



▶ UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS1



▶ RECOGNIZING BEHAVIORAL SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS.....2



▶ FACT FOCUS : RESPONDING TO SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

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The Safety Net

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PROMOTING CHOICE AND OPTIONS IN THE COMMUNITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Understanding Mental Health Conditions

Mental health conditions, also called mental illnesses, can affect anyone, including people with developmental disabilities. In fact, there is a special term for those who have been diagnosed with both a developmental disability and a mental health condition—this term is dual diagnosis. Estimates show that between 30% and 70% of people with developmental disabilities may also be diagnosed with or have symptoms of a mental health condition and need psychiatric care. Unfortunately, these individuals often have trouble receiving the care they need. Doctors and others may wrongly think that changes in behavior are due to the person’s developmental disability, rather than a mental health condition.

What are mental health conditions?

Mental health conditions are diseases of the brain. The brain’s job is to organize our thinking, feeling, and behavior. So, when someone has a mental health condition, he or she will probably exhibit unusual thinking, feeling, or behavior.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can develop a mental health condition, but some people are more likely than others to experience this type of disease:

- People whose family members are diagnosed with a mental health condition. Some mental health conditions run in families.
- People going through stressful life events, such as the death of a loved one, changing jobs or schools, or moving. Mental health conditions can be triggered by stress.

What can you do?

Pay special attention to the behavior and mood of individuals who have a family history of mental illness, and those who are going through stressful life events. Encourage anyone who has a family member with mental health problems to be honest with their doctors about their family history. This will help the doctor monitor the individual for any signs of a mental health condition.

Mental health conditions are treatable!

With proper treatment for mental health conditions, many people are able to reduce troublesome symptoms and live their lives as they want. You can help individuals get the treatment they need by talking to the person’s doctor if you notice changes in the way the person is acting, feeling, or thinking. If the doctor diagnoses the person with a mental health condition, he or she may prescribe treatment such as counseling or medication.



For more suggestions on how you can support those with mental health conditions, see page 2 of this newsletter.

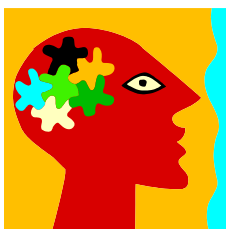
Different Types of Mental Illness

Mental Illness	Examples of Signs and Symptoms	Example Diagnoses
Anxiety disorders	Responds to things with an increased amount of fear or dread; experiences physical signs of nervousness (rapid heartbeat, sweating).	Phobias, generalized anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder
Mood disorders	Has long-term feelings of sadness, or goes from extreme happiness to extreme sadness. Diminished interest or pleasure in most activities.	Depression, bipolar disorder
Psychotic disorders	Has hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there) or delusions (false beliefs that are strongly held despite evidence to the contrary).	Schizophrenia

FACT FOCUS: Responding to Signs of Mental Health Conditions

If you notice an individual you support behaving in a way that might be a sign of a mental health condition, you should call their health care professional. When you call, be ready to report:

- The individual’s usual behavior
- Any changes in behavior that you have noticed
- When this behavior started
- How often it is happening
- Any stressors in the individual’s life that may be the cause of the behavior change





Recognizing Behavioral Signs of Mental Health Conditions

Many people can find it difficult to talk about their thoughts and feelings, especially when these thoughts and feelings are very strong or frightening, or seem strange. People with developmental disabilities may find it especially challenging to express themselves when they are experiencing symptoms of mental illness, such as extreme emotions or unusual thoughts. They may not realize that these thoughts and feelings could be symptoms of a mental illness. They may not have the ability to explain what they are going through or to ask for help. For these reasons, it is important that you, as a direct service professional, are on the lookout for changes in behavior that might signal mental illness.

Behavioral signs and symptoms that may indicate mental health concerns include:

- **Changes in sleep patterns**—excessive sleep, constant fatigue; little or no sleep; interrupted sleep.
- **Changes in appetite**—lack of appetite; being fearful of food; inspecting or refusing food.
- **Excessive worry**—excessive talk about particular daily events; repetitive behavior rituals to ensure or prevent an event.
- **Excessive anger**—threats or hostility to others, including strangers; agitation or irritability; extreme or inappropriate anger.
- **Excessive happiness**—extreme elation for a period of time; grandiose thoughts.
- **Excessive sadness**—depressed mood that is not related to loss or grief; loss of interest in pleasurable activities; talking about death or hurting oneself.
- **Hearing voices**—stares at a fixed point and appears to be involved in conversation; covers ears.
- **Seeing things that are not there**—seems to be fighting something invisible; covers eyes; brushes unseen material off body.
- **Change in cleanliness habits**—refuses to wash; washes excessively.
- **Cuts or bruises**—accidental or purposeful self-harm.

Many of these feelings or changes in behavior are normal responses to events in life. However, if they go on for long periods of time, are affecting relationships, a person's job, or the person's health and safety, you should call the person's health care provider.

FYI: Resource Links for Better Living



For more information on developmental disability and mental illness, you can visit the following websites:

The Arc
<http://www.thearc.org/faqs/mimrqa.html>

The Missouri Developmental Disability Resource Center
<http://www.moddrc.com/Information-Disabilities/FastFacts/DDandMentalHealthIssues.htm>

Psychotropic Medications: Common Side Effects

The medications that people take for mental illnesses are called psychotropic medications. There are different types of psychotropic medications to treat different mental illnesses. Before a person's doctor prescribes a psychotropic medication, you should let the doctor know the other medications that the individual is taking. The doctor will know which medications can work together and which cannot.

Medication	Condition Treated	Examples	Side Effects
Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)	Depression	Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft, Luvox, Celexa	Stomach upset, sleep disturbance, behavioral problems, weight gain
Tricyclics	Depression	Anafranil, Elavil, Tofranil, Norpramin	Constipation, dry mouth, dizziness
Other antidepressants	Depression	Wellbutrin, Desyrel, Serzone, Remeron, Effexor	Sleepiness, dizziness, agitation, dry mouth
Stimulants	Attention Disorders	Ritalin, Dexedrine	Insomnia, loss of appetite, mood changes
Anti-psychotics / Neuroleptics	Schizophrenia / Psychosis	Haldol, Risperdal, Zyprexa	Sedation, weight gain, movement problems, restlessness
Mood stabilizers	Bipolar Disorder	Lithium, Neurontin	Memory problems, thirstiness, shakiness
Anxiolytics (Anti-anxiety)	Anxiety Disorders	Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin	Sedation, unsteadiness, disinhibition

Check out www.ddssafety.net for more information that can help individuals with developmental disabilities live healthier and happier lives!

The site is translated into Spanish and Tagalog!

...Just log on and tell us what you think...