



# MENTAL HEALTH 101

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## *Learner Action Guide*

### Understanding Mental Health

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#### **Mental Illness or Mental Disorder**

- A diagnosable illness that affects a person's thinking, emotional state and behavior
- AND disrupts the person ability to work, carry out daily activities, and engage in satisfying relationships (or the 4 L- Live, love, laugh, learn)

#### **Substance Use Disorder**

- Defined as meeting criteria for illicit drug or alcohol dependence or abuse.
- Illicit Drug Use -misuse of prescription psychotherapeutics or the use of marijuana, cocaine (including crack), heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, or methamphetamine.

#### **Recovery**

- A personal journey with the goals of hope, empowerment, and autonomy

#### **Mental Health Professional**

- A license professional that specializes in the treatment of mental health problem (e.g. clinical social workers, psychiatric nurse practitioners, psychologist, licensed counselors)

### Common Signs

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- Changes in psychological, behavioral and physical well being
- Common signs:
  - Withdrawal
  - Mood changes
  - Increased substance use
  - Problems thinking
  - Unexplained physical ailments or complaints
  - Decrease in functioning
- Avoid diagnosing --- just to notice and acknowledge

## Mental Health Disorders

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### Signs and Symptoms of Depression

#### Psychological

- Sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger
- Mood swings
- Feelings of helplessness & hopelessness
- Impaired memory and concentration
- Thoughts of death and suicide

#### Physical

- Fatigue/Lack of energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Headaches

#### Behavioral

- Crying spells
- Withdrawal from others
- Neglect of responsibilities
- Loss of interest in personal appearance
- Loss of motivation
- Slow movement
- Use of drugs and alcohol

### Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

#### Psychological

- Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry
- decreased concentration and memory
- indecisiveness, irritability, impatience
- restlessness or feeling “on edge” or nervous
- fatigue, sleep disturbance, vivid dreams

#### Behavioral

- Avoidance of situations
- Obsessive or compulsive behavior
- Distress in social situations
- Phobic behavior

#### Physical

- Cardiovascular: pounding or rapid heart, chest pain
- Respiratory: fast breathing, shortness of breath

- Neurological: dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling, numbness
- Gastrointestinal: choking, dry mouth, stomach pains, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Musculoskeletal: muscle aches and pains (especially neck, shoulders and back), restlessness, tremors and shaking, inability to relax

### Psychosis

- Psychosis is a condition in which a person has lost some contact with reality
- The person may have severe disturbances in thinking, emotion, and behavior
- Not as common as depression and anxiety disorders
- Psychosis usually occurs in episodes and is not a constant or static condition
  - Psychosis is not: “split personality” or an illness in itself

### Signs and Symptoms

- Delusions
- Hallucinations
- Disorganized speech
- Disorganized behavior
- Loss of drive
- Blunted emotions
- Social withdrawal

## Understanding Trauma

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**Trauma** is an emotional response to a terrible event

**Traumatic event:** a deeply distressing or disturbing experience.

### Types of trauma:

1. Acute trauma results from a single incident.
2. Chronic trauma is repeated and prolonged such as domestic violence or abuse.
3. Complex trauma is exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature.

## How to Help

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1. Approach with kindness and identify that there is a concern
2. Listen actively and nonjudgmentally
3. Ask for help and encourage the individual to ask for help
4. Maintain boundaries
  - Show empathy but share minimal information about yourself
5. Set realistic exceptions

- Don't make promises you can't keep

#### **Approaching a person in distress**

- Remain calm and patient
- Speak in a reassuring but firm manner
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Talk in a clear, concise manner
- Use short, simple sentences
- Use a moderate pace when talking
- Acknowledge that their feelings feel very real
- Let the person know you are concerned and want to help; state the specific behaviors that concern you
- Do not touch the person without permission

#### **Active Non-Judgmental Listening**

- Maintain attitudes of acceptance, genuineness, empathy
- Goal is to listen with the intent of being able to paraphrase
- Give consistent signals that you are listening
- Model calm behavior
- Allow the person to talk about their experiences and beliefs if they want to, but do not force them
- Let the person set the pace and style of interaction
- Use non-verbal skills to display you are listening:
  - Comfortable eye contact
  - Open body posture
  - On the same level (seated is ideal)
  - Avoid fidgeting, sudden reactions, etc

#### **Reassurance**

- Reassure the person that they are safe and that the symptoms will pass

- Avoid expressing your own negative reactions
- Respect the person's privacy and confidentiality
- Be consistent
- Comply with reasonable requests

### Encouragement

Encourage the person to:

- Tell others what they need
- Identify sources of support
- Use coping strategies that have helped before
- Take care of themselves
- Spend time in a safe and comfortable place
- Discourage the person from using negative coping strategies
- Seek professional help if needed

### Handling Challenging or Disruptive Behavior

- Address it ASAP
  - They may lack awareness of the impact of their behavior so they will need specific feedback
  - If possible, speak to them immediately
- Create a safe space for you and the individual
  - As private as possible
  - Minimal distractions
  - Maintain your safety and access to an exit
- Utilize de-escalation techniques

### De-escalation Techniques

- Get help
- Speak slowly and confidently with a gentle, caring tone of voice

## MENTAL HEALTH 101

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- Do not argue or challenge the person
- Do not threaten
- Do not raise your voice or talk too fast
- Use positive words instead of negative words
- Stay calm and avoid nervous behavior
- Do not restrict the person's movement
- Try to be aware of what may increase the person's fear and aggression
- Pause, if needed, during the conversation