

## Workshop

# Supporting People with Mental Illness

*Adapted from various sources including: “Mental Health First Aid Basic”*

## Depression

### 1. Recognize the Signs of Depression

- a. Low energy
- b. Loss of interests
- c. Lost confidence in themselves
- d. Feeling hopeless
- e. Difficulty concentrating
- f. Weight loss (due to poor appetite)
- g. Waking up early
- h. Feeling slowed down
- i. Feeling worse in the mornings

### 2. Understand the Effects of Depression

- a. On emotion: sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger, mood swings, lack of emotional responsiveness, helplessness, hopelessness, irritability
- b. On thinking: frequent self-criticism, self-blame, worry pessimism, impaired memory and concentration, difficulty making decisions, confusion, a tendency to believe others see them in a negative light, thoughts of death and suicide, negative view of world
- c. On behavior: crying spells, withdrawal from others, neglect of responsibilities, loss of interest in personal appearance, look unkempt, loss of motivation, slow speaking – monotones, unable to sit still, pacing
- d. Physical effects: chronic fatigue, lack of energy, sleeping too much or too little, over eating or loss of appetite, constipation, weight loss or gain, irregular menstrual cycle, unexplained aches and pains

## Anxiety

### 3. Recognize the Signs of Anxiety

- a. Have you felt 'keyed up', on edge?
- b. Have you been worrying a lot?
- c. Have you been irritable?
- d. Have you had difficulty relaxing?
- e. Have you been sleeping poorly?
- f. Have you had headaches or neck aches
- g. Have you had any of the following: trembling, tingling, dizzy spells, sweating, urinary infrequency, diarrhea?
- h. Have you been worried about your health?
- i. Have you had difficulty falling asleep?

#### **Psychological Signs of Anxiety:**

Fear, trepidation, sense of impending doom, excessive inappropriate worry, decreased attention and concentration, environment feels unreal and unfamiliar, feeling detached from oneself, speeding or slowing thoughts, insomnia, irritability

#### **Physical signs of Anxiety:**

Cardiovascular palpitations (chest pains, rapid heart rate), respiratory (shortness of breath), neurological (dizziness, headache, vertigo), gastrointestinal (choking, dry mouth, nausea), musculoskeletal (muscle aches and tension)

## Providing Support

### 4. Steps to Provide Support:

- a. **Listen** non judgmentally: do not be critical, don't express frustration, do not give glib advice. Respect the person's feelings/experience and values.

**Empathy:** ability to put oneself in the other person's place (connect with something in self that knows that feeling)

**Watch:** Brene Brown <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>

- **Verbal Skills:**

- Listen without interruption
- Pay attention
- Ask appropriate questions to make sure both people are clear

- Listen to the words and tone of voice and look at body language (will give clues to their feelings)

- **Non-Verbal:**

- Be attentive
- Keep eye contact comfortable (do not stare or avoid eye contact)
- Keep an open body position (don't cross arms)
- Sit down even when the person is standing – less threatening

**b. Encourage them**

- *Remember:*

- *They have a real medical condition*
- *Depression and Anxiety are common illnesses*
- *It is not a weakness or character defect (ie. laziness)*
- *Effective treatments are available*

- Encourage them to...

- Access appropriate professional help
  - You could help by knowing what resources and supports exist in your local community
  - You could help by encouraging them to connect with informal supports as well



“People can, and do, recover from even the most severe mental health problems. A wide variety of factors can influence the journey of recovery, including supportive social networks, access to education and employment opportunities early intervention and the quality and availability of treatments. The person’s ability and willingness to participate in treatment will also impact recovery.” - Canadian Mental Health Association