

Schizophrenia (Psychotic Illnesses):

Features:

- Distortion of the individuals sense of external and inner reality
- Delusions (fixed false beliefs)
- Hallucinations (auditory most commonly)
- Disorganized thinking, speech and behaviours
- Social withdrawal
- Flat mood
- Poor self care
- Thoughts of suicide

Helpful Interventions:

- Encourage the individual to meet with the doctor regularly to assess the need for medication
- If there are children 3 years of age or older, review steps with the children that they may be able to take if they feel unsafe. This may include teaching them how to call for emergency assistance or identify a neighbour they can go to for help.
- Identify whether the individual has had any stressful life events, e.g., pregnancy, recent childbirth, substance abuse. Schizophrenia may be exacerbated by these types of additional stresses.
- Make the appropriate referral for the assessment of suicidal ideation. 20 to 42% of persons with schizophrenia will attempt suicide.
- Review “red flags” periodically which may indicate a return or increase in symptoms
- Teach about these possible red flags and how to avoid them if possible
- Obtain individuals consent to communicate with other professionals involved. Maintain regular contact with these professionals,

Bipolar Disorder:

Features:

- Cyclic disturbance of depression (great lows) and mania (great highs)
- Increased energy with decreased need for sleep
- Inflated self esteem and confidence
- Poor judgement and involvement in potentially dangerous activities
- Increased sex drive
- Talks rapidly
- Agitation and restlessness
- Grandiose thoughts and plans
- Think rapidly jumping from one idea to another

Helpful Interventions:

- Encourage regular medical follow up
- Be aware of the red flags for increasing symptoms
- Observe for potential substance abuse as a way to try to relieve symptoms

- Develop a safety plan with client and others involved
- Use harm reduction strategies with risky behaviours

Depression (Mood Disorders):

Features:

- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite disturbance
- Lack of concentration
- Sense of worthlessness and helplessness
- Potentially thoughts of suicide
- Feelings of sadness and emptiness
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Tired, listless, lacks energy
- Withdrawal from others
- Difficulty thinking clearly and making decisions

Helpful Interventions:

- Help build a circle of support for the individual (e.g., relative, friend, neighbour). Provide each individual with a list of emergency phone numbers including a way to reach you
- Complete routine assessments for early signs of depression and difficulty coping
- Teach about early signs for relapse prevention
- Encourage to meeting regularly with the attending physician/psychiatrist to assess medication
- Teach and model relaxation techniques or cognitive restructuring
- Observe for red flags such as alcohol abuse as a form of self-medication
- Encourage regular exercise
- Get appropriate immediate help if individual talks about suicide

Anxiety Disorders:

Features:

- Episodes of overwhelming fear, rapid heartbeat and other distressing bodily symptoms
- Avoidance of certain things, places or situations
- Persistent worry
- Feelings of apprehension, restlessness and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep disturbance
- Fear of losing control

Helpful Interventions:

- Encourage reduction of stimulants (caffeine and sugar).
- Teach strategies for improving sleep
- Teach and model relaxation techniques and cognitive restructuring

- Promote regular medical visits and prescribed medication/counseling compliance
- Encourage a "go slow, think small" approach to change
- Provide positive reinforcement and encouragement on each small step taken to increase their self confidence