

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS!

In any one year, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem, and the number is rising. Changes in society, the breakdown of families and communities, loss of meaningful faith, unremitting stress, all contribute to this.

Recently, there have been severe cutbacks in spending on mental health: groups have closed, services been reduced, and many vulnerable people are now left not well enough to work but with nothing to do, isolated and on the margins. This makes a relapse into illness all the more likely.

Churches have always been involved in the care of those with mental health problems. They can be a source of information, emotional and practical care to those who are vulnerable, and contribute greatly to the mental health of their local community..

However, there is a universal lack of knowledge or understanding of mental health issues.

Many are afraid of those who are mentally ill: they believe that they will be violent, unpredictable, unable to hold responsibility or have meaningful relationships. Some believe that sufferers are possessed by evil spirits. In most cases any of these is unlikely to be true.

Church workers are frequently uncertain how to respond to those with disturbed mental health, from a fear of getting in too deep, or of being thought judgemental. There is also confusion between mental illness and learning difficulties.

This series of leaflets is designed to help you and your church respond better to people with mental health problems, whether in your congregation or in the local community. Each leaflet will address a different set of issues, such as local resources, how to start a befriending service, who to refer to in a crisis, and how to help people access their benefits.

Signs of disturbance

It is important to be able to recognise signs of mental distress and to share this information when necessary, so that colleagues may work together and feel supported.

People are generally relieved that someone has noticed their distress, and already feel less alone.

What follows are the signs of probable mental disturbance.

Any one of these indicates a problem that needs addressing:

- Hearing voices, or seeming to talk to oneself
- A change of appearance, becoming more unkempt.
- Loss of temper for small reasons, or sudden rages
- Inappropriate comments, or rambling, incoherent speech
- Obvious, uncontrollable anxiety or distress
- Acutely suspicious or fearful without apparent cause
- Distracted and unable to concentrate at all
- Becoming more and more withdrawn

[Bear in mind that some signs of disturbance may vary from one culture to another.]

Next issue: how to keep yourself and others safe and not over-burdened, who to refer to in a crisis, and the NHS structure of care for mental health.

Useful Resource:

'Promoting mental health: A resource for spiritual and pastoral care' is a comprehensive document produced by the Church of England Archbishop's Council, the NHS and Mentality, and contains a great deal of useful information on mental health, training sessions for volunteers, suggestions for worship, and many other invaluable resources. Much of the information in these leaflets is drawn from there. It can be accessed and downloaded from the internet, but the website address is too complicated as it is no longer a current production.

Use your search provider with the title, *'Promoting mental health: a resource for spiritual and pastoral care'*.

Choose *SCMH previous work, mentality home page*

Type the title into the search section

At the bottom of the page is the download command.