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Mental Health and Mental Health Disorders

1. Identify seven characteristics of mental health

Mental health is the normal functioning of emotional and intellectual abilities. A person who is mentally healthy is able to:

- Get along with others (Fig. 18-1)
- Adapt to change
- Care for herself and others
- Give and accept love
- Deal with situations that cause anxiety, disappointment, and frustration
- Take responsibility for decisions, feelings, and actions
- Control and fulfill desires and impulses appropriately



Fig. 18-1. The ability to interact well with other people is a characteristic of mental health.

2. Identify four causes of mental health disorders

Although it involves the emotions and mental functions, a **mental health disorder** is like any physical disorder. It produces signs and symptoms and affects the body's ability to function. It responds to proper treatment and care. A mental health disorder disrupts a person's ability to function in the family, home, or community. It often causes inappropriate behavior. Some signs and symptoms of mental health disorders include confusion, disorientation, agitation, and anxiety.

However, signs and symptoms like those of mental health disorders can also occur when a mental health disorder is not present. A personal crisis, temporary physical changes in the brain, side effects from medications, interactions among medications, or a severe change in the environment may cause a **situation response**. In a situation response, the signs and symptoms are temporary.

Mental health disorders can be caused or made worse by chronic stress from any of these conditions:

Physical factors: Illness, disability, or aging can cause stress that may lead to a mental health disorder. Substance abuse or a chemical imbalance can also lead to a mental health disorder. Self-respect and self-worth are the building blocks of mental health. They are challenged when people

who are ill or disabled have difficulty with their activities of daily living. Such people may become fearful of the future. They may be concerned about their dependence on others.

Environmental factors: Weak interpersonal or family relationships or traumatic early life experiences (such as suffering abuse as a child) can lead to mental health disorders.

Heredity: Mental health disorders can occur repeatedly in some families. This may be due to inherited traits or family influence.

Stress: People can tolerate different levels of stress. People have different ways of coping with stress. When the amount of stress becomes too great, a person may not be able to cope with it, and a mental health disorder may arise.

3. Distinguish between fact and fallacy concerning mental health disorders

A **fallacy** (*FAL-a-see*) is a false belief. The greatest fallacy about mental health disorders is that people can control them. People who have a mental health disorder cannot simply choose to be well. It is a disorder like any physical disorder. People who are mentally healthy are usually able to control their emotions and responses. People who have a mental health disorder may not have this control.

Fact and Fallacy

Fact: A mental health disorder is like any physical illness. People who have a mental health disorder cannot control it through sheer force of will.

Fallacy: People with a mental health disorder can control it or choose to be well.

Intellectual Disability and Mental Health Disorder

Sometimes people confuse the terms intellectual disability and mental health disorder. They are not the same. Intellectual disability is a developmental disability that causes below-average mental func-

tioning. It may affect a person's ability to care for himself, as well as to live independently. It is not a type of mental health disorder. Here are some ways that it differs from a mental health disorder:

- Intellectual disability is a permanent condition; a mental health disorder can be temporary.
- Intellectual disability is present at birth or emerges in childhood. A mental health disorder may occur at any time during a person's life.
- Intellectual disability affects mental ability. A mental health disorder may or may not affect mental ability.
- There is no cure for an intellectual disability, although persons who are intellectually disabled can be helped. Many mental health disorders can be cured with treatment such as medications and therapy.

Although they are different conditions, persons who have either condition need emotional support as well as care and treatment.

4. Explain the connection between mental and physical wellness

Mental health is important to physical health. Reducing stress can help prevent some physical illnesses (Fig. 18-2). It can help people cope if illness or disability occurs. Mental health can help protect and improve physical health. The reverse is also true. Physical illness or disability can cause or worsen a mental health disorder. The stress these conditions create takes a toll on mental health.



Fig. 18-2. Social interaction can promote mental and physical health.

5. List guidelines for communicating with clients who have a mental health disorder

Different types of mental health disorders will affect how well clients communicate. Home health aides should treat each client as an individual and promote person-centered care. They should tailor their approach to the situation.

Guidelines: Mental Health Disorders

- G** Do not talk to adults as if they were children.
- G** Use simple, clear statements and a normal tone of voice.
- G** Be sure that what you say and how you say it show respect and concern.
- G** Sit or stand at a normal distance from the client. Be aware of your body language.
- G** Be honest and direct, as you would with any client.
- G** Avoid arguments.
- G** Maintain eye contact and listen carefully (Fig. 18-3).



Fig. 18-3. Home health aides should maintain eye contact and sit at a normal distance when communicating with a client who has a mental health disorder.

6. Identify and define common defense mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are unconscious behaviors used to release tension or cope with stress. They help to block uncomfortable or threatening feelings. All people use defense mechanisms

at times. However, people who have a mental health disorder use them to a greater degree. An overuse of these mechanisms prevents a person from understanding his emotional problems and behaviors. If a person is unable to recognize problems, he will not address them. The problems may get worse. Common defense mechanisms include the following:

Denial: Completely rejecting the thought or feeling—"I'm not upset with you!"

Projection: Seeing feelings in others that are really one's own—"My teacher hates me."

Displacement: Transferring a strong negative feeling to a safer situation—for example, an unhappy employee cannot yell at his boss for fear of losing his job. He later yells at his wife.

Rationalization: Making excuses to justify a situation—for example, after stealing something, saying, "Everybody does it."

Repression: Blocking unacceptable thoughts or painful feelings from the mind—for example, choosing not to think about a traumatic experience.

Regression: Going back to an old, usually immature behavior—for example, throwing a temper tantrum as an adult.

7. Describe types of mental health disorders

There are many degrees and types of mental health disorders, from mild to severe. A person with a severe mental health disorder may lose touch with reality and become unable to communicate or make decisions. Some people with a mild type, however, seem to function normally. They may sometimes become overwhelmed by stress or overly emotional. Many signs of mental health disorders are simply extreme behaviors most people occasionally experience. Being able to recognize such behavior may make it easier to understand clients who have these disorders.

Anxiety Disorders: **Anxiety** (*ang-ZYE-i-tee*) is uneasiness, worry, or fear, often about a situation or condition. When a person who is mentally healthy feels anxiety, he can usually identify the cause. The anxiety fades once the cause is removed. A person who has an anxiety disorder may feel anxious all the time. She may not know the reason for feeling anxious. Anxiety causes physical symptoms, such as shaking, muscle aches, sweating, cold and clammy hands, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, cold or hot flashes, a choking or smothering sensation, difficulty swallowing, and a dry mouth. Some types of anxiety disorders include the following:

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is characterized by chronic anxiety and worry, even when there is no reason for concern. A person with GAD may be excessively worried about health, finances, work, or other issues.

Panic disorder is characterized by panic attacks. A panic attack is an episode of intense fear that occurs along with physical symptoms, such as rapid heartbeat, chest pain, dizziness, and shortness of breath. A person having a panic attack may think he is having a heart attack or dying. When a person has panic disorder, he has regular panic attacks or lives with chronic anxiety about having another attack.

When a person has **social anxiety disorder** (social phobia), she has intense anxiety and extreme discomfort in social situations. A **phobia** (*FOH-bee-uh*) is an intense, irrational fear of or anxiety about an object, place, or situation, such as a fear of dogs or a fear of flying. Having social anxiety disorder is not the same as being shy. A person with this disorder is very self-conscious and may feel she is being judged or criticized by others to the point where she actively avoids social functions.

Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders: **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** is a disorder characterized by recurring intrusive behavior or thoughts that cause anxiety or stress.

For example, a person may wash his hands over and over again or repeatedly check to make sure the door is locked. A person with OCD is unable to control these thoughts or actions.

Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders: **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is a disorder caused by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic experience, such as being a victim of violence (e.g., sexual or physical assault, other violent crimes), being involved in combat while in the military, or surviving a car accident or terror attack. Symptoms of PTSD include reliving the trauma through flashbacks, bad dreams, or scary thoughts, as well as avoiding places or thoughts that trigger reminders. Some people who have PTSD are constantly tense, easily startled, and have trouble sleeping. Anger and irritability are other symptoms.

Depressive Disorders: **Major depressive disorder** (often called *clinical depression* or **depression**) is characterized by a loss of interest in everything a person once cared about, and may interfere with the person's ability to work, sleep, and eat. It may cause intense mental, emotional, and physical pain and disability. Depression also makes other illnesses worse. If left untreated, it may result in suicide. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) lists depression as one of the most common conditions associated with suicide in older adults.

Clinical depression is not a normal reaction to stress. Sadness is only one sign of this illness. Not all people who have depression complain of sadness or appear sad. Other common symptoms of clinical depression include:

- Pain, including headaches, abdominal pain, and other body aches
- Low energy or fatigue
- **Apathy** (*A-pah-thee*), or lack of interest in activities
- Irritability
- Anxiety

- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Problems with sexual functioning and desire
- Sleeplessness, difficulty sleeping, or excessive sleeping
- Lack of attention to basic personal care tasks (e.g., bathing, combing hair, changing clothes)
- Intense feelings of despair
- Guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Withdrawal and isolation (Fig. 18-4)
- Repeated thoughts of suicide and death



Fig. 18-4. Apathy and withdrawal are important changes to report.

Depression is very common in the elderly population. It can occur in conjunction with other illnesses. Cancer, AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, and heart attack may be associated with increased rates of depression. It can happen after the death of a loved one. Depression may be caused by abnormal levels of chemicals in the brain.

Clinical depression is an illness and must be treated as such. A person cannot simply overcome depression through sheer will. It can be treated successfully. People who suffer from depression need compassion and support. A home health aide needs to know the symptoms so that she can recognize the beginning or worsening of depression. Any suicide threat should be taken seriously and reported immediately. It should not be dismissed as an attempt to get attention.

Bipolar and Related Disorders: Bipolar disorder causes a person to have mood swings and changes in energy levels and the ability to function. A person may swing from periods of extreme activity or excitement (a manic episode) to periods of deep depression or sadness (a depressive episode). Characteristics of manic episodes include high energy, little sleep, big speeches, rapidly changing thoughts and moods, inflated self-esteem, overspending, and poor judgment.

Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders: Schizophrenia (*skit-zo-FRAY-nee-a*) is a mental health disorder that affects a person's ability to think and communicate clearly. It also affects the ability to manage emotions, make decisions, and understand reality. It affects a person's ability to interact with other people.

Hallucinations and delusions are two symptoms of schizophrenia. **Hallucinations** (*ha-loo-sin-AY-shuns*) are false or distorted sensory perceptions. A person may see someone or something that is not really there, or hear a conversation that is not real. **Delusions** (*de-LOO-zhuns*) are persistent false beliefs. For example, a person may believe that other people are controlling his thoughts.

Other symptoms of schizophrenia include disorganized thinking and speech. This makes a person unable to express logical thoughts. Disorganized behavior means a person moves slowly, repeating gestures or movements. People with schizophrenia may also show less emotion. They may seem to have less interest in the things around them and have a lack of energy.

8. Explain common treatments for mental health disorders

It is extremely important to remember that mental health disorders can be treated. Medication and therapy are common treatment methods. Medication is widely used for several disorders and can have a very positive effect. These medications affect the brain and have been successful in treating the symptoms and behaviors of many

people with mental health disorders. Medication may allow people to function more completely. Medications used to treat mental health disorders must be taken properly to promote benefits and reduce side effects. HHAs may be assigned to observe clients taking their medications.

Psychotherapy is a method of treating mental health disorders that involves talking about one's problems with mental health professionals. Individuals, groups, couples, or families meet with trained, licensed professionals to work on their problems. Therapists work with their clients to identify problems and causes. They use different techniques to help clients learn more about themselves and to teach them new ways to handle problems and be more in control of their lives.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a type of psychotherapy that is often used to treat anxiety disorders and depression. This type of therapy is usually short-term and focuses on skills and solutions that a person can use to modify negative thinking and behavior patterns.

9. Explain the home health aide's role in caring for clients who have a mental health disorder

Personal care of clients who have a mental health disorder is similar to care for any client, and as with any client, care should be provided in a way that is respectful of and responsive to each client as an individual. This is part of providing person-centered care. The care plan will contain instructions for what care to perform. There will also be some special responsibilities, including the following:

Guidelines: Caring for Clients Who Have a Mental Health Disorder

- G Observe clients carefully for changes in condition or abilities. Document and report your observations.

- G Support the client and his family. Coping with mental health disorders can be very frustrating. Your positive, professional attitude encourages the client and the family. If you need help coping with the stress of caring for someone who has a mental health disorder, speak to your supervisor.
- G Encourage clients to do as much as possible for themselves. Progress toward independence may be very slow. Be patient, supportive, and positive.
- G Help preserve the client's role and authority in the family. Remember that you are not replacing the client. You are only filling in until the client is well enough to resume his or her role in the family.

Abilities vary among people who have a mental health disorder. Clients should do as much as possible for themselves. However, a stable home environment is important in managing many forms of mental health disorders. By assisting the family with meeting their basic needs, the home health aide helps the recovery process. Even if not caring directly for the person who has a mental health disorder, the HHA's role is important. For example, knowing that their children are being well cared for can greatly assist people being treated for depression. The HHA may be assigned to provide these services:

- Food shopping, meal planning, and food preparation
- Housecleaning and laundry
- Assistance with activities of daily living and personal care, such as bathing
- Caring for children and other family members

10. Identify important observations that should be made and reported

The HHA should carefully observe clients. He should not draw conclusions about the cause of

the behavior. He should only report the facts, including what he saw or heard, how long the behavior lasted, and how frequently it occurred.

Observing and Reporting: Mental Health Disorders

- _R Changes in ability
- _R Positive or negative mood changes, especially withdrawal
- _R Behavior changes, including changes in personality, extreme behavior, and behavior that does not seem appropriate to the situation
- _R Comments, even jokes, about hurting oneself or others
- _R Failure to take medicine or improper use of medicine
- _R Real or imagined physical symptoms
- _R Events, situations, or people that seem to upset or excite clients

11. List the signs of substance abuse

Substance abuse is the repeated use of legal or illegal substances in a way that is harmful to oneself or others. Many types of substances are abused, including alcohol, tobacco, legal and illegal drugs, glue, and paint.

It is not necessary for a substance to be illegal for it to be abused (Fig. 18-5). Alcohol and cigarettes are legal for adults but are often abused. Over-the-counter medications including diet aids and decongestants can be addictive and harmful. Even household substances such as paint or glue are abused, causing injury and death.

Some medications are available legally by prescription but may also be abused. Opioids are drugs used to relieve severe pain, such as from surgery, cancer, or serious injuries. They are also sometimes prescribed to treat chronic pain. They work to block pain signals to the brain and boost feelings of relaxation, happiness, and

pleasure. Opioid abuse has become increasingly widespread in the United States over the last few decades.



Fig. 18-5. Alcohol and prescription drugs are examples of legal substances that may be abused.

Some opioids, such as oxycodone, morphine, codeine, hydrocodone, and fentanyl, are legally prescribed. Heroin and illegally made fentanyl are types of illegal opioids.

Taking prescribed opioid medication can put a person at risk for dependence on the drug and addiction. Because of the positive feeling opioids create, some people continue to want to take them and even seek illegal drugs once they can no longer obtain prescriptions from doctors. In addition, when taking prescribed opioids, a person's tolerance for the drug increases, requiring higher doses of the medication to achieve the same effects. High doses of opioids can cause breathing to slow and even stop, which can cause death. When a person overdoses on opioids, he must be given an antidote called naloxone during a certain time frame for it to reverse the potentially fatal effects.

The harm caused by substance abuse may come in many forms: damage to the abuser's health,

legal problems, damage to the abuser’s relationships with family and friends, and death. When a person becomes dependent on a substance or drug, it affects him physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Like many other disorders, substance abuse can develop at any age. It is treatable but frequently requires diagnosis and care by specialists. Medication, psychotherapy, and residential treatment centers are ways to treat substance abuse.

A home health aide may be in a position to observe the signs of substance abuse in clients, their children, or other family members. The HHA should report these signs to the supervisor. Observations can be made without accusing anyone of abuse. The HHA should simply report what she sees, not what she thinks the cause may be.

Observing and Reporting: Substance Abuse

- /R Changes in physical appearance (red eyes, dilated pupils, weight loss)
- /R Changes in personality (moodiness, strange behavior, disruption of routines, lying)
- /R Irritability
- /R Smell of alcohol, cigarettes, or other substances on breath or on clothing
- /R Diminished sense of smell
- /R Unexplained changes in vital signs
- /R Loss of appetite
- /R Inability to function normally
- /R Need for money, or money missing from the home
- /R Confusion or forgetfulness
- /R Blackouts or memory loss
- /R Alcohol or cigarettes missing from the home
- /R Frequent accidents
- /R Problems with family or friends

Some of these same signs may also indicate other problems. Depression, dementia, medication issues, or medical conditions can also produce many of these same symptoms.

Chapter Review

1. For each of the seven characteristics of mental health in Learning Objective 1, give one example of a behavior that demonstrates the characteristic.
2. What are four possible causes of mental health disorders?
3. What is the most common fallacy about mental health disorders?
4. Why might a physical illness cause or make a mental health disorder worse?
5. At what distance should a home health aide be when communicating with a client who has a mental health disorder?
6. What are defense mechanisms?
7. What is anxiety?
8. When a person makes a suicide threat, what should the home health aide do?
9. What are hallucinations? What are delusions?
10. What are the most common treatments for mental health disorders?
11. List three care guidelines for clients who have a mental health disorder.
12. Why is assisting with home management helpful to a client who has a mental health disorder?
13. List five important observations to make about a client who has a mental health disorder.
14. List four legal substances that can be abused.
15. List 10 signs and symptoms of substance abuse.