Agenda

Overview of mental health issues
Common reactions to mental illness
How to be supportive
How to respond to suicidal thoughts
Facts About Mental Health

• 1 in 5 people will experience some type of mental health issue

• 1 in 25 will experience a serious mental illness that will substantially impact their work performance and capacity to function in life

• Mental illnesses are more common than cancer, diabetes or heart disease

• About 50% of people think about taking their own life at some point
Definition of Mental Health

- Ability to enjoy life
- Ability to have a productive life
- Ability to achieve work/life balance
- Ability to cope with stressors
- Ability to adapt to sudden changes
- Having self-awareness and the ability to regulate emotions
- Having resilience to deal with distress
Signs of Possible Problems

- Persistent anxiety, depressed or irritable mood
- Highly reactive mood – e.g. happy then angry then sad
- Withdrawn and isolative
- Lethargic, unable to self motivate
- Deterioration of personal hygiene
- Using illegal drugs or alcohol at work
- Interpersonal problems and/or excessive conflicts
- Bizarre and/or irrational thinking
- Antisocial acts – stealing, lying, threatening or intimidating behaviors
- Suicidal thoughts and gestures
Common Responses to Illness

Confusion and Fear – avoidance

Judgement – behaving dismissively, gossiping, exclusion

Frustration and Anger – blaming, conflict, disrespectful behavior

Compassion – support and possible enabling
Confusion and Fear

“What happened? Why are they behaving that way? Is it something I did? Will I make it worse by talking to them?”

- You don’t know what to do and you fear the consequences of getting involved
- Strong emotions and unusual behaviors cause immediate distress in most people

People seek explanations:

“Why is this happening? Who is to blame? When will someone do something to fix this? Why isn’t anyone doing something about this?”

- Ask instead: “What can I do in this situation? How can I use my skills to ease the tension?”
- “What” or “How” questions promote problem solving responses
Judgement

“If that were me, I’d never do that! They should be able to control themselves.”

• Signs
  - Being dismissive of someone, complaining, gossiping

• Why it happens:
  - Ignorance of that person’s situation or what they are experiencing
  - Unrealistic expectations of the other person
  - A belief in your superiority to the other person
  - A belief that you don’t need to learn anything else
  - A belief that you can’t really help the situation
Let Go of Judging

- Be aware of doing it
- Ask yourself:
  - “What expectations do I have that are unrealistic?”
  - “What can I guess about what the other person is really going through?”
  - “What do I appreciate about the other person?”
  - “Was there a time when I was going through something similar?”
  - “How can I help? What does this person need?”
Frustration and Anger

“They are behaving that way just to get a rise out of me!”

- Personalizing their actions, they are doing it intentionally
- Recognize it’s not personal
- Their behavior is an extension of their own problems
- You just happen to be the person that they are interacting with at moment
- Ask yourself:
  - “Why would a reasonable person behave this way?”
Compassion

“*I can imagine this must be difficult for them.*”

- Compassion is a product of empathy with someone who is in pain
- Be supportive but recognize you cannot fix the problem or relieve their pain
  - Don’t argue about how bad things are or challenge expressions of hopelessness
  - Don’t insist that depression or sadness are the wrong feelings to be experiencing
  - Don’t expect to “cheer up” a depressed person
  - Don’t become angry even though your efforts may be resisted or rejected
  - Avoid critical or shaming statements
  - Avoid becoming an enabler by taking on their responsibilities or covering up for performance issues
Comments to Avoid

- Don’t offer a pep talk
- Resist telling them how strong they are
- Statements that begin with "You should" or "You will."
- Don’t try to be profound:

  - “Don’t cry! You’ll be fine.”
  - “I know how you feel.”
  - “God will never give you more than you can handle.”
  - “I’ve been there.”
  - “Be strong for...”
  - “Look at what you have to be thankful for.”
  - “There is a reason for everything.”
Appropriate Comments

- “I wish I had the right words.”
- “How are you feeling?”
- “I’m here for you.”
- “Although I can’t know exactly how you feel, I understand how difficult this must be for you.”
- “We all need help at times like this, I’d like to help.”
- “Would you like to talk?”
Being Supportive

- **Listen**: acknowledge feelings of sadness, grief, anger and frustration
- Emphasize that professional help is available as needed
- Stress confidentiality
- Be supportive of counselor or doctor suggestions
- Take seriously any suggestion or talk of suicide
Warning Signs of Suicide

- Talking or writing about death or dying or making comments like “What’s the point of living?” “Life is meaningless” or “No one would miss me if I were gone”
- Threatening suicide
- Seeking lethal means such as saving pills, buying or asking to borrow a gun
- Giving away possessions
- Asking about details of their life insurance policy, especially as it relates to cause of death
- Showing interest in end-of-life affairs such as making a will or discussing funeral preferences
What to Do

If someone is thinking about suicide, the situation must be taken seriously!

- **Ask** – ask the person about suicidal thoughts
- **Agreement** – get their agreement to accept help
- **Arrange** – help them to connect with resources
Maria

Your friend Maria hasn’t been her usual self the past couple of months:

• Her appearance has become disheveled and she’s not as animated as she once was.
• She hasn’t been sleeping well and barely eats.
• You’ve asked her before how she’s doing and her usual reply is, “Eh, I’m ok.”
• You’re worried about Maria and want to help.

What would you do?
Self Care: What to Do?

- Acknowledge your emotional stress and its impact - talk to self, write and/or talk with others about your experience
- Breathe and relax – develop a routine
- Connect with others socially – find a way to help others
- Maintain your normal routine – don’t become isolative or avoidant
- Take care of your physical wellbeing – exercise, sleep adequately, drink in moderation
- Focus on accomplishing objectives:
  - “What do I want to accomplish today? What is the obstacle?”
- Speak up on your own behalf – be assertive about your rights/needs
- Seek professional help
Final Comments

• Be aware of your emotional reactions
• Seek counseling for yourself to better equip you with working with others who may have mental illness
• Mental health issues can and should be addressed openly and respectfully
• Confidential resources are available to all employees in addressing personal issues
• Open communication prevents stigmatization and creates a supportive work environment
Thank You for Attending

Your single source for confidential support, expert information and valuable resources, when you need it the most.

Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
Online: guidanceresources.com