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elearning for healthcare

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

VOLUNTEER INDUCTION

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health problems can affect anyone of any age - from children to the very old.

Different mental health problems are more likely at different stages of life.

For example, young people are more likely to have worries about their body image, whereas older people are more likely to have memory problems.

There are lots of different types of mental health problems.

Some examples of common mental health problems are:

Some people feel very sad and low in mood for more than two weeks. This is called **depression**

Some people get more worried than is usual. This is called **anxiety**

Memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language, severe enough to affect daily life. This is called **dementia**

Other mental health problems include addiction and eating disorders, amongst others.

What Causes Mental Health Problems?

We do not know exactly what causes all mental health problems; however, we do know that some factors make a mental illness more likely.

Changes in the environment

Substance misuse

Being physically unwell can be associated with a mental health problem

Mental health problems sometimes run in families (this is called **genetic association**)

Having a learning disability

EFFECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Mental health problems can affect people in different ways

Some people might:

- Have very little energy and sleep a lot
- Have more energy and be more active than usual
- Stop eating or eat too much
- Change their behaviour, for example, they might be more irritable than usual
- Worry more than usual, or have unusual thoughts, including wanting to hurt themselves

Some mental health problems may last for a long time, for example, bipolar disorder.

However, about half of people with common mental health problems are no longer unwell after 18 months.

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Can you match the example symptoms to the illness?

1. Low mood / depression
2. Dementia
3. Phobia
4. Anxiety
5. Anorexia Nervosa

A. Not eating because of worries about being fat, when in reality the person's body weight is very low

B. Being scared of spiders

C. Worrying all the time about what people think of them

D. Forgetfulness and memory problems

E. Feeling hopeless and worthless

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

It is widely recognised that physical health and mental health should be treated equally. This is important, as physical and mental health problems are often linked.

People with poor physical health are at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems.

People with poor mental health are more likely to have poor physical health.

TREATMENTS

The choice of treatment varies from individual to individual, here are some examples:

- Removing a trigger factor - reducing stress.
- Practical support - receiving help with finding a job.
- Self-help - learning breathing exercises to help with relaxation.
- Talking therapy - with a trained professional.
- Medication - these can help to improve some symptoms, for example an antidepressant may lift someone's mood.

Mental illness is treatable

How Volunteers can Support Someone with a Mental Illness

Sometimes volunteers can be unsure how to best support someone with a mental illness. You do not need to be an expert to provide good support to someone with a mental health problem.

Follow these simple principles:

- Allow enough time for a conversation where possible
- Listen actively and communicate clearly
- Ask how you can help
- Have a non-judgemental attitude; do not make assumptions
- Be aware of the whole person - they are not just a mental health diagnosis
- When relevant, seek support from your volunteer coordinator

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

The following would be helpful when supporting someone with a mental health problem -

Encourage a healthy diet and regular exercise

Encourage them to seek support from their GP

Allow enough time for a conversation where possible. Ask how you can help them, listen actively and communicate clearly. If the individual is known to a mental health team, try to speak with them to find out what they like and do not like.

MYTH BUSTING

There are a lot of myths about individuals with mental health problems.

Myth: Individuals with mental health problems are always dangerous

Fact: The majority of violent crime is committed by individuals without a mental health problem. Individuals with mental health problems are more likely to be attacked than attack.

Myth: Mental illness is a sign of weakness and failure

Fact: Mental illness is common and can affect anyone, it is not a sign of weakness and failure.

Myth: It is not possible to treat a mental health problem

Fact: There is a wide variety of evidence-based treatments for mental health illnesses.

DEMENTIA

The term 'dementia' is used to cover many different conditions that affect the brain.

Alzheimer's is just one type of dementia.

People suffering with dementia have problems with 'cognitive functions' - this means how they remember things and how to do them. This often means they have problems with their:

- Memory
- Thinking
- Communicating
- Decision making

UNDERSTANDING DEMENTIA

Someone suffering from dementia may sometimes feel confused, frustrated and frightened.

A common symptom is short-term memory loss - the individual finds it difficult to remember recent events or conversations.

This can lead to them repeating stories or asking the same question over and over again.

CAUSES OF DEMENTIA

There are many types of dementia and many different causes.

The two most common types are Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

Alzheimer's is caused by a bad protein developing in the brain. This causes damage to brain cells and their connections. No one yet fully understands why this happens and why it affects some people and not others.

Vascular dementia is caused by oxygen failing to get to the brain cells as a result of problems with the blood supply (the vascular system).

