

■ Problem solving

It helps if relatives are aware of the part played by stress in schizophrenia and of the vicious circle of pressure from relatives, or the environment, that can lead to exacerbation of symptoms or problems. This vicious circle can be broken at several points, one of which is to develop a system for solving problems. There are always going to be problems, and although you can get useful advice from professionals, it is important that the family becomes good at solving these problems. Learning the skills to solve problems is a first step in dealing with all the specific difficulties a family will have.

■ The six stages of problem solving

- ① **Identify a specific problem:** this means defining the problem clearly, avoiding woolly terms. Avoid words like 'lazy' or 'difficult' and state clearly exactly what the problem is (eg, 'John stays in bed until midday and this upsets mum').
- ② **List alternative solutions:** sit down with your family and discuss as many alternatives as possible, for example. 'Let him stay in bed and don't worry', 'Buy him an alarm clock', 'Let him lie in late three mornings a week', 'Give him something to get up for'.
- ③ **Discuss pros and cons:** What are the effects of letting John lie in bed? How does it make us feel? Is it our problem? Does it do him any damage? Find out why it upsets mum, does she believe he could be employed if he were not in bed?
- ④ **Choose the best solution:** A compromise. John can stay in bed on Saturday and Sunday, but on certain days he will get up by ten o'clock. We will build into his day something to get up for eg, a trip out.
- ⑤ **Plan how to implement the solution:** Sally gives him a call and takes him a cup of tea rather than dad shouting at him. We'll make a written contract including John, if we all agree, and we'll sign it. Then we'll meet in two weeks and discuss it.
- ⑥ **Review efforts:** Look at how things have developed. What are the obstacles? Expect problems and don't be surprised when they occur.