

## Designing and Setting Limits With the Person Who Has Mental Illness

It is best to establish limits when you and your loved one are calm and clear thinking.

Unless a major transition is occurring (e.g. loved one is returning home from the hospital) it is a good idea to set one limit at a time.

1. Consider exactly what behavior you want to change.
  - Be realistic about the amount of energy it will take.
  - Make sure you are prepared to follow through.
2. Plan the consequences.
  - Use those that are appropriate to the seriousness of the behavior and those you are willing to carry out, (e.g. you would *not* want to tell your loved one that you will never talk to them again if they curse in your house).
3. Inform your loved one.
  - Be very simple and clear in communicating the limit and consequence.
  - Don't get defensive or give long explanations.
  - Give your loved one a chance to ask questions and give input.
  - Negotiate if it seems reasonable.
  - Writing down agreements or contracts often helps keep things clear.
4. Implement the consequences.
  - This too is best done when you are calm and clear.
  - It is essential to follow through exactly as you said you would.
  - It is important to acknowledge and praise any part of the limit that was adhered to.
5. Modify or revise the limit, consequence or contract as experience indicates would be productive.
  - Do this in a clear and explicit way.

Limits are extremely important. They give people a sense of order and predictability in their environment. This is especially reassuring for people whose internal world is fraught with chaos and disorganization.

Rebecca Woolis/Buckelew Houses