

**Objectives:**

- *Overview of Mental Health
- *Define Mental Health disorders
- *Working with a client with a Mental Health condition

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REFERENCES:

National Institute of Mental Health-
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/older-adults-and-mental-health>

NCDHHS/DHSR/HCPEC | NAT I Curriculum – July 2024. Module U Mental Health and Mental Illness.

NCDHHS/DHSR/HCPEC | Home Care Aide Curriculum | July 2021 Module 19 Mental Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/about/index.html>

MENTAL HEALTH

In-home aides work with clients with various physical health conditions that may be short term or ongoing chronic conditions. A person may also have a condition that is psychological (mental and emotional). Mental health is important at every stage of life. Mental health is defined as an ability to cope with and adjust to everyday stresses in ways society accepts. People who don't have a mental health condition may still face challenges to their mental health. Mental illness includes a wide range of disorders including thinking, emotion and/or behavior; a disturbance in the ability to cope or adjust to stress; impaired behavior and function either short-lived or long term. Contributing factors for mental illness include physical factors, psychosocial factors, genetics, and stress. As people age, they may experience certain life changes that impact their mental health, such as coping with a serious illness or losing a loved one. Although many people will adjust to these life changes, some may experience feelings of grief, social isolation, or loneliness. When these feelings persist, they can lead to mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety.

Symptoms of Mental Disorders in Older Adults

- Noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite
- Feeling flat or having trouble feeling positive emotions
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Difficulty concentrating, feeling restless, or on edge
- Increased worry or feeling stressed
- Anger, irritability, or aggressiveness
- Ongoing headaches, digestive issues, or pain
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs, Sadness or hopelessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts
- Engaging in high-risk activities
- Obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior
- Thoughts or behaviors that interfere with work, family, or social life
- Engaging in thinking or behavior that is concerning to others
- Seeing, hearing, and feeling things, that other people do not see, hear, or feel

Most Common Mental Health Illnesses for Older Adults

- Mood Disorder such as depressive disorders, bipolar disorders
- Anxiety Disorder- anxiety disorders are frequently related to traumatic events such as a fall or acute illness, multiple medical conditions, concern for physical problems, use of numerous prescribed medications. Symptoms of anxiety may include headaches, back pain, or a rapid heartbeat
- Psychotic Disorder- severe mental disorders that cause abnormal thinking and perceptions. People with psychoses lose touch with reality. Two of the main symptoms are delusions and hallucