Annexure 3: Mental Disorders

1. Symptoms of Mental Disorders

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2. What You Can Do For a Person Who Needs Help

Source: University of Melbourne, 2009

2.1 Assess the Risk of Suicide or Harm to Self or Others.

People with mental disorders sometimes feel so helpless about their life that future seems hopeless to them. Engage the person in conversation about how they are feeling and let them describe why they are feeling this way.

Ask the person if they are having thoughts of self-harm or suicide. If they are, find out if they have a plan for suicide. This is not a bad question to ask someone who is mentally unwell. It is important to find out if she/he is having these thoughts in order to refer her/him for help.

2.2 Listen without Judgment

Listen to what the person describes without being critical or thinking they are weak. Don’t give advice such as ‘just cheer up’ or ‘pull yourself together’. Avoid getting into an argument with the person.
2.3 Give Reassurance and Information
Provide hope to the person. Tell the person that she/he has an illness that can be treated, and it doesn’t mean that she/he is a bad person. Let she/he know that you want to help.

2.4 Encourage the Person to get Appropriate Professional Help
You can encourage the person to consult a doctor who knows about mental disorders, and who is able to prescribe medication if necessary. Then you can follow-up by giving ongoing support to the person and her/his family. If the person is very unwell, i.e. you think they are suicidal or psychotic, and she/he is refusing to get any help from a doctor, encourage the family to consult the doctor so that they can explain the situation and get professional support.

2.5 Encourage Self-help Treatments
Suggest actions that the person can perform herself/himself to help relieve the symptoms of mental disorder such as:

- Getting enough sleep;
- Eating a healthy diet;
- Regular exercise;
- Relaxation and breathing exercises, e.g. yoga;
- Avoiding alcohol; and
- Joining support groups for women, men or youth.

3. How You Can Respond to a Person With Unexplained Physical Complaints

3.1 Assess the Risk of Harm to Self or Others
Make sure that the person is not suffering from any physical illness. If you have doubts that the symptoms may be caused by a physical illness, refer the person to a doctor.

3.2 Listen without Judgment
Spend some time talking with the person to find out the type of complaints she/he has. It is helpful to use general questions – such as, ‘have you been worried about anything lately?’ – to find out if the person is having problems that may be contributing to physical illness.

3.3 Give Reassurance and Information
Stress and worry often contribute to unexplained physical illness. If the person is able to reduce these two, it will help improve the physical condition.

3.4 Encourage the Person to Get Appropriate Help
Explain that emotional stress often leads to physical illness, which in turn can make condition worse. Treatment is needed to help the underlying problem and not just the symptoms, for example stress caused by money problems may contribute to headaches and body aches, and finding a solution to the money problems will help treat the same. Vitamins and pain killers will not help unless there is evidence of malnutrition or a painful physical illness.
3.5 Encourage Self-help Treatments

Relaxation exercises such as slow breathing may help the person manage stress and worry. Encourage the person to involve herself/himself in interesting and pleasurable activities or to join support groups. Follow up with the person regularly and refer to the local doctor if further treatment for mental or physical disorders is required.

4. How You Can Respond to a Person Experiencing Excess Worry and Panic

4.1 Assess the Risk of Harm to Self or Others

If you are unsure if the person is having a panic attack or a life-threatening condition such as a heart attack or asthma attack call for a doctor immediately. If possible move the person to a quiet, safe place. Stay with the person until she/he has recovered.

4.2 Listen without Judgment

Stay calm yourself and help the person relax by encouraging slow breathing to match your own breathing (Elaborate that they need to breathe in for three seconds through your nose and pause for three seconds before breathing out for three seconds then repeat).

4.3 Give Reassurance and Information

Explain that the attack will soon stop and she/he will feel better. Reassure the person that their symptoms are not a sign of serious physical illness. Explain that worry and fear are triggering the symptoms.

4.4 Encourage Self-help Treatments

Explain that if the person can stop worrying, it will help break the cycle of worry which then leads to panic which is a precursor for further worry. Teach a relaxation technique that can be used at times of stress (see below).

