

Welcoming and Peaceful Communication at St. Luke's Church

The following are some suggestions that create positive interactions with a person who is living with a mental illness or who may be experiencing mental health symptoms. We are a welcoming and inclusive place that encourages peaceful interaction with all our neighbors and parishioners.

- Relax, stay calm. If the person seems upset, become even calmer.
- Focus on the person as a complete person, not an illness or symptom.
- People with mental illness are no more likely to behave violently than the rest of the population. This is a myth that further serves to stigmatize and oppress people dealing with mental health issues.
- Remember that people with mental illnesses have likely experienced significant prejudice, discrimination, and misunderstanding --*Make this a different experience.*
- Be patient and allow enough time for the person to communicate.
- If you need to redirect someone, use a firm, low tone of voice. If possible, take the conversation a few steps away from others, but not to an isolated area.
- Do not yell, use foul language, or label the person (a trouble-maker, crazy, etc.).
- Use "I" statements—not accusations. ("I would like for you to please keep your voice down, so everyone can feel comfortable and safe here.")
- Give the person more personal space—do not come up from behind, touch the person, or stand over the person. If they are sitting, get on eye level.
- Focus on the person, not on any personal attacks they may use that could cause you to become angry. Resist the urge to defend yourself. Do not get into a power struggle—it will only make matters worse.
- If the person feels personally attacked or wronged by you, apologize briefly and then try to redirect the conversation in a positive direction.
- Be clear that everyone is welcome at St. Luke's, but that verbal, physical, or other violence, including threats is not allowed. Repeat this as much as necessary. If it continues, calmly let the person know that they are welcome as long as they are non-violent and not using threats or other abusive language.
- It is o.k. to validate or reflect that you hear that the person is upset/angry—sometimes this helps the person feel heard. Ask if they are willing to talk about a possible solution.
- Do not threaten the person or resort to other intimidation tactics.
- Do not try to talk someone out of a delusional belief, thought or other false statement. Do not try to explain it away, minimize or make fun of it. Instead, be willing to empathize and help the person find a way to feel more comfortable.
- Help the person redirect their behavior by distraction or by helping others (engaging in worship, helping pick up towels or keeping their voice down so others are not upset).
- Use non-judgmental language. Avoid words like "paranoid" that can be seen as labeling.
- Remember that the fact that some thoughts or experiences may not be based in reality does not mean that the person is dangerous, untrustworthy or prone to violence.
- Remember that an adult with a mental illness has the life experience of an adult. Do not refer to them as "like a child" or speak as if they were children.
- Avoid having favorites or giving the impression of inequality. Do not bend the rules for certain people and not others—people are sensitive to unfairness.
- Reassert that everyone is responsible for keeping St. Luke's a safe, welcoming place for everyone.