

Clinical Guidelines for “Just the Facts – Basic Facts about Alcohol and Drugs”

OVERVIEW:

This is an optional module designed to help participants understand reasons for substance use and how it can be particularly problematic in psychosis. Relatives are also offered some tips on supporting abstinence/recovery from substance use.

Goals

1. Review information on commonly used substances.
2. Review reasons for use, especially as they pertain to person with psychosis.
3. Place substance use in the context of the stress-vulnerability model.
4. Remind relatives how they can support low levels of use.

Materials Needed

1. Educational handout: Just the Facts – Basic Facts about Alcohol and Drugs

TEACHING STRATEGIES:

- Begin by asking participants about what they know about substance use and what role it may play in psychosis.
- Normalize substance use (not abuse) in the culture; the point here is that people with psychosis are uniquely sensitive to substance use effects, even if they do not use more than others.
- Review types of drugs briefly; if the client is present and willing to talk about the impact of various drugs on his/her life, especially regarding symptoms and losses, this is to be encouraged.
- Encourage all participants to recognize perceived benefits (even if they are short-lived) for the substance use for the client—this is a way to create empathy with his/her struggles.

- Review the list of negative outcomes from substance use—make sure the ones the client has experienced are identified.
- Encourage participants to commit to as many tips for helping with substance use listed in the handout as possible.
- Encourage relatives to praise the participant for even small changes in behavior.

TIPS FOR COMMON PROBLEMS:

- Be prepared for varying degrees of openness on this topic between families; support candor wherever you can.
- If the topic arises, remind participants we do not think substances cause psychoses that last more than a month, but may combine with underlying *vulnerabilities* to develop psychosis and thus the ultimate development of symptoms.
- Be prepared to act quickly if tensions arise, using the strategies mentioned at the beginning of the overview to the clinical guidelines.
- Some relatives may be unprepared to support abstinence in the client (e.g. be unwilling to reduce their own substance use). Do not fight over this—just point out that the situation may be different for the client because of his/her underlying vulnerability, and any help is positive. Praise any willingness to be supportive.
- It may become clear that family members use together. This means the topic may need to be revisited frequently. See the point immediately above.

THE MOST IMPORTANT GOAL OF THE SESSION

Help participants to understand that, while there may be perceived short term benefits, substance use tends to make recovery from psychosis more difficult because people with psychosis are uniquely sensitive to substance use effects.

EVALUATING GAINS:

- After completing the handout for this topic area it may be helpful to assess how much knowledge the participants have retained about medications. You can assess a participant's knowledge using the following questions:
 1. Why do people with psychosis often use alcohol and drugs?
 2. What are two ways relatives can help support reduction or elimination of alcohol or drug use?
 3. Why is substance use a particular problem in a person who has had a psychotic episode?