Understanding Mental Health

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Understanding Mental Health

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N.B: We are aware that official practice is to use the terms "service users" or "people using this service" to describe those receiving care. We prefer the term "client" and use it throughout our training package.

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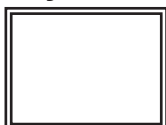
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important

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Course content.

- Understanding mental ill health.
- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Eating disorders.
- Bi-polar.
- Schizophrenia.

Learning outcomes.

- Recognise and support an individual with a Mental Health Disorder.
- Understand, recognise and support an individual with Anxiety.
- Understand, recognise and support an individual with Depression.
- Understand, recognise and support an individual with Bi-polar.
- Understand, recognise and support an individual with an Eating Disorder.
- Understand, recognise and support an individual with Schizophrenia.

Introduction

Mental health, just like physical health is important and needs to be taken care of. Anxiety and depression are the two most common mental health problems.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines mental health as:

"a state of well-being in which every individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community".

Mental health can be thought of as a spectrum with good mental health at one end and poor mental health at the other and we are able to move up and down on that spectrum. Mental health can deteriorate at any time depending on what is going on in our life.

Statistics.

Data from Public Health England and the NHS:

- *Approximately 1 in 6 people in the UK will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime.*
- *Approximately half of all mental health issues are established by age 14, and 75% by age 24.*
- *It is estimated that men are 3 times more likely to die by suicide than women.*
- *Severe mental illness can reduce life expectancy by up to 20 years currently.*

In 2015, the Government published a document, called All Our Health, for health and care professionals which resulted in a series of guidance focusing on improving outcomes in many areas of health and wellbeing, including mental health. This guidance was last updated in 2019 and acknowledges the following:

- Mental health issues are often hidden.
- Stigma is often still attached to them.
- A need exists for appropriate care and support.

This course aims to give you an insight into some of the disorders we may come across in our work with others. We have included units on anxiety, depression, eating disorders, Bi-polar and Schizophrenia. As you will see as you work through the course poor mental health is not always clear cut, and many people will present with more than one of these disorders at the same time. It is important to adopt a person centred approach, as each individuals experience will be different.

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Unit One

Understanding mental health disorders.

When our mental health is impaired it affects a lot of areas of our life including physical, emotional and social aspects. How much, or little, we are affected may depend on a number of factors including but not limited to what is happening in our life at the time, how stressed we are feeling, whether we have low self esteem, our past experiences, medication we are taking, how healthy our lifestyle is, and how much support we have around us.

Mental health generally means you are able to think, feel and react in positive and constructive ways. Mental ill health generally means your thoughts, feelings and / or reactions may become or feel overwhelmed, and more negative thoughts are present. It is often characterised by abnormal thoughts, perceptions, emotions, behaviour and relationships with others.

Everybody has times when their mental health is affected which is short lived and with a little support good mental health is restored. For some, maintaining mental health is difficult and requires ongoing support, lifestyle changes and or medication.

How might we recognise changes to an individuals' mental health.

- Confused thinking.
- Long-lasting sadness or irritability.
- Extremely high and low moods.
- Excessive fear, worry, or anxiety.
- Social withdrawal.
- Changes in eating habits.
- Changes in sleeping habits.
- Strong feelings of anger.
- Delusions or hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not really there).

For many mental disorders sleep is often badly affected, this can lead to symptoms worsening. Sleep is important for everyone to be able to function effectively.

Is diagnosis always a good thing?

We need to understand that for some people having a diagnosis of mental ill health is not always seen as a good thing. Fear of stereotypes, stigma and how family and friends will view them are all valid reasons, in their mind, for not wanting a diagnosis. For some disorders a diagnosis is important to be able to access relevant support services, but the most important thing is being able to understand and manage the way they are feeling, and a diagnosis can sometimes help with this too.

Medication, drugs, and alcohol.