Relaxation techniques are helpful for controlling stress and worry. Many people with stress often breathe shallowly. The following technique introduces a better way of breathing that can be used when feeling anxious, and can help the person to feel calmer.

Find a comfortable position either lying flat on your back or sitting comfortably in a chair.

- Place your hands on your stomach.
- Breathe as you normally would and notice whether your hands on your stomach rise or your chest rises as you breathe.
- To breath properly your stomach should rise (as this expands your diaphragm).
- Begin by slowly breathing in through your nose for five counts. Watch your hands to help you see if your stomach is rising when you breathe in.
- Gently hold your breath and count till five. When learning you may only be able to count to three but after practice you can increase to five.
- Slowly breathe out through your mouth for a count of five while gently pushing down on your stomach.
- Repeat this process for three to five minutes.

Tips

This relaxation exercise can be practiced first thing in the morning and/or just before going to sleep at night.

Remind people not to get annoyed if they cannot do this exercise correctly straight away. It takes practice to feel comfortable.

Remind people not to breathe too quickly when doing this exercise.

Change Thinking

Suggest ways to change thinking and attitudes that contribute to worry, for example:

- ‘Something is wrong with me, I must be a weak person’ can be replaced with ‘I feel this way because I worry too much, these feelings are temporary’;
- ‘I hope they don’t ask me a question, I won’t know what to say.’ Replace with: ‘Whatever I say will be OK, I am not being judged. Others are not being judged, so why should I be?’
5. How You Can Respond to a Person Feeling Unusually Sad or Thinking About Suicide

5.1 Assess the Risk of Suicide and Harm to Self or Others
Ask the person if she/he has thoughts of ending her/his life. If the person is thinking so, it is important to seek professional help as soon as possible.

5.2 Listen without Judgment
Treat the person with respect and dignity. Don’t be critical of the person or belittle her/his feelings. Do not interrupt if the person is speaking more slowly and less clearly than usual. Remain patient even if the person is more repetitive than usual. Encourage the person to talk to you since ‘a problem shared is a problem halved’. Talking about feelings usually makes things better. Let the person know you are concerned about her/him and would like to help. It is more important to be ‘genuinely caring’ than to say all the ‘right things’. Supporting a person who is feeling unusually sad and hopeless requires patience, persistence and encouragement, and takes genuine kindness and attention. Offer some practical assistance with tasks that may seem overwhelming for the person such as fetching water or cleaning the house. Give reassurance and information that:

- They are not alone in facing their problems;
- They are not to blame for feeling sad and hopeless;
- They are not weak or a failure because have these feelings; and
- With time and treatment they will feel better.

If a person has thoughts of suicide you can help them identify reasons to continue living, such as being with friends and family.

5.3 Encourage the Person to Get Appropriate Help
If the person is very depressed she/he should be seen by a doctor who understands about mental disorders and will be able to diagnose the problem and offer treatment and care. If the person has been feeling sad and hopeless for weeks and it is affecting their functioning in daily life, the doctor may prescribe anti-depressant medication. A doctor may decide to refer the person to a specialist for further counselling.

5.4 Encourage Self-help Treatments

- Help the person to think positively about their situation.
- Help the person to identify their negative thoughts and how they make them feel. For example: ‘I will always feel miserable, nothing will change in my life’.
- Suggest some positive ways of looking at the same situation. For example: ‘These feelings are temporary, I feel this way because I am not well, talking to the health worker, taking my medicine and trying to solve my problems will make me feel better’. Encourage the person to frequently challenge negative thoughts in this way.
- Involve the family.
  - If there is conflict or violence in the family you may need to think of alternative support networks such as women’s groups, friends or a religious leader.
  - Families often need help to understand the person’s problems and manage their own stress related to the situation.
  - Families also need help to understand the importance of not being too critical or over protective of the depressed person.
If a person is thinking of committing suicide:

- Remove access to all dangerous items such as knives and poison;
- Ensure the person is not left alone—enlist help from family and friends to keep the person company if necessary;
- Seek professional help as soon as possible;
- If the person is consuming alcohol, try to stop him/her from consuming anymore;
- Listen non-judgmentally, do not give advice or contradict the person;
- Let the person know that you and others care about him/her;
- Let the person know that even though the situation seems hopeless at present, things are likely to improve—feeling bad is only temporary; and
- If the person has already harmed him/herself e.g. swallowed poison, emergency medical treatment is required.

6. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is Tired all the Time

6.1 Assess the Risk of Harm to Self or Others
Make sure the person is not suffering from any physical illness by referring them to see a doctor.

6.2 Listen without Judgment
Recognise that chronic tiredness is a symptom of a problem rather than laziness. It is important to identify the possible reasons why a person feels tired. Once the problem is identified it will be possible to work out a solution to help overcome feelings of being tired.

6.3 Give Reassurance and Information
If having poor sleep is the problem, refer to the handout on ‘How you can respond to a person with a sleeping problem’.
Encourage the person to gradually increase activity levels.
Regular contact with friends and relatives can help. There is no specific medication that by itself will cure tiredness; taking tonics or vitamins is not helpful for people who do not have anaemia or malnutrition.

6.4 Encourage the Person to get Appropriate Help
Refer the person to a doctor if you suspect tiredness is due to a physical illness. Refer the person to a doctor if she/he might be depressed.

6.5 Encourage Self-help Treatments
Lifestyle changes can help a person to regain and maintain mental balance without having to resort to medications or a therapy.
7. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is Hearing Voices, Suspicious of Others or Expressing Unusual Beliefs

7.1 Assess the Risk of Suicide and Harm to Self or Others

- Try to determine if there is any risk of self-harm or any threat of harm to others.
- A person who is hearing voices may be frightened and suspicious and needs to be approached in a very unthreatening way.
- If the person is suicidal, respond as outlined in the handout on ‘How you can respond to a person who is feeling unusually sad or thinking about suicide’.
- If the person threatens violence to others try to restore calm and safety – this is covered in the hand-out on ‘How you can respond to a person who is threatening violence’.

7.2 Listen without Judgment

- Speak calmly, clearly and in short sentences.
- Introduce yourself and let her/him know that you want to help.
- Don’t be critical of the person.
- Avoid confrontation and arguments.
- Don’t tell her/him that there are no voices or that her/his beliefs are wrong.
- Don’t pretend that you can hear the voices or agree with false beliefs.
- Give reassurance and information.
- Try to talk to the person when she/he is calm and thinking clearly.
- Be honest and try to win the person’s trust.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep and do not lie to the person.
- Explain to the person and her/his family that hearing voices is a symptom of a mental disorder (or a problem in the brain) and treatment is available.

7.3 Encourage the Person to Get Appropriate Help

Encourage the person to see a doctor to be assessed for antipsychotic medication, which is usually the best treatment for this disorder.

7.4 Encourage Self-help Treatments

- Visit the person regularly once she/he has started to recover.
- Assist the person to reintegrate into the social life of the community and into employment or other family duties.

8. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is Engaging in Harmful Use of Alcohol

8.1 Assess the Risk of Suicide or Harm to Self or Others

Urgent medical help may be required if the person is suffering from:

- Intoxication or overdose of alcohol;
- Severe withdrawal reaction; and
- Serious infection or injuries from alcohol use.
8.2 Listen without Judgment
Do not be critical of the person, as stopping alcohol use is not easy for those who are dependent.

8.3 Give Reassurance and Information
- Harmful use of alcohol is a common problem.
- Often other problems such as depression or anxiety underlie an alcohol problem and there are effective treatments for the underlying problems.
- There are three stages to overcoming an alcohol problem.
  - Admitting there is a problem.
  - Stopping or reducing the harmful use of alcohol.
  - Remaining sober.
- Provide the person with information of the harm caused by using too much alcohol.

