



DISABILITY FACT SHEET

Mental Illness

Communication strategies

- When communicating with a person with a mental health condition it is important to acknowledge that each person is an individual and should be approached as such.
- Always remember to keep your voice tone low and unhurried.
- Give the person an opportunity to talk. Make time for them.
- Meet in a setting that is comfortable and does not cause anxiety or distraction.
- For a person who may become anxious or distracted, provide written instructions.
- Use shorter, clear direct sentences to be more easily understood.
- Use different words if the person is having difficulty understanding what you are saying.
- Provide positive feedback or comments, along with recommendations.
- Ask questions to ensure the person understands the information being discussed.
- Always provide an opportunity to answer any questions or provide further information.

Disability Overview

Mental illness or Psychiatric illness are terms used to describe a wide range of disorders that are considered to be related to the mind or brain in some way. Many conditions resulting in disorders of thought, emotion, perception and judgement can now be identified, diagnosed and treated and may include:

- Schizophrenia
- Bi-Polar Disorder
- Depression
- Anxiety

Mental illnesses may fall into two categories - Non-Psychotic & Psychotic. The common non-psychotic illnesses include depression and anxiety which involve exaggerated feelings of depression, sadness, tension or fear. The common psychotic illnesses include Schizophrenia and Bi-Polar Disorder which are known or thought to affect the brain and cause the person to lose touch with reality.

The exact causes of psychiatric and psychological disorders are not known. It appears to be a combination of genetic, biological, psychological and environmental factors. Drugs and stress may also create circumstances that make a person vulnerable.

A mental illness may have an impact on a person's behaviour, their thought processes, their feelings and moods. The specific personal experience of an illness may also vary from individual to individual. Recent figures suggest that one in five adults will experience a mental health issue at some stage in their life.

Although it is considered there is no cure for some mental illnesses, such as Alzheimer's Disease and chronic Schizophrenia, the ability to access medication, counselling and supports can assist to treat or manage the symptoms.

Implications

- A psychiatric disorder affects the thought processes, the emotions and the way a person organises knowledge (cognitive ability). For some individuals a psychiatric disability can hinder their ability to function affectively in a social setting.
- Some psychiatric and psychological conditions are recurring and appear regularly in the person's life as episodes. The person, and those that support the person will learn to recognise the signs of an episode occurring and intervene before it escalates.

Supporting a person who is displaying symptoms of a mental illness:

- Remain calm, do not panic or dramatise the situation
- Ask how you can assist the person
- Clearly explain your role or function, using clear and simple language
- Do not attempt to reason or talk the person out of their way of thinking- it is difficult to reason with a person that is unable to think clearly
- Talk to the person and help to calm them down
- Face the person you are talking to and maintain good eye contact
- Attempt to avoid personal details or asking irrelevant questions
- Assist the person to access supports or services they require