Expressing Negative Feelings Directly

Highly emotional expressions, i.e. blaming, threats (especially of the withdrawal of love), and character assassinations are damaging to all, but are especially detrimental to the vulnerable mentally ill. Research even links these communications to re-hospitalization! The goal is to state calmly the behavior you are unhappy about, giving an acceptable alternative and communication a continued acceptance of the person.

To express negative feelings:

1. Express yourself when the problem behavior occurs. Don't wait until later (unless it is impossible to be reasonably calm and clear at the moment).

2. State clearly and specifically what it is that the other person has said or done (or failed to say or do) that is producing the negative feeling in you. For example: "When you pace back and forth and then spend so much time just standing and staring into space…."

3.   Tell the other person how his or her behavior is affecting you by stating the feeling you are experiencing. Be direct and honest. For example: "When you pace back and forth and then just stand and stare into space, I feel very sad. I feel uneasy, and it's hard for me to stay in the house and watch you."

4.   Request that the person change his or her behavior or ask the person to help you solve the problem by coming up with an alternative solution. For example: "When you pace back and forth and then stand and stare into space, I feel sad and uneasy. I would feel much better if you would try to do something constructive and helpful in the house. Can you think of some things that you could do right now?"

Other possibilities:

- **"It really hurts my feelings when you _____. Please stop."**
- **"I feel uncomfortable when you don't _____. I would feel much better if you would do it."**
- **I get so frustrated and irriated when you _____. I'd appreciate your helping me by _____."**

5.   Look at the other person when you are expressing negative feelings. This adds impact to what you are saying.

6.   Lean toward the person or come close to him when you are expressing negative feelings. This helps to make the expression more direct and helps the person to hear you correctly.

7.   Have a serious expression on your face, in tune with your feelings and message.

8.   Use a firm tone of voice consistent with the feelings you are expressing.