

What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid is the help offered to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate treatment and support are received or until the crisis resolves.

Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety

- An awareness of the particular needs of the mentally ill can help officers and staff better serve the public, work for efficiency, and increase safety.
- An officer or staff person's ability to recognize the signs & symptoms of mental illness can be a valuable tool when interacting an individual or incident.
- Individuals with severe mental illness are eleven times more likely to be the victim of a crime than the general population. (2005 study by Northwestern University).
- Increase access to mental health treatment will lead to decrease encroachment with the criminal justice system overall.
- Public Safety Staff often work with the same individuals across the criminal justice system.



Why Mental Health First Aid?

- Mental health problems are common
- Stigma is associated with mental health problems
- Many people are not well informed about mental health problems
- Professional help is not always on hand
- People often do not know how to respond
- People with mental health problems often do not seek help

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Specific Considerations for Public Safety

- Officers are often the first on scene or staffing a unit in custodial care
- Approximately 7% of police contact involves a mentally ill person and 10% – 15 % of incarcerated individuals are mentally ill
- The institutions with the largest psychiatric populations – Rikers Island, LA County Jail, Cook County Jail
- Depression is 20% more common than the general population for male police officers and more than twice the general population for female officers (Buffalo Police Department Study)
- Officer Suicide rates are double the general population, and in 90% of the cases, the victim had been drinking heavily
- The higher stress levels in all public safety jobs can be a risk factor for developing a broad range of disorders

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What Is a Mental Disorder?

A **mental disorder** or **mental illness** is a diagnosable illness that

- + Affects a person's thinking, emotional state, and behavior
- + Disrupts the person's ability to
 - Work
 - Carry out daily activities
 - Engage in satisfying relationships

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What Is Depression?



- Major depressive disorder lasts for at least 2 weeks and affects a person's
 - Emotions, thinking, behavior, and physical well-being
 - Ability to work and have satisfying relationships

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Emotions

- Sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger, mood swings, lack of emotional responsiveness, feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, irritability

Thoughts

- Frequent self-criticism, self-blame, pessimism, impaired memory and concentration, indecisiveness and confusion, tendency to believe others see one in a negative light, thoughts of death and suicide

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Behaviors

- Crying spells, withdrawal from others, neglect of responsibilities, loss of interest in personal appearance, loss of motivation, slow movement, use of drugs and alcohol

Physical

- Fatigue, lack of energy, sleeping too much or too little, overeating or loss of appetite, constipation, weight loss or gain, headaches, irregular menstrual cycle, loss of sexual desire, unexplained aches and pains

What Are Anxiety Disorders?



- An anxiety disorder differs from normal stress and anxiety.
- An anxiety disorder is more severe, lasts longer and interferes with work and relationships.

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Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

Physical

- **Cardiovascular:** pounding heart, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, blushing
- **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

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Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

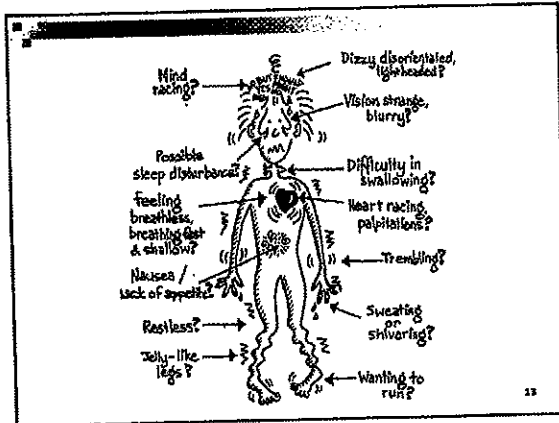
Psychological

- Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry (about past and future events), mind racing or going blank, decreased concentration and memory, indecisiveness, irritability, impatience, anger, confusion, 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

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Risk Factors

Anxiety is mostly caused by perceived threats.

- People who are more likely to react with anxiety when they feel threatened are those who:
 - ☐ Have a more sensitive emotional nature
 - ☐ Have a history of anxiety in childhood or adolescence
 - ☐ Are female
 - ☐ Abuse alcohol
 - ☐ Experience a traumatic event

Anxiety symptoms can also result from:

- Some medical conditions
- Side effects of some prescription medications
- Intoxication with alcohol and drugs
- Withdrawal from alcohol, cocaine, sedatives, and anti-anxiety medications

What is Psychosis?