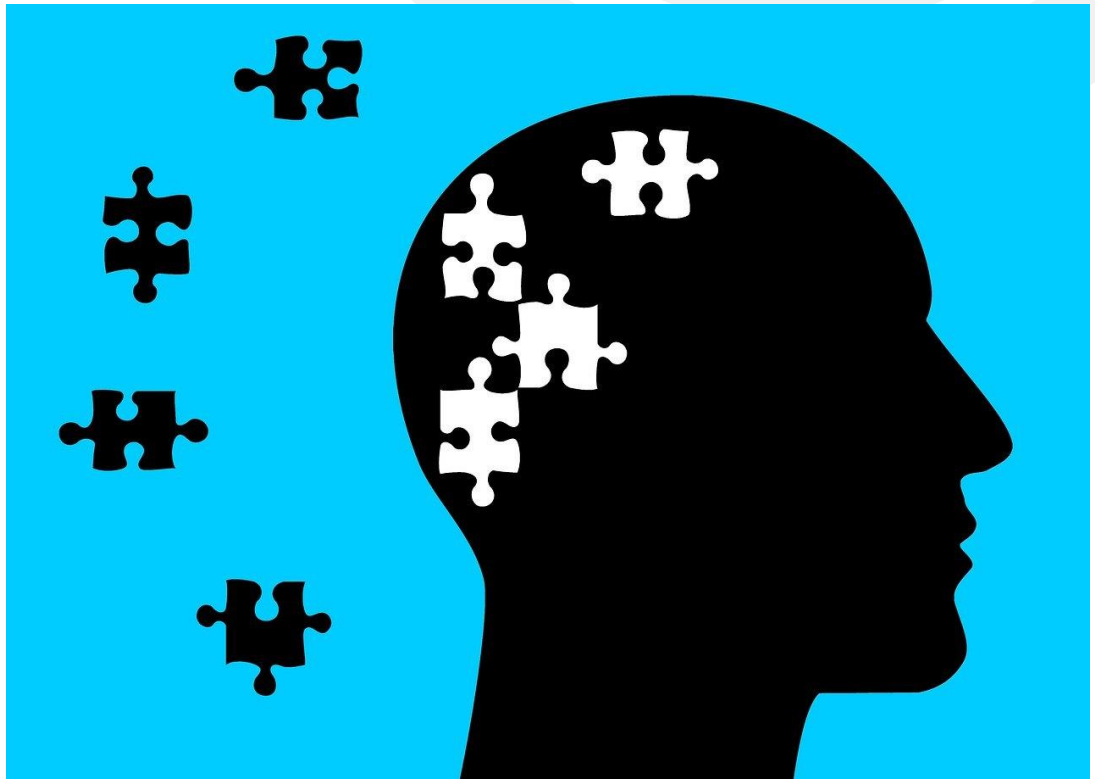
SYMPTOMS

- Although the symptoms of each type of dementia are different, all types of dementia are progressive.

- This means that individuals experience a gradual decline in their thinking, processing and remembering skills.

- How gradual and how serious this is varies in each individual and will be affected by the care and support they have.

Dementia is often thought to be a condition that only affects older people; however, dementia can affect anyone at any age. Individuals with learning disabilities are more likely to experience dementia at an early age.



LEARNING DISABILITIES

- A learning disability is a result of brain development being affected before birth, during birth or in a person's childhood.
- An individual with a learning disability may have difficulty understanding information, learning new skills, communicating and living independently.
- The experience of living with a learning disability varies depending on whether it is mild, moderate or severe.
- People with a mild learning disability may only need a little support to be independent while someone with a severe learning disability may not be able to communicate verbally and may need constant specialist support.
- Individuals may have other physical and sensory conditions alongside their learning disability and may have difficulty responding to feelings and emotions. They may express themselves in ways that others find difficult to understand which can in turn affect how others see and respond to them. In most cases living with a learning disability will have a lifelong impact but this will vary depending on the type of learning disability.

Unlike someone with a physical disability, you cannot always tell who has a learning disability just by looking at them.

CAUSES OF LEARNING DISABILITIES

Learning disabilities can result from a number of causes, but the particular cause in any given person is not always known. Causes can include:

- Genetic conditions such as trisomy 21 which happens as a result of an extra chromosome. This leads to impairments in both cognitive ability and physical growth that range from mild to moderate developmental disabilities
- Complications during birth which can lead to lack of oxygen which impedes the baby's development
- Illness or injury in childhood which has affected the brain, such as meningitis

PROMOTING POSITIVE ATTITUDES

There is a lot of stigma linked to living with a mental health need, dementia or learning disability.

This can create feelings of loneliness or being left out in society.

It is important that you demonstrate a positive attitude towards all those living with mental health needs, dementia and learning disabilities. You can do this by :

- Helping reduce the stigma by making sure individuals are not isolated in social situations
- Identifying and building on an individual's skills and abilities
- Providing opportunities for individuals to feel empowered and in control

Reporting Concerns

There may be situations in your role as a volunteer where you feel that an individual's needs are not being met.

As you have a duty of care to this individual, you must report your concerns to your volunteer coordinator.

Case study:

James is a 36-year-old man who has severe anxiety and depression. As a volunteer, you visit James twice a week to spend time with him and you often take him out to visit different places in the local area.

The past month, James has not wanted to leave the house and is refusing to go anywhere with you. When you talk to him, he tells you he no longer feels like he can go outside and prefers to stay in the house where he is safe. He hasn't left the house in 6 weeks.

James' mental health needs have clearly changed, and he may require more support. As a volunteer, you must contact your volunteer coordinator and explain your concerns. Your volunteer coordinator will then raise it with the appropriate authorities.

KEY POINTS

- Mental illness is common. One in four people in the United Kingdom is likely to experience a mental illness during their lifetime
- Mental health problems include a diverse range of illnesses, symptoms and treatments
- Mental illness is treatable. There is a wide variety of treatment options, the choice of which will depend on the type and severity of the illness and person's preference
- Mental illness and physical illness are often linked
- A wide variety of support services for individuals with mental health problems is available from the NHS, Social Services and the voluntary sector
- All volunteers can help to support individuals with a mental health problem by ensuring that they treat the individual with respect, allow sufficient time, communicate clearly and seek help from their volunteer coordinator

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THANK YOU!

The content of this training was developed by NHS England, E-Learning for Healthcare and has been adapted by **Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust**, to provide an accessible format, ensuring that all volunteers have the same basic learning when they start in their role.