

MIND HEALTH

Introduction to Mental Health and Stigma

Resources Guide

The Direct Action Project @ The Peel has developed a suite of activities and accompanying resources to help you raise awareness about mental health in your organisation. We regularly use these in the workshops we deliver, to help stimulate discussion about mental health and stigma. The activities may be used on their own, or you may want to put several together to create a workshop. You may want to change the activities to suit the needs of your organisation, though we urge that you check all mental health information you share with others for accuracy.

The Direct Action Project has worked hard to ensure all information given is clear and correct. Please contact us with any questions and improvement suggestions, or if you spot any inaccuracies.

Swot Up! We recommend enhancing or refreshing your own understanding about mental health before facilitating these activities with others.

Recommended reading includes:-

- Direct Action Project's Mind Health pink booklet – download it from <http://www.peelinstitute.org.uk>
- The mental health charity MIND's information pages: www.mind.org.uk/mentalhealthA-Z
- Islington's iCope website: www.icope.nhs.uk

FREE recommended training includes:-

- Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) / Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHA). This excellent 2-day training is for anyone living, working, studying or volunteering in Islington. Delivered by the charity Rethink Mental Illness. www.rethink.org.uk/islingtonmhfa / 020 7840 3086
- Direct Action Project's 3-hour mental health awareness for professionals working with young people or parents in Islington. Sessions can be tailored to meet the needs of your staff and volunteers. admin@peelinstitute.org.uk / 020 7837 6082

Workshop Planning Support To help you plan a workshop or interactive presentation we've included a sample power point presentation and workshop plan – download them from www.peelinstitute.org.uk.

Getting Started: Mental Health Definitions

Discussing definitions of 'mental health' can be a very useful way to start or conclude any of the activities.

Suggested Definition 1 'Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. There are times when everyone feels stressed or unhappy. Generally these bad times pass, but sometimes they do not go away and we might need to seek help. Most people fully recover from mental health problems.' NHS Islington, April 2011

Discussion question What do you think about this statement? 'Recovery' can trigger interesting discussions. Recovery means different things to different people; for some it involves taking medication long term and/or engaging with mental health or counselling services. For other people recovery involves looking after their personal mental health through non-medical means. Many people can recover from mental health problems if they get the right support – the earlier support is accessed the better.

Suggested Definition 2 'Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.' World Health Organisation, updated August 2014

Discussion question What do you think about this statement? These two definitions of 'mental health' are very different. Which do you prefer and why? How else might you define 'mental health'?

The Activities

1. Exploring Emotions (activities 1 & 2)

Activity Aim

To introduce the concept that everyone has a state of mental health with ups and downs, sometimes called the 'mental health continuum'.

How it works

Place emotions cards around the room. Give everyone a sheet of coloured stickers. Invite people to put stickers on each emotion they have experienced over the last few days or week. Alternatively use the Exploring Emotions sheet to tick the emotions experienced – this is better suited to large groups.

Summary

Look at the cards to see which have the most and the least stickers. Explain the exercise in terms of good and poor mental health / the mental health continuum, stressing that we all have a state of mental health and that it is natural to experience changes in mood and emotions.

However if low feelings continue for some time (a rough guide is a fortnight or more), particularly if they outweigh positive emotions experienced and/or prevent you from doing everyday activities, then it is advisable to seek support.

Recommended

We recommend that this exercise is followed by a discussion about types of support available, including things people can do to look after their own mental / emotional health and where to access free and low cost counselling (youth and adult). The Direct Action Project's *Mind Health* booklet lists some local and national support services. We also recommend completing Happiness Promise Cards after this activity, which are designed to encourage people to look after their own mental / emotional health.

Emotions Cards (as used in this activity)

- Happy
- Sad
- Angry
- Excited
- Stressed
- Calm
- Fear
- Coping

2. What is Mental Health?

Activity Aim

To introduce the concept that everyone has a state of mental health, with ups and downs, sometimes called the 'mental health continuum'.

