with you to effectively utilize low-dose medication to manage symptoms and minimize side effects.

### **Alumni & Mentoring:**

Participants and family members can stay involved with EASA and learn to help others.

## Learn to LEAP:

Xavier Amador's book, [I'm Not Sick, I Don't Need Help](#) is a very helpful resource for families. Dr. Amador has created a strategy to help families when their loved one may be highly delusional, paranoid, or in denial about their symptoms. The LEAP strategy may be helpful:

Listen: It is important to listen to your loved one, even when they aren't making sense to you. It may be important to check in and rephrase what you heard to make sure you understood correctly.

Empathize: When you feel empathy and convey it, your loved one will feel understood, respected, and less defensive.

Agree: Although your loved one may not sound like they are making sense at times, there are areas where you will agree. Once you can find some common ground and agree, you will be able to work together rather than be at odds.

Partner: Once you can agree on some basic goals (staying out of the hospital, finding work, obtaining more independence), a partnership may be formed to work toward meeting those goals.

"When you're facing someone who rigidly holds irrational beliefs, you gain nothing by disagreeing"

- Xavier Amadore

## What Helps?

EASA staff have many written materials available to families regarding information on psychosis as well as strategies which may be helpful. The following is a very brief list of guidelines that may be helpful to you as you are adjusting to your family member's experience of psychosis.

### Self Care:

It is important to make sure your own needs are being met at this time. Just as the flight attendant instructs you to place the oxygen mask on your own face before your loved one, the same theory applies at this time. If a caregiver is depleted, they will not have the energy or patience needed to support their loved one. Caregivers need to have ample breaks and/or time away from the situation. Getting adequate sleep, eating nutritious food, and getting regular exercise may not seem like a priority at this time, but it is important to make sure you are getting what you need.

### Support:

Families often feel isolated by their experience with mental illness. For many reasons, families do not always share their situation with others as they would if their loved one was suffering from a physical illness. There are many families who share your experience. EASA provides opportunities for families to meet through a quarterly education workshop, multi family groups, and EASA social gatherings. NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) is another resource where families are able to connect with each other, share experiences, and provide support to each other. Some family members have found it helpful to have their own therapist or couples counselor to provide a safe space to vent, and to attend to their own process.

### Crisis:

Safety is the priority. Never hesitate to reach out for help.

If there is an immediate risk to anyone's safety call 911.

If there is a need for a mental health intervention: During business hours, 8:00- 5:00, Monday –Friday call your EASA worker. After hours and weekends call the Multnomah Co. Crisis Line 503 988-4888.

## What to Expect in the Short Term

EASA is an intensive transitional outpatient program and our team functions in a trans-disciplinary model where each team member is available to assist in meeting your goals.

Intensive outpatient means we provide weekly service to program participants (clients and their support system) from our office and the community. The frequency of your meetings depends on your needs at any given time.

Each program participant works with a Case-Manager/Therapist who is responsible for your care. This EASA staff member is the person to call with any questions or concerns during their normal working hours.

To start, you and your Case Manager will develop a Crisis Plan and a Treatment Plan based on your individual needs and goals. Then, as a trans-disciplinary program, a variety of team members may assist you with these goals.

Often, the EASA team provides a lot of services to start then gradually encourages greater independence as time goes on.

## What to Expect in the Long Term

We work with transition aged youth (TAY), ages 15 to 25 for up to 2 years. It is common that each person's need for assistance will vary throughout these 2 years and that each person's recovery will ebb and flow. You should expect recovery to take time. It's best to adjust your expectations based on the pace of your individual recovery.

The stress-vulnerability model teaches that recovery is greatly affected by a person's stress level and EASA teaches program participants a wide variety of skills to better manage life's stressors.

During these 2 years EASA assists with each person's unique transitional needs. For some it will be transitioning to adulthood, for others it will be transitioning from education to employment, for others it will be transitioning into leadership roles. For most program participants, transition of some kind will remain a goal throughout their time with EASA.

## Common Reactions of Family Members

Every family is unique. However, there are common reactions families may have when their loved one becomes ill.

### Helplessness:

“I’ve raised 3 other kids. When my son told me he was hearing voices come out of the wall, I was totally out of my element.

Nothing I do seems to help”

Feeling helpless is a normal reaction. Although there may not be anything you can do to make the symptoms disappear, there are some actions you can take. You have already begun by helping your loved one find supports such as EASA.

### Confusion and Frustration:

Many parents are surprised to see their child acting in ways or expressing beliefs that are totally out of character. Many families do not have any idea how to respond to their child’s behaviors. “My son was a straight ‘A’ student! He never got into any trouble.” Parents can feel frustrated, as the experience rarely follows a linear course. Further frustration can be experienced when the young person does not recognize the need for treatment. Families can also feel frustration by lack of resources available including mental health services, housing, insurance, and/or the hospitalization process.

### Guilt:

It is no one’s fault when a young person develops psychosis. However, as parents, it is natural to look for reasons behind the symptoms, and to worry that it is something that could have been controlled. Families do not cause psychosis. Although certain factors may contribute to developing psychosis (substance use, trauma, biological predisposition, life transitions), no one is to blame for the experience of psychosis.

### Sadness:

It is very normal to feel a sense of sadness and grief as you watch your loved one struggle. “My daughter had to leave college and move back home. I worry that she won’t be able to finish school.” Families feel the grief over previous goals that may not be met, as well as the change in your relationship. “It’s like she’s in there somewhere, but she’s slipping away from us.”

### Embarrassment:

Families often feel embarrassed by their family member’s bizarre behaviors. Unfortunately, mental illness continues to be stigmatized in our society. Young people struggling with psychosis may have difficulty maintaining hygiene, or may have other behaviors that bring attention to them in a negative way. “If my son was in a wheelchair, people would understand his position and empathize.”

### Anger:

There are many reasons to feel angry when someone you love develops a mental illness. It is natural to feel anger over the situation, and the fact that it isn’t fair. It is also natural to feel anger regarding the amount of upheaval the illness has created in your life. Anger is a part of the grieving process and is expected. Some parents have felt anger at their child for their refusal to take steps to get treatment. “I just want to shake him sometimes! It’s like he’s not even trying.” Sometimes families may feel anger at the treatment providers or the mental health system that is supposed to be providing support. EASA staff understand parents are in pain and welcome feedback about how we can partner with you during this difficult time.