

Devon Prison Cluster  
**Buddy Support  
Worker Induction  
Programme**

Prisoners assisting other prisoners



Mental health,  
dementia and  
learning disability

Adapted from Care Standard 9

# To complete this module...

you will need to show that you understand the outcomes listed below. Please use this booklet as a guide but don't copy directly from this. When writing your answers in your workbook, please try to give your own examples.

## Outcomes

- Identify signs that might indicate that someone has the following:  
**Mental Health conditions**  
**Psychosis**  
**Depression**  
**Anxiety**
- Identify the signs that might indicate that someone has Dementia (there are many types of Dementia and individuals are affected differently, this point is to indicate awareness only)
- Identify the signs that might indicate that someone has a Learning Disability (all learning disabilities are different and affect individuals differently – this point is to indicate awareness only).
- Explain why it is important to understand that the support needs are different for people with mental health conditions, dementia and learning disabilities.
- Give examples of how you might support someone who has dementia.
- Give examples of how they you support someone who has a mental health condition.
- Give examples of how they you support someone with a learning disability.

**In additional to those outcomes listed above, you will also be observed in the workplace and will need to demonstrate the below outcomes:**

- Demonstrate that you are able to support individuals who have:  
**Mental health condition**  
**A learning disability**  
**Dementia**

# Mental Health Awareness

(written by Recoop)

## Some facts

- 25% of the general public will be treated for a mental health issue at some point in their lives
- 90% of the prison population has a mental health issue (Dept of Health Social Exclusion Unit, 2004)
- 72% of Male Prisoners have 2 or more mental health illnesses (Dept of Health 2012)
- 50 out of 1,000 men self harm in prison (Government Safety in Custody stat Oct 2014)
- 11% of the people affected by an eating disorder are male (The National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence 2014 - NHS information Centre)
- 30% of prisoners over 60 yrs were diagnosed with depression. (Growing Old in Prison – Prison Reform Trust 2002)
- Research shows most people who commit suicide told someone within the last 2 months that they intended to commit suicide.
- Mental Health problems can affect anyone at any time.

## What is mental health?

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation as “a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”

## Factors that can lower mental well-being

- Environmental deprivation
- Social exclusion
- Lack of trust in people around you
- Emotional abuse, e.g. bullying, feeling threatened
- Poor self management skills
- Personal neglect
- Feeling that you have no control
- Poor self image
- Lack of mental health understanding resulting in being stigmatised

### **The stigma surrounding mental illness adds to the distress and isolation felt by offenders who experience mental health problems.**

There is a belief that they are untreatable or that people with mental disorders are difficult, not intelligent, or incapable of making decisions. This stigma can lead to abuse, rejection and isolation and exclude people from health care or support.

## Factors that can strengthen and increase mental well-being

- Having someone to talk to about their feelings
- Being able to form positive friendships
- Keeping active
- Eating regular balanced meals
- Sleeping well
- Keeping in touch with family / friends on the out
- Improving social skills
- Setting realistic goals
- Having interests / hobbies that keep you interested and motivated
- Getting the knowledge to take control and maintain independence as much as possible
- Getting appropriate support and professional help

## Two major groups of mental disorder

### 1. Neuroses

Any mental imbalance that causes distress but does not impact upon someone's sense of reality, e.g. **depression and anxiety**.

### Depression

#### Signs you may notice:

- Depressed mood, persistent sadness and pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Tiredness, lack of energy
- Difficulty remembering and making decisions
- Insomnia, early morning awakening or over sleeping
- Change in appetite
- Thoughts of suicide or death

#### Possible risks:

- Suicide
- Self-harm
- Reduction in self-care

**What you can do:**

- Treat each person as a valued individual
- Signpost to health care / listeners at earliest opportunity
- Help person to know it takes courage and strength of character to seek help
- Create a friendly environment and listen with compassion and understanding
- Ask how you can help
- Find out if they have felt this way before and what helped last time
- Encourage relaxation and exercise
- Encourage regular meals and ordering from canteen
- Guide them to information that can help them understand their condition

**Do not:**

- Tell someone to 'snap out of it'
- Dominate conversation
- Joke about the problem
- Be nosy or try to force them to talk
- Take on the problem by yourself

## Anxiety

**Signs you may notice:**

- Feeling excessively worried and feelings of dread
- Tiredness and sleep problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- Being irritable
- Heavy rapid breathing and heart palpitations
- Light headed and dizziness
- Physically anxious with sudden jerky movements

**Possible risks:**

- Panic attacks
- Development of phobias
- Depression
- Increase in obsessive behaviour

**What you can do:**

- Treat each person as a valued individual
- Signpost to health care at earliest opportunity
- Help person to know it takes courage and strength of character to seek help
- Create a friendly environment and listen with compassion and understanding
- Encourage relaxation through exercise and regular breathing
- Be reassuring and let them know that they will be okay
- Guide them to information that can help them understand their condition

**Do not:**

- Tell them they are over reacting; this will agitate and worsen the situation

## 2. Psychosis

A mental state involving a loss of contact with reality.

