

## **“I’m A Teacher – How Can I Help?”**

*"Professionals ... must help the ill person set realistic goals. I would entreat them not to be devastated by our illness and transmit this hopeless attitude to us. I urge them never to lose hope; for we will not strive if we believe the effort is futile."*

—Esso Leete, patient who has had schizophrenia for 20 years

### **1. ARM YOURSELF WITH THE FACTS**

Schizophrenia is a very common illness (1 in 100). It strikes in the mid to late teens and early twenties. You need to be aware that:

- Early intervention and effective new medications lead to better medical outcomes for the individual
- The earlier someone with schizophrenia is diagnosed and stabilized on treatment, the better the long-term prognosis for their illness
- Teen suicide is a growing problem—and teens with schizophrenia have a 50% risk of attempted suicide
- In rare instances, children as young as five can develop schizophrenia.

### **2. BRING THE ILLNESS INTO THE OPEN**

- Discuss schizophrenia in class in a matter-of-fact way. This helps dispel some of the myths and reduces discrimination and injustice associated with the illness.
- Provide information on precipitating factors, such as drug abuse.

### **3. BE ALERT TO EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA**

Young people are sometimes apathetic, have mood swings, or experience declines in athletic or academic performance. But if these things persist, you should talk to the family and help the student receive an assessment.

### **4. IF YOU HAVE A STUDENT WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA IN YOUR CLASS:**

- Learn as much as you can about the illness so you can understand the very real difficulties the person is experiencing

- Reduce stress by going slowly when introducing new situations
- Check the student's cognitive assessment, and help set realistic goals for academic achievement and extra-curricular activities
- Establish regular meetings with the family for feedback on health and progress. It may be necessary to modify objectives, curriculum content, teaching methodology, and evaluation formats.
- Encourage other students to be kind and to extend their friendship. Some may wish to act as peer supports when illness occurs and some catch-up help is needed.

#### 5. TEACHERS AND COUNSELLORS CAN ALSO RAISE AWARENESS BY:

- Holding information sessions about mental illness at parents' meetings and at student assemblies
- Setting up displays for special occasions (such as Mental Illness Awareness Week) in the school library or counselling office
- Ordering up-to-date resource materials for your library, finding current information on the internet, and discarding out-of-date literature.