How it Works

Stick happy and sad faces pictures on the walls. Give each participant 2 post-its. Ask them to each write or draw something in their life that makes them feel good / happy / lifts their mood, e.g. playing sport, listening to music, phoning friends etc. Use the 2nd post-it to write something that usually makes them feel sad / angry or another negative emotion, e.g. arguing with family or worrying about money. Stick each post-it on the appropriate smiley and sad face signs.

Summary

Read out some of the post-its. Explain the exercise in terms of good and poor mental health / mental health continuum, stressing that we all have a state of mental health and that it is natural to experience changes in mood and emotions. However if low feelings continue for sometime (a rough guide is a fortnight or more), particularly if they outweigh positive emotions experienced and/or prevent you from doing everyday activities, then it is advisable to seek support.

Recommended

We recommend that this exercise is followed by a discussion about types of support available, including things people can do to look after their mental / emotional health and where to access free and low cost counselling (youth and adult). The Direct Action Project's Mind Health pink booklet lists some local and national support services. We recommend completing Happiness Promise Cards after this activity, which are designed to encourage people to look after their own mental / emotional health.

3. Mental Health Problem Triggers (Ladder Game)

Activity Aim

To encourage discussion about issues and situations which may trigger mental health problems in some people.

How it Works

In pairs or small groups place the trigger signs in a vertical list (or ladder shape) with the least likely trigger at the top and the most likely at the bottom. Encourage participants to discuss the reasons for their top and bottom choices. Don't forget to print and cut up the list of potential triggers, as well as the Ladder sheet.

It is important to stress that there are no right or wrong answers to this activity – potential triggers vary widely between individuals. None of the triggers listed mean that someone will definitely experience a mental health problem, though it may mean they are at higher risk if they don't take steps to look after their emotional health.

Recommended

We recommend that this exercise is followed by a discussion about what to do if someone you know is experiencing mental health problems or if you're worried about a friend. The Direct Action Project's Mind Health pink booklet lists some local and national support services. We also recommend completing Happiness Promise Cards after this activity, which are designed to encourage people to look after their own mental / emotional health.

Trigger cards (as used in this activity):-

- School, college or work stress
- Playing favourite computer games most nights
- Lots of arguments at home or with friends
- Smoking skunk (strong marijuana)
- If someone in your family has mental health problems
- Having a long term physical health condition
- Being bullied at school, college or work
- Receiving abuse / nasty comments on social media

- Feeling angry a lot
- Not sleeping much

4. Types of Mental Health Problems (Ladder Game)

Activity Aim

To encourage discussion about different types of mental health problems.

How it Works

In pairs or small groups place the trigger signs in a vertical list (or ladder shape), with the least serious types of mental health problems at the top and the most serious at the bottom.

Encourage participants to discuss the reasons their top and bottom choices.

It's important to stress that there are no right or wrong answers to this activity – the degree to which people experience mental health problems of all types can vary significantly. Don't forget to print and cut up the list of mental health problems, as well as the Ladder sheet.

Recommended

We recommend that this exercise is followed by a discussion about what to do if someone you know is experiencing mental health problems, or if you're worried about a friend. The Direct Action Project's Mind Health pink booklet lists some local and national support services. We also recommend completing Happiness Promise Cards after this activity, which are designed to encourage people to look after their own mental / emotional health.

Mental Health Problems cards (as used in this activity)

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder (previously called manic depression)
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Eating problems
- Psychosis
- Drug-induced mental health problems (i.e. caused by recreational / street drugs)

5. Signs, Symptoms and Triggers (2 activities)

There are two different Signs, Symptoms and Triggers activities:-

1. Anxiety, depression and stress – recommended as an introductory type activity
2. Anxiety/ depression, bi polar disorder and psychosis – recommended as a more in-depth activity.

Activity Aim

- The overall aim of this activity is to encourage discussion about mental health problems – it is not a test!
- To identify types of behaviour and emotions commonly experienced with some mental health problems.
- To encourage discussion about common mental health problems.
- To recognise that we can all identify with some symptoms.
- To identify stress as a potential trigger for all types of mental health problems.

Important note Symptoms that people experience can vary widely from person to person. This activity introduces some symptoms commonly experienced by many people but it should not be viewed as an official or definitive list of symptoms.

On their own these symptoms are not necessarily signs of mental ill health. However if someone is experiencing several symptoms, and / or if they are interfering with daily life, then it is a good idea to seek professional support.

Stress is a potential trigger for mental health problems but it's not a symptom; stress on its own does not indicate mental health problems. 'Stress' is included in this activity to highlight the relationship between everyday stress and mental health. It's also included to highlight the importance of looking after our personal wellbeing / mental health.

How it Works

In pairs or small groups match possible symptoms to mental health problems by placing the symptom cards on the correct / most likely condition circles on the Venn Diagram. Cards may be placed on the overlapping spaces. Make sure that you leave time for a discussion about this activity. Don't forget to print and cut up the relevant symptoms lists, as well as the Venn Diagram sheet.

Recommended

We recommend that this exercise is followed by a discussion about what to do if someone you know is experiencing mental health problems or if you're worried about a friend. The Direct Action Project's Mind Health pink booklet lists some local and national support services. We also recommend completing Happiness Promise Cards after this activity, which are designed to encourage people to look after their own mental / emotional health.

Symptom List (as used with this activity):-

Depression

- Not going out, not talking to friends or family
- Not looking after yourself, not eating well
- Lack of confidence in own abilities
- Constant tiredness / very low energy

- Feeling very sad / crying easily
- Finding studying or going to work really difficult

Anxiety

- Constantly feeling worried and irritable
- Sleep problems
- Difficulties in concentrating
- Worrying that something terrible is going to happen
- Feeling stressed about going out in public

Psychosis

- Hearing voices and seeing things that aren't there (hallucinations).
- Believing people are saying nasty things behind your back (delusions)
- Having a short attention span
- Unable to feel strong emotions

Bipolar Disorder

- Increased energy / loads of energy
- Impulsive behaviour, spending lots of money
- Feeling euphoria / extreme happiness
- Feeling extreme despair

Trigger (potential for all conditions)

- Stress

Stress

- Feeling very nervous about an exam or job interview
- Can't concentrate
- Feeling more irritated than usual
- Lack of confidence in own abilities
- Headache / belly ache / nausea

6. Myth Busting Quiz (True or False?)

Activity Aim

To increase awareness of key mental health messages and to reduce stigma.

How it Works

Work in pairs or small groups. Distribute the 10 true / false cards amongst the participants. Each question card has the answer on the back. Ask participants to discuss each question in pairs before checking the answers. Share the cards around – ideally allow enough time for each pair to look at all 10.

Summary

Ask if any answers on the cards surprised anyone. Are there any questions or comments triggered by the cards? You may want to highlight some specific questions, depending on the discussions that have taken place.

7. Happiness Promise Cards

Activity Aim

To highlight the importance of looking after our personal wellbeing and to encourage simple strategies to do so.

How it Works

Give each person a Happiness Promise card. Invite them to make a realistic promise to themselves, to do some over the following week which will make them feel happy / good about themselves. Invite people to share their promises with the group.

Alternative 1 – invite people to write happiness promises for each other. Alternative 2 – everyone completes a happiness promise card. Place all cards on a table. Invite everyone to take someone else's promise card, taking one which appeals to them and is realistic to do.

Summary

Stress the importance of personal wellbeing and how looking after our own mental health is a necessity, not a luxury.

End Note

We hope you enjoy facilitating these activities and using the accompanying resources. We'd love to hear how you got on! Contact the Direct Action Project @ The Peel with any feedback, questions, corrections or improvement suggestions.

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