### Causes of psychosis:

- Excessive stress factors can be a cause of a psychotic episode
- Substance-induced psychosis (including alcohol, certain illegal drugs)
- Inherited genes - risk rises to 10% if one of your parents was/is a sufferer.
- Chemical imbalance in the brain caused by your genes making you susceptible to the illness
- Family relationships and family tension may trigger relapses
- Environmental and traumatic experiences including war and disaster
- Other disorders and diseases including: dementia, Parkinson's and Huntington's disease, brain tumor, HIV and other infections that may affect the brain.

### Signs you may notice:

People experiencing psychosis may experience:

- Hallucinations
- Delusional beliefs not shared by other people
- Personality changes
- Social withdrawal
- Bizarre behaviors
- Talking incoherently
- Disorganised thinking, slowness to move, think, speak or react
- Difficulty in understanding things, carrying out daily activities

### Possible risks:

- Suicide

### What you can do to help:

- Treat each person as a valued individual
- Signpost to health care at earliest opportunity
- Try to be aware if prescribed medication is not being taken properly
- Be very patient, calm and reassuring
- Be mindful that the person can make a full recovery with specialist help

### Do not:

- Collude with hallucinations and delusions
- Expect the person to be able to comply with normal day to day activities

# Why it is important to increase your understanding of mental health issues?

- To promote mental well-being in order to avoid mental illness
- Enable appropriate intervention by professionals through signposting
- Help people cope better with mental health issues exasperated by being in a prison environment
- To improve quality of life for prisoners needing support
- To enable you to assist prisoners showing signs of distress
- Be more effective in your role of Buddy support worker
- To contribute to a better understanding and tolerance of prisoners with mental health issues and thereby contributing towards a safer prison environment.

## Learning disability

A learning disability affects the way a person learns new things in any area of life. It affects the way they understand information and how they communicate. This means they can have difficulty:

- understanding new or complex information
- learning new skills
- coping independently

A learning disability can be mild, moderate or severe. People with a learning disability may also have associated physical or sensory disabilities.

The term 'learning disability' can be confusing because there are several different explanations about what a learning disability is.

Learning disability and learning difficulties are terms that are commonly used in the UK. These two terms are often interchangeable when used in the context of health and social care for adults. Some people with learning disabilities prefer the term learning difficulties.

There are several definitions of learning disability used in the UK. A commonly used one is from **Valuing People**: a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century, the government White Paper for England about health and social care support for people with a learning disability (2001).

**It explains that a learning disability includes the presence of:**

- A significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information or to learn new skills;
- A reduced ability to cope independently;
- An impairment that started before adulthood, with a lasting effect on development.

**People First**, an advocacy organisation, says: “At People First (Self Advocacy), when we talk about people with learning difficulties, we mean ‘people labelled as having a learning difficulty’. This is one of the labels that society puts on us to mark us out as not being able to understand things the same as other people... We believe that people labelled as having a learning difficulty are disabled by society. We choose the term ‘learning difficulty’ instead of ‘learning disability’ to get across the idea that our learning support needs change over time.

## What can you do to support?

### 1. See the person not the disability

Find the best way to communicate, picking up on non-verbal communication. For example, look at facial expressions, gestures and body language. Keep information simple and brief.

### 2. Manage appointments and activities correctly

A person with a learning disability may have difficulty with crowds, lack of space and not understanding the social conventions of the regime within the Prison.

Consider talking to Prison staff about helping this individual to access services such as washing and showering when it is quieter, perhaps when the other prisoners are working.

Some individuals may need encouragement to speak up and explain why they need a consultation with the Health professionals and so this is where your advocacy skills can come into practice.

### 3. Safeguarding – monitoring and supporting

A person with Learning Disabilities can be more vulnerable and need extra support, they could be targeted by other Prisoners and can be more prone to being bullied, so it is important to have good communication and monitor the situation so you can report it to the appropriate personnel under your duty of care to that individual.

# Dementia

## **Understanding and respecting the person with dementia – taken from the Alzheimer’s Society fact sheet:**

It’s very important that people with dementia are treated with respect. It is important to remember that a person with dementia is still a unique and valuable human being, despite their illness. This factsheet looks at ways that you can help the person to feel valued and good about themselves.

