

# About Us

#### STUDENT MINDS CAMBRIDGE

## Student Minds Cambridge is a mental health charity aligned with the national project 'Student Minds'.

Our Aims

We aim to engage with students and University staff about the subject of mental health in the University, to campaign for better provisions inside the University and, by changing the culture of high intensity terms and competitive teaching styles, we hope to promote the idea of being mentally healthy.

Our Work

We carry out our work through a large variety of actions, from hosting fresher talks to organising formals and arts-and-crafts events. We regularly meet with university staff to help implement policies helpful both to students who actively identify as suffering from a mental health problem and those that do not.

We believe our work is important because it is not unusual to experience a mental health problem. Today, 1 in 4 students are diagnosed with a mental health issue, from anxiety to an eating disorder. An even greater number continue undiagnosed. If you do find yourself in a situation, know that you are not alone and there are various avenues for help. We are one of them.

## Introduction

#### WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID?

Mental health first aid is the help offered to any person developing or suffering from mental health problems. First aid is provided to the person in need before he/she receives appropriate and professional treatment, or until the crisis resolves, to prevent further deterioration.

This guide, and mental health first aid in general, is **not** about providing professional diagnosis of one's mental health condition, nor to give professional advice and cure, but rather to offer **informal yet immediate** intervention to people in need, whether they are in a crisis or just going through relatively minor difficulties.

There might be extreme situations that cannot be handled with the skills and techniques suggested below. In that case, do not attempt to intervene if personal safety is not secured, and seek professional services as soon as possible.

## Introduction

#### ACTION PLAN, MENTAL ILLNESS AND MOOD DISORDER

Action Plan

#### **ALGEE:**

Approach the person, assess and assist with any crisis

Listen non-judgementally

Give support and information

Encourage appropriate professional help

**E**ncourage other supports

Mental Illness

A mental illness is a kind of **brain dysfunction** that affects a person's thinking, emotional state and behaviour. It disrupts one's ability to work, to carry out daily activities and to engage in satisfying relationship.

Mood Disorder Different from psychosis, mood disorders (neurosis) such as depression and anxiety disorders would bring disturbance to a person's **emotions**.

#### SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

#### Symptoms of Depressions

According to the American Psychiatric Association's DSM-V, anyone having 5 or more of the following symptoms that happen almost daily and have lasted for more than two weeks, one of which should include either:

- (a) an unusually sad mood that does not go away; or
- (b) loss of interest or pleasure in activities, can be diagnosed as depressive.

#### Other Major Symptoms of Depression

- 1. Lack of energy and tiredness
- 2. Feeling worthless or guilty when not really at fault
- 3. Suicidal thoughts
- 4. Difficulty in concentrating or making decisions
- 5. Moving slowly, easily agitated and unable to settle
- 6. Having sleeping difficulties or sleeping too much
- 7. Losing or gaining weight (5% difference within a month)

#### ACTION PLAN

#### Approach

- Take the initiative to approach the person and show your concern
- Find an appropriate time and place
- Be respectful and sincere
- Reassure the person about the confidentiality of the conversation

## Active Listening - Appropriate Attitudes

- Acceptance
   Listen non-judgementally, respect the person's feelings, personal values and experiences
- Genuineness
   Show your acceptance through words and actions
- Empathy
   Put yourself in one's shoes, show that you have tried to understand how he/she feels

#### ACTION PLAN

## Active Listening - Verbal Skills

- Take the initiative to ask questions about the person to show that you genuinely care
- Confirm that you understand by re-stating and summarising what the person has shared
- Pay attention to your tone and pace when talking
- Use prompts such as "I see" and open-ended questions
- Appreciate the person when he/she shows any positive motives, attitudes or behaviours
- Do not express your frustration at the person or be critical
- Do not interrupt the person when he/she is talking
- Avoid giving unhelpful and vague advice such as "take it easy",
   "cheer up" or "don't worry"
- Avoid confrontation unless necessary (e.g. to prevent harmful or dangerous acts)

ACTION PLAN

## Active Listening - Mon-Verbal Skills

- Pay attention and be patient
- Maintain comfortable eye contact, but avoid starring
- Maintain an open gesture (e.g. do not cross your arms)
- Allow silence, since the person may need time to think about and digest information

## Giving Support and Encouragement

- Show respect and understanding
- Have realistic expectations
- Give consistent emotional support and hope of recovery
- Provide accurate and appropriate information
- Encourage the person to look for support, such as self-help and peer support group
- Refer the person to professionals if needed

ACTION PLAN

#### Beware of Suicidal Signals

- Talking about or planning to hurt/kill oneself (e.g. jumping from height, overdosing drugs)
- Talking/writing about death, dying or suicide, or preparing for after-death arrangements
- Feeling helpless and hopeless
- Having irrational behaviour or engaging in risky activities
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Social withdrawal
- Anger, irritability and agitation
- Insomnia or sleeping too much

## Handling Persons with High Suicidal Risks

- Seek help from professionals as soon as possible
- Do not leave the person alone when he/she is going over crisis (unless your own safety is threatened)
- Try to stop the person from taking drugs or alcohol
- Ensure that the person does not have any life-threatening tools
- Encourage the person to express his/her feelings, listen with patience and show respect and sincerity

# Anxiety Problems

SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

## Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

#### Physical:

- Rapid heartbeat, shallow breathing, choking, sweating and diarrhoea
- Chest pain, muscle aches and pains
- Sleep disturbance and vivid dreams

#### Psychological:

- Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry about past and future events
- Mind racing or going blank and irritability

#### Behavioural:

- Avoidance of situations
- Obsessive or compulsive behaviour

## Anxiety-related Mental Health Problems

- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Panic disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Agoraphobia and other phobic disorders
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

# Anxiety Problems

#### PANIC ATTACK

#### Symptoms of Panic Attack

It happens suddenly, the symptoms will go to peak in a few minutes and may last for 10 minutes or so.

- Rapid heart rate
- Overheating and sweating
- Trembling and shaking
- Shortness of breath or choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Dizziness
- Feeling unreal or being detached from oneself
- Fears of losing control or dying
- Nausea or stomach pain
- Rapid changes in body temperature

## Risk Assessment for Panic Attack

- Call the ambulance
- Find out whether the person is experiencing a heart attack or panic attack
- Take the person to a safe, quiet and spacey place if possible
- Help the person to calm down and breathe normally (e.g. by giving instructions to slow down his/her respiratory rate)



## What is Psychosis?

- Losing some contact with reality
- Being severely disturbed in terms of thinking, emotion and behaviour
- (Daily) Life being severely disrupted
- Having difficulty to develop or maintain relationships, perform work and take care of oneself

## Symptoms of Psychosis (1)

- Delusions: false but firm beliefs that are unrealistic, e.g. being under constant surveillance
- Hallucinations: false perceptions that are out of touch with reality, e.g. hearing voices
- Disorganised thinking: lack of ability to organise ideas, resulting in incoherent speech
- Cognitive difficulties: in terms of concentration, memory and the ability to plan and implement



## Symptoms of Psychosis (2)

- Loss of motivation: lacks motivation to participate in social activities and for self-care
- Blunted emotions: reacts inappropriately and lack of facial expression
- Social withdrawal: loss of social skills and dear of communicating with others
- Repeated and bizarre behaviours

#### Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

- Elevated mood, more energetic than usual and over-activity
- Less sleep than usual
- Irritability
- Rapid thinking and speech
- Lack of inhibitions
- Over-confident
- Grandiose delusions
- Lack of insight



## Risk Assessment for Persons with Psychosis

#### Suicidal Risks:

- Does the person have thoughts of suicide?
- Does the person have any plans of suicide?
- Has the person ever tried to commit suicide?
- Any immediate ways for the person to alleviate the problem?
- Any supporting network?

#### Violence Risks:

- Hallucinations or delusions may lead to aggressive behaviours
- Is the person relapse?
- Is the person taking alcohol or drugs?
- Any records of violence?



### De-Escalating Skills

#### **Psychological Preparation**

- Estimate the risk of intervention
- Be patient and calm

#### Reduce Stimulants

- Turn off television, radio and anything that produces noise
- Do not stare at the person
- Avoid unnecessary body contact
- Speak in a slow, soft, calm, concise and firm manner

#### **Build Trust**

- Try to calm the person down by giving him/her a drink
- Do not argue with their hallucinations or delusions
- Accept the person's feelings of being affected by psychosis
- Agree with the person's feelings, but not his hallucinations or delusions
- Comply with the person's requests which seem unreasonable but feasible and harmless

If you fail to calm the person down, don not panic and call for help



### Giving Support and Encouragement

You are not suggested to give information to the person when he/she is having disorganised thinking. However, you can try to provide the person with appropriate information when his/her mental condition has been improved.

- Give sense of hope that the illness can be treated
- Have reasonable expectation and understand his limitation
- Encourage the person to seek professional help psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers etc.

## Taking Medications

- Medication is an effective treatment for psychosis
- The person should take medication according to his/her doctor's prescriptions
- Psychotropic drugs have side effects including sleepiness, dizziness, dry mouth, blurred vision, hand tremors, slow action, weight gain etc.
- The patient may refuse to take drugs because of the side effects. Show understanding and encourage the person to follow the doctor's instruction and reflect his/her situation with the doctor

# Depression, Anxiety and Psychosis

OTHER SUPPORT

### Support from Family and Friends

Family and friends can help by:

- Listening to the person's problems and feelings
- Reducing the person's stress and thus the chance of relapse
- Encouraging the person to get appropriate treatment and support
- Taking immediate actions if the person has suicidal thoughts
- Having an understanding of depression, anxiety problems and psychosis
- Assisting the person in developing an advance directive plan and a relapse prevention plan
- \*Carers should be responsible for observing the person's mental health conditions after treatments or taking medications and note the changes and side effects.

# Depression, Anxiety and Psychosis

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

## Where to Seek Help in Cambridge?

#### College

- Tutors
- JCR/MCR Welfare Reps
- College Counsellor/College Nurse
- Chaplain
- Porters

#### University

- University Counselling Service (UCS)
- Student Advice Service

#### Facebook Groups

- CUSU DSC/SMC Mental Health Support Community
- BME Mental Health Support Group

#### Student Initiatives

- Nightline: 01223 744444 (7pm-7am during term time)
- Peer2Peer

findsupportcam.com also has a comprehensive list of mental health resources available