

Mental Health First Aid at a Glance

Candice M. Haines, LCPC

Program Supervisor | Mental Health First Aid Instructor

Pilsen Wellness Center

chaines@pilsenmh.org

Overview

- Address myths vs facts
- Warning signs for a self-harming behavior including suicidal ideation
- Provide the tools to de-escalate crisis
- Review mental disorders for a better understanding
- Recovery from mental illness is possible

Definitions

Mental health

Mental health problems

Mental illness



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.

Impact of Mental Illness

“Disability” refers to the amount of disruption a health problem causes to a person’s ability to:

- Work
- Carry out daily activities
- Engage in satisfying relationships

Prevalence of Mental Disorders

- 1 in 17 adults suffer from a serious mental illness
- Undiagnosed/misdiagnosed
- Nearly half (45%) of the people with any mental disorder meet the criteria for two or more disorders

Barriers to Treatment

- Lack of social services/access
- People often don't know how to respond
- People with mental health problems often do not seek help
- Many people are not well informed
- Stigma is associated with mental health problems

Anxiety

- Anxiety disorder differs from normal stress and anxiety
- The symptoms of an anxiety disorder are more severe and can cause impairment in daily life (ie work, relationships)

Anxiety: Signs and Symptoms

Physical

- Cardiovascular
- Respiratory
- Neurological
- Gastrointestinal
- Musculoskeletal

Anxiety: Signs and Symptoms

Behavioral

- Avoidance of situations, obsessive or compulsive behavior, distress in social situations, phobic behavior

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

Depression

Major depressive disorder last for at least 2 weeks and affects a person's

- Emotions, thinking, behavior, and physical well-being
- Ability to work and have satisfying relationships
- Ability to carry out usual daily activities

Symptoms

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

Behavioral

- Crying spells
- Withdrawal from others
- Neglect of responsibilities
- Loss of interest in personal appearance
- Loss of motivation
- Slow movement
- Use of drugs and alcohol

Symptoms

Psychological

- Sadness
- Anxiety
- Guilt
- Anger
- Mood swings
- Lack of emotional responsiveness
- Feelings of helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Irritability
- 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

Risk Factors for Depression & Anxiety

- Distressing and uncontrollable event
- Stressful or traumatic events
- Difficult childhood, history of childhood anxiety
- Ongoing stress and anxiety
- Another mental illness
- Previous episode of depression or anxiety
- Family history
- More sensitive emotional nature

Risk Factors for Depression & Anxiety

- Illness that is life threatening, chronic or associated with pain
- Medical conditions
- Side effects of medication
- Recent childbirth
- Premenstrual changes in hormone levels
- Lack of exposure to bright light in winter
- Chemical (neurotransmitter) imbalance
- Substance misuse: intoxication, withdrawal

Psychosis

- Psychosis is a 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 can occur are not as common as depression and anxiety disorders
- Psychosis usually occurs in episodes and is not a constant or static condition

Substance Use Disorders Warning Signs

- Increased substance use over time
- Increased tolerance for the substance
- Difficulty controlling use
- Symptoms of withdrawal
- Preoccupation with the substance
- Giving up important activities (work, social, family, ect.)
- Continued use even after recognizing problem with substance use

Suicidal Thoughts and Behavior

Warning Signs

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself
- Seeking access to means
- Talking, writing, or posting on social media about death, dying, or suicide
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling worthless or lack of purpose
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky behaviors
- Feeling trapped
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Having a dramatic change in mood

Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

Assess for risk of suicide or harm

Listen nonjudgmentally

Give reassurance and information

Encourage appropriate professional help

Encourage self-help and other support strategies

How to Help:

- Remain calm
- Talk in a clear, concise manner
- Use short, simple sentences
- Speak quietly in a nonthreatening tone
- Use a moderate pace when talking
- Answer questions calmly
- Comply with reasonable requests
- Maintain your safety and access to an exit
- Do not do anything to further agitate the person

Try to De-escalate the Situation:

- Speak slowly and confidently with a gentle, caring tone of voice
- Do not argue or challenge the person
- Do not threaten
- Use positive words instead of negative words
- Stay calm and avoid nervous behavior
- Do not restrict the person's movement
- Try to be aware of what may increase the person's fear and aggression
- Pause, if needed, during the conversation

Linkage to Community Services

Types of Professionals:

- Doctors (primary care physicians)
- Psychiatrists
- Social workers, counselors, and other mental health professionals
- Drug and Alcohol Specialists
- Certified peer specialists

Types of Professional Help:

- Talk therapy
- Medication
- Psychoeducation
- Other professional supports