8.4 Encourage Self-help Treatments
- Refer the person to a community support-group that helps people who drink too much alcohol, e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, or facilitate the formation of similar support groups.
- Advise:
  - Have two or three days a week free from alcohol; and
  - Eat before you have your first drink.

9. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is Threatening Violence

9.1 The best way to help is by starting to restore calm and safety.
- Do not get involved physically to stop violence.
- Never put yourself at risk; if you are frightened, seek outside assistance immediately.
- Remove any weapons, or items which could be used as weapons, from the immediate environment.
- Stay calm and keep the atmosphere as non-threatening as possible; talk quietly, firmly and simply, avoid making any abrupt movements.
- Do not raise your voice or talk too quickly.
- Do not threaten the person, as this will increase their fear and may trigger an aggressive reaction.
- Give the person enough space so that they don’t feel trapped.
- Try to get the person to sit down; it is best if you are both seated side by side rather than facing each other.
- Do not ask a lot of questions as these can cause the person to become defensive, agitated or angry.
- If the person’s behaviour appears to be getting out of control, you must remove yourself from the situation and immediately call for other people to help.
10. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is a Victim of Domestic Violence

10.1 Assess the Risk of Suicide or Harm to Self or Others
Urgent psychological or psychiatric help may be required if the person is suffering from trauma due to domestic violence.

10.2 Listen without Judgment and Do Not be Critical of the Person
Fighting against domestic violence is often not easy given Indian social circumstances and considering the fact that most victims of domestic violence are marginalised people – women, children, people belonging to sexual minorities.

10.3 Give Reassurance and Information
Also, encourage the person to get appropriate help from the police, local clubs and lawyers if necessary.

10.4 Encourage Self-help Treatments
Refer the person to a community support-group or legal-aid societies where he/she can get advice on how to deal with different types of domestic violence from a legal standpoint.

11. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is in a Crisis Situation
1. Assess the situation and the risk.

2. Involve the family and friends of the client in managing the crisis if the family of the client is approachable.

3. Support the client on three levels.
   • The primary level – where the support shall be given by the peer educators, associated field workers and other officers of your community-based organisation (CBO) closest to the client.
   • The secondary level – where all other officers of your CBO shall step in as and when required.
   • The referral level – where friendly services associated with your CBO shall be mobilised to deal with the crisis as and when necessary – local police station, local politicians, local clubs, lawyers, doctors, etc.

4. Follow up with the client to see whether the crisis has been managed effectively or not.

5. If the crisis still continues, continue giving support and look for alternative solutions depending on the situation – remember the client needs to be kept out of harm’s way.
12. How You Can Respond to a Person Who is Experiencing Stress

12.1 Assess the Risk of Harm to Self or Others
Make sure that the person is not suffering from any physical illness, if you have any concern that the symptoms may be caused by a physical illness, refer the person to a doctor.

12.2 Listen without Judgment
Spend some time talking with the person to find out the type of complaints. It is helpful to use general questions such as ‘have you been worried about anything lately?’, to find out if the person is having problems that may be contributing to their symptoms, which might be varying in nature – from sleeplessness to acute body aches.

12.3 Give Reassurance and Information
Stress and worry often contribute to unexplained physical symptoms and if the person is able to reduce stress and worry this will help improve the physical symptoms.

12.4 Encourage the Person to Get Appropriate Help
Explain that emotional stress often leads to physical symptoms, which in turn can make emotional stress worse. Treatment is needed to help the underlying problem and not just the symptoms, for example stress caused by money problems may contribute to headaches and body aches, finding a solution to the money problems will help treat the headaches and body aches. Vitamins and pain killers will not help unless there is evidence of malnutrition or a painful physical illness.

12.5 Encourage Self-help Treatments
Relaxation exercises such as slow breathing may help the person manage stress and worry. Encourage the person to become involved in interesting and pleasurable activities or to join support groups. It has been seen that building a hobby often channelises stress and turns it into creative energy.

Review the person regularly and refer to the local doctor if further treatment for mental or physical disorders is required.