- Psychosis is a mental condition in which a person has lost some contact with reality
- The person may have severe disturbances in thinking, emotion, and behavior
- Disorders in which psychosis may occur are not as common as depression and anxiety disorders
- Psychosis usually occurs in episodes and is not a constant or static condition

Psychosis

- Illnesses with symptoms of psychosis are perhaps the most misunderstood and misrepresented of all mental illnesses
- This often leads to fear, ignorance, and stigmatizing attitudes
- A cautious and sensitive interaction that is non threatening may help de-escalate tensions and increase the likelihood of a successful outcome
- Research shows that the vast majority of people with mental illness in the general population are no more dangerous than any other group in society and in fact, more commonly victims than perpetrators of violence
- A person with mental illness has the same rights to fair treatment and legal protection as anyone else

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Common Symptoms When Psychosis Is Developing

Changes in emotion and motivation

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Suspiciousness
- Blunted, flat, or inappropriate emotion
- Change in appetite
- Reduced energy and motivation

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Common Symptoms When Psychosis Is Developing

Changes in thinking and perception

- Difficulties with concentration or attention
- Sense of alteration of self, others, or the outside world (e.g., feeling that self or others have changed or are acting different in some way)
- Odd Ideas
- Unusual perceptual experiences (e.g., a reduction in or greater intensity of smell, sound, or color)

Changes in behavior

- Sleep disturbances
- Social isolation or withdrawal
- Reduced ability to carry out work and social roles

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Types of Disorders in Which Psychosis May Occur

- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder (in some cases)
- Psychotic depression
- Schizoaffective disorder
- Drug-induced psychosis

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Characteristics of Schizophrenia

- Delusions
- Hallucinations
- Thinking difficulties
- Loss of drive
- Blunted emotions
- Social withdrawal

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Characteristics of Mania (Bipolar)

- Increased energy and over activity
- Elated mood
- Need less sleep than usual
- Irritability
- Rapid thinking and speech
- Lack of inhibitions
- Grandiose delusions
- Lack of insight

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Without Early Intervention

- Poorer long-term functioning overall
- Increased risk of depression and suicide
- Slower psychological maturation and slower uptake of adult responsibilities
- Strain on relationships and subsequent loss of social supports
- Disruption of education and employment
- Increased use of alcohol and drugs
- Loss of self-esteem and confidence
- Greater chance of involvement with criminal justice system

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Assess for Risk of Suicide or Harm

- Individual may be compliant, nod and say they understand but may not comprehend
- People with mental illness have 7 times more contact with police officers during their lifetimes than the person with out a mental illness
- They may behave in unusual ways that draw the attention of others (posturing, laughing, staring)
- They may not readily recognize or understand the badge, vehicle or uniform
- Allow yourself and the individual an escape route if possible/appropriate for safety and to reduce anxiety
- Be prepared to repeat questions and commands without showing frustration

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Psychosis – How to Help

- Introduce yourself
- Use a triangular approach
- State why you are there
- Only one officer should interact with the person
- Acknowledge they may be overwhelmed by delusions, paranoia or hallucinations and fearful
- Comply with requests unless they are unsafe or unreasonable
- If acting erratically, but not directly threatening, allow them time to calm down

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Psychosis – How to Help

- Break the speech pattern of people who talk nonstop by interrupting them with simple questions, such as their birth date or full name, to bring compulsive talking under control
- Be honest. Getting caught in a well-intentioned deception will only increase their fear and suspicion of you
- Continually assess the situation
- Remove anything or anyone that is disturbing the individual
- Maintain adequate space between you and them
- Determine whether they have a family member, guardian or mental health provider who helps them with daily living
- Remember that a person with mental illness has the same rights to fair treatment and legal protection as anyone else

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Psychosis: Things to Avoid

- Do not touch the person until you are ready to take him/her into custody
- Direct eye contact
- Sudden rapid movement
- If appropriate try to explain what you are about to do
- Whispering, joking will increase the person's suspiciousness
- Don't make promises you can not keep
- Deceiving the person will increase fear and suspicion
- Raising your voice or talking too fast
- Challenging or arguing with them, about delusions – don't take personally

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Spectrum of Mental Health Interventions

Well Becoming Unwell Unwell Recovering

Prevention Treatment

Where MHFA can help

Spectrum of mental health interventions from wellness to mental disorders and through to recovery, showing the contribution of MHFA

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