When a person with dementia finds that their mental abilities are declining, they often feel vulnerable and in need of reassurance and support. The people closest to them – including their carers, health and social care professionals, friends and family – need to do everything they can to help the person to retain their sense of identity and feelings of self-worth.

## **Helping the person feel valued**

The person with dementia needs to feel respected and valued for who they are now, as well as for who they were in the past.

### **There are many things that the people around them can do to help, including:**

- trying to be flexible and tolerant
- making time to listen, have regular chats, and enjoy being with the person
- finding things to do together, like playing cards

## **What’s in a name?**

Our sense of who we are is closely connected to the names we call ourselves. It’s important that people address the person with dementia in a way that the person recognises and prefers. Some people may be happy for anybody to call them by their first name or nickname. Others may prefer younger people, or those who do not know them very well, to address them formally and to use courtesy titles, such as Mr or Mrs.

## **Respecting cultural values**

Make sure you understand the person’s cultural or religious background, and any rules and customs, to anyone from a different background so that you can behave accordingly. These may include:

- respectful forms of address
- what they can eat
- religious observances, such as prayer and festivals
- particular clothing or jewellery that the person (or those in their presence) should or should not wear

- any forms of touch or gestures that are considered disrespectful
- ways of undressing
- ways of dressing the hair
- how the person washes or uses the toilet.

## Acting with courtesy

- Many people with dementia have a fragile sense of self-worth; it's especially important that people continue to treat them with courtesy, however advanced their dementia.
- Be kind and reassuring to the person you're caring for without talking down to them.
- Never talk over their head as if they are not there – especially if you're talking about them. Include them in conversations.
- Avoid scolding or criticising them.
- Look for the meaning behind their words, even if they don't seem to be making much sense. Whatever the detail of what they are saying, the person is usually trying to communicate how they feel.
- Try to imagine how you would like to be spoken to if you were in their position.

## Respecting privacy

- Try to make sure that the person's right to privacy is respected.
- Suggest to other people that they should always knock on the person's cell door before entering.
- If the person needs help with personal activities, do this sensitively

Everyone involved – including the person's friends, family members, carers, and the person with dementia themselves – reacts to the experience of dementia in their own way.

Dementia means different things to different people.

## Helping the person feel good about themselves

There are lots of things you can do to help the person with dementia feel good about themselves.

- When you spend time with someone with dementia, it is important to take account of their abilities, interests and preferences. These may change as the dementia progresses. It's not always easy, but try to respond flexibly and sensitively.
- Supporting the person to express their feelings
- Dementia affects people's thinking, reasoning and memory, but the person's feelings remain intact. A person with dementia will probably be sad or upset at times. In the earlier stages, the person may want to talk about their anxieties and the problems they are experiencing.
- Try to understand how the person feels.
- Make time to offer them support, rather than ignoring them or 'jollyng them along'.
- Don't brush their worries aside, however painful they may be, or however insignificant they may seem. Listen, and show the person that you are there for them.

## Offering simple choices

- Make sure that, whenever possible, you inform and consult the person about matters that concern them. Give them every opportunity to make their own choices.
- When you are helping someone, always explain what you are doing and why. You may be able to judge the person's reaction from their expression and body language.
- People with dementia can find choice confusing, so keep it simple. Phrase questions so that they only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer, such as 'Would you like to wear your blue jumper today?' rather than 'Which jumper would you like to wear today?'

## Tips: maintaining respect

- Avoid situations in which the person is bound to fail, as this can be humiliating. Look for tasks that they can still manage and activities they enjoy.
- Give plenty of encouragement. Let them do things at their own pace and in their own way.
- Do things with the person, rather than for them, to help them retain their independence.
- Break activities down into small steps so that they feel a sense of achievement, even if they can only manage part of a task.
- Our self-respect is often bound up with the way we look. Encourage the person to take pride in their appearance, and compliment them on how they look.
- Try not to correct what the person says to you, the accuracy of the information is not as important as what the person is trying to express.

### **If someone is not used to being around people with dementia, it may help to emphasise the following points:**

- Dementia is nothing to be ashamed of. It is no one's fault.
- If the person tends to behave in ways that other people find irritating or upsetting, this may be because of the dementia – it's not deliberate.
- The person with dementia may remember the distant past more clearly than recent events. They are often happy to talk about their memories, but anyone listening needs to be aware that some of these memories may be painful.

## Always try to remember:

- Each person with dementia is a unique individual with their own individual experiences of life, their own needs and feelings, and their own likes and dislikes.
- Although some symptoms of dementia are common to everyone, dementia affects each person in different ways.

We all need to feel valued and respected and it is important for a person with dementia to feel that they still have an important part to play in life. Give encouragement and reassurance and support other family members to understand the person's needs and concerns.