These substances can lead to people experiencing some of the symptoms of mental health disorders. Some anti depressants can cause mania / hypomania in the person taking them or give a withdrawal effect when they stop taking them. Alcohol and drugs may cause highs and lows in mood and this can sometimes make it difficult for someone to distinguish between the effects of the substance on their mood and their mental health symptoms.

As we will see from the disorders covered in this manual, there is a lot of overlap of symptoms and that is why it is important we treat each person as an individual even if they have been diagnosed, because they may not fit into the general description of that diagnosis. There are some areas of support that may help any mental health disorder as follows:

Patterns.

You may be able to help a person recognise when they are heading into a episode of mental ill health. Remember that we all have mood changes and not every mood change means that an individual is going into an episode. Be sensitive, ask how they are feeling.

Triggers.

Helping to identify triggers to poor mental health, for an individual, may help them to be more prepared. Some triggers like erratic eating, lack of hydration, or poor sleep can be addressed, and in some cases removed. Others may be able to be better managed by knowing what they are.

Support.

When somebody is seeing things that are not there, or perceives things differently compared to what we see or believe, we may feel that reassuring them that there is nothing there or that their beliefs are unfounded, will help them to feel safe: in their minds it is very real. We need to acknowledge feelings rather than challenge perceptions. This does not mean agreeing that everyone is against them, or whatever it is, but accepting that what they see, believe or feel is very real to them at that time.

Plan.

If you know that someone has times when their mental health is not good, help them plan when they are in good mental health for times when they may not be. Talk to them about how they feel at those times and what they feel they need. It is easier to do this when they are feeling more positive.

Routine.

A routine, which is quiet, has structure and is unpressurised, combined with medication where needed can go a long way to helping an individual remain stable, and live a healthier life.

Reassurance.

Realising that you have a mental health disorder can sometimes cause extra fears to develop. This is a normal reaction:

- Will I ever feel normal again?
- Will I get better?
- Will it affect my job?
- What if people close to me don't understand?

Providing reassurance that there is help and support available for them can often allay some or all of these fears.

There are many types of mental ill health and an individual may have more than one. Those identified in this course give you an overview and show there are common links between them both in symptoms and ways we can offer support.

Unit Two

Anxiety.

Anxiety is one of the most common types of mental disorder, it is sometimes used when describing stress. Although symptoms may be similar, the cause of anxiety is different to the cause of stress, however stress can be a cause of anxiety.

We all get anxious sometimes. Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried or afraid; particularly about something which is about to happen or which we believe may happen in the future. It is a natural human response when we feel we are under threat. This may be at times of high stress.

Sometimes anxiety can be helpful as it causes the fight, flight or freeze reaction giving us time to prepare for how we deal with stressful situations.

When does anxiety affect our mental health.

For some people, anxiety can become so overwhelming that it begins to affect their day-to-day life. Anxiety becomes a mental health issue when:

- Feelings are strong.
- Last for a long time.
- Become out of proportion to the situation.

It is common to have a diagnosis of anxiety alongside other mental health problems such as depression, eating disorders or Schizophrenia.

Anxiety can be caused by:

- Distress about past events.
- Worry about the future.
- Learned responses from childhood.
- Caffeine, sugar, and poor diet.
- Stress.
- As a side effect of some medications.

Anxiety can affect someone both emotional and physically. Common symptoms of anxiety include:

Physical	Emotional
• A churning feeling in your stomach. • Feeling light-headed or dizzy. • Pins and needles. • Headaches, backache or other aches and pains. • Faster breathing. • A fast, thumping, or irregular heartbeat. • Sweating or hot flushes. • Problems sleeping. • Grinding your teeth, especially at night. • Nausea.	• Feeling restless. • Having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst. • Feeling like you cannot stop worrying, or that bad things will happen if you stop worrying. • Worrying about anxiety itself, for example worrying about when panic attacks might happen. • Rumination – thinking a lot about bad experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again.

Identify a sign that anxiety has become a mental health issue: