

Introduction to Working with Customers with a Mental Health Condition

Topic 03 – Facts & Myths

May 2014

V2.0

Time

Approximately 1 hour 30 minutes

Objectives

At the end of this topic learners will be able to:

- state the main symptoms associated with certain mental health conditions
- set straight some of the myths around mental health conditions
- state the recommended action to take if a customer declares the intent to self harm or commit suicide.

Learning Points

This event will cover the following learning points:

- Mental Health Conditions you may come across in the working environment
- Myths around mental health conditions
- Declarations of intent to self harm or commit suicide.

Support Material

- Handout 03.01 – Affective or Mood Disorders
- Handout 03.02 - Anxiety Disorders
- Handout 03.03 - Psychotic Disorders
- Handout 03.04 - Common Treatments for Mental Health Conditions and Sources of Support
- Handout 03.05a –Mental Health Conditions Quiz Answers Q1 - Q4
- Handout 03.05b –Mental Health Conditions Quiz Answers Q5 – Q8
- Handout 03.06 – The Six Point Plan.

Validation

This topic will be validated by discussion and question and answer.

Method of Delivery

This topic is facilitator led. It also uses discussion.

Introduction

There are many myths around mental health conditions which can lead to fear and discrimination. In this topic we are going to explore some of these myths. We will also discuss the action to take should a customer declares their intention to harm themselves.

Managing a Mental Health Condition

In our earlier discussions we found that many of the fears that we may have about working with a customer who has a mental health condition were similar to the concerns we have when working with a customer who has a physical illness.

A mental health condition is like any other condition. For example, diabetes can be an unpleasant illness which can lead to a wide range of physical ill health impacts if it remains untreated and unmanaged.

When it is managed, however, it can be controlled and pose very little threat to the person's wellbeing. You may work with someone who has diabetes, you may see them every day and you don't even know they have it.

This is also often true of mental health conditions. There are many people who may have been diagnosed with a mental health condition who are managing their condition and as a result it has little or no disruptive impact on their life.

Many individuals will lead a relatively normal life, and carry on working and looking after their families etc.



To illustrate this, you may wish to provide some examples of famous people who have a mental health condition and are very successful in their chosen profession, such as:

Stephen Fry, Paul Merton, Lily Allen, Billie Piper, Bill Oddie.

These examples are given as people we may know because they are famous, but you should stress that there are also many non famous people with mental health conditions who have successful professional and personal lives.

It is important to be aware that mental health conditions:

- are treatable
- are common enough for most people to have experience of them through relatives or friends
- can be managed with the right help and support.

Mental Health Conditions and Treatments



Handouts 03.01 – 03.03 provide information relating to specific mental health conditions, Handout 03.04 provides information about the treatments available. The information has been provided by DWP psychologists.

It is important to remind the learners that, although each condition has specific symptoms, the condition can affect people in slightly different ways.



Divide the learners into in four groups. Issue Handouts 03.01 to the first group, 03.02 to the second, and so on.

Ask each group to read through their handout and prepare to deliver the contents of the handout to the rest of the group.

Allow approximately 10 minutes for each group to prepare and share the information with the others.



If time allows and learners have access to PCs, they can do additional research on the content of the handouts before presenting the information to the group.

Introduction to Working with Customers with A Mental Health Condition

Topic 03 – Facts and Myths



At the end of the activity, issue Handouts 03.01 – 03.04 so that all the learners have a copy of each.

Allow time for the learners to read through the handouts.



Facilitate a short discussion around the following:

- How much of this information were they previously aware of?
- Has any of the information on the handout surprised them?



Remind learners that a condition affects each individual differently, so even though they may know somebody with one of the conditions, not necessarily all of the symptoms will apply in that person's case.

We must avoid making assumptions. Ask the individual about their experience and their thoughts about the implications for work. (WSD?)



Ask if there are any further questions about these mental health conditions and treatments. Discuss before continuing.

Review of Mental Health Conditions Quiz



Refer learners to Exercise 02.01 – Mental Health Conditions Quiz which they completed in Topic 2.

Allow a couple of minutes for the learners to read through their responses and to change any if they want to.



Ask the learners to work in two groups for the following exercise.

Issue Handout 03.05a to the first group and Handout 03.05b to the second. Give them time to compare the answers on their handout with their own and then to present the correct answers to the other group.



Issue further copies of Handouts 03.05a and 03.05b to ensure each learner has a complete set of answers.

Allow learners time read through the new handout.



Lead a discussion asking the learners to point out any parts of the answers which surprised them or which they think should be emphasised to the group.

Make sure the points displayed on flip from Topic 1 are brought out:

- Mental health conditions are very common
- There are degrees of severity of mental health conditions
- The majority of mental health conditions can be managed
- We must consider the person, not their condition, and avoid making assumptions
- Many people with a mental health condition want to work, and are able to work
- Working is beneficial for many people with a mental health condition
- Many people are mistakenly afraid of those with a mental health condition.

As you can see from the answers to the quiz and from what we have discussed today, things are not always clear cut, and there are a lot of myths around mental health conditions. Let's move on to look at one of these in more detail, the myth about violence.

Violence and Mental Health

Earlier today we discussed any worries you may have about working with customers who have a mental health condition. One of the issues some people have is the fear that the person may attack or hurt you.

A customer who behaves in a strange or unusual way can often generate fear in those who are not used to that kind of behaviour. They may believe that they are in danger, and that the customer may lash out violently and unexpectedly.

A label of a mental health condition, whether passed on in conversation with a colleague or appearing in a customer's record, may have the same effect, even when the customer is behaving quite normally.

It is often believed that someone who has a mental health condition will behave violently or that someone who behaves violently must necessarily have a mental health condition.

You will have heard about violent incidents associated with people with a mental health condition. In fact research shows that people with a mental health condition are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators.

Introduction to Working with Customers with A Mental Health Condition

Topic 03 – Facts and Myths

In the majority of cases, someone with a mental health condition is not necessarily violent or abusive. People can behave violently for a number of different reasons.



Why do people become violent?



- Anger
- Frustration
- They feel threatened

This list is not exhaustive.

So while it is possible that someone with a mental health condition may become violent, we could say the same about any other customer using Jobcentre Plus services.

There are many frustrations that can have an influence on someone's behaviour and make them behave threateningly or violently.

A history of violence is a far better indicator of possible violent behaviour in the future than any other indicator.

Therefore it is important that you deal appropriately with each customer contact and report any incidents of threatening behaviour.



What should you do if you feel threatened when talking to a customer?



- Remain calm
- Try to slow things down
- Remain courteous
- Remain respectful
- Raise the alarm discreetly in keeping with local arrangements
- If you think you are in danger, remove yourself from the situation
- Do not:
 - raise your voice
 - swear
 - become involved in an argument.



Completing 'Keeping Safe' learning is a pre-requisite for this event. If any of the learners feel they need to revisit the learning they should talk to their line manager about enrolling on the 'Keeping Safe Refresher' learning.

Learners should make a note on their Action Plan to check the local procedure for summoning help when they return to their office.



If you have felt threatened, what should you do once the customer has left?



- Let your line manager know what has happened
- Complete an incident form.

It is recommended that you meet with your line manager after such an incident to ensure that they are fully aware of what has happened. They should ensure you follow the correct procedures, such as reporting the incident formally and can ensure you get the support you need.

Incident reporting is part of the control measures we have in place in the organisation to protect staff. It is essential that all incidents are reported, so that we can monitor any patterns of behaviour and take the appropriate action.

Introduction to Working with Customers with A Mental Health Condition

Topic 03 – Facts and Myths

Although we have been discussing violent incidents, let's remind ourselves that:

- people with a mental health condition are no more violent than anyone else; and
- 'strange' or unusual behaviour does not automatically mean violent behaviour will follow.

Declarations of Intent to Self Harm or Commit Suicide



DWP medical and psychology experts recommend that we avoid talking about 'threats' of suicide as it is appropriate. Instead, try to use phrases like 'stating the intention to...', 'saying they will...' or 'declaring the intent to...'.

There may be occasions when a customer says they intend to self harm or to commit suicide. Sometimes they mean it but at other times it can be used as a shock tactic or to persuade.



What do you think is the best action to take if this happens?



- Take the statement seriously
- Try to find out more information from the customer as discretely as possible
- Let the customer talk if they want to but do not offer advice – you are not a counsellor
- Do not agree to keep information secret or confidential
- Record as much of the conversation as possible and discuss as soon as you can with your line manger and, if possible the Work Psychologist and DEA (this will depend on local arrangements and practices)
- Ask the customer if they would like you to contact someone for them such as a family member or their doctor
- Provide contact details for services that can offer help, for example the Samaritans.

This list is not exhaustive.

Introduction to Working with Customers with A Mental Health Condition

Topic 03 – Facts and Myths

If a customer makes such a statement, you must always take it seriously. Deal with the case urgently and make sure your line manager is aware that a statement of intent to commit suicide or self harm has been made.

It can be quite a shock and very upsetting to hear this sort of statement. However being prepared about what to do should help you to deal with the situation.

There is a generic Six Point Plan that has been developed that you may find useful. On the second page of this document you can complete details of your local Community Mental Health Teams etc.



Issue Handout 03.06 – The Six Point Plan.

Allow learners time to read through.

It is important that you discuss with your managers what plans are in place within your office for dealing with a statement of intent to commit suicide or self harm.

Make a note now to do this as soon as you return to the office – this is a crucial part of your preparation for dealing with such a situation.



Allow time for the learners to add this to their Action Plan.



What action do you think you should take to help you deal with this experience?



- Take time to recover afterwards to deal with your feelings – being upset, concerned, and afraid are all natural after an experience like this
- Discuss what has happened with your manager and other relevant parties
- Contact [Right CarecareHELP Employee Assistance Programme](#)
- Discuss formally with colleagues to share good practice.

There is also Intranet guidance available as follows:



DWP Home page >> A – Z >> 'H' >> Health and Safety >> Guidance >> Managing Customers self harm and suicide declarations.



Jobcentre Plus >> Business Delivery Guidance by A-Z >>M>> mental health and employment >> Mental Health - Adviser Toolkit >> 02 Chapter 02 Guidance>>

Declarations of Suicide and Self Harm.



Ask if there are any questions and discuss before continuing.

Summary

In this topic we have:

- discussed the reality of managing a mental health condition
- reviewed answers to the mental health quiz
- discussed some of the myths around mental health conditions
- addressed fears around mental health and violence
- discussed what to do when facing statements of intent to self harm or commit suicide.



Ask the learners if they have any questions before moving on to the next topic.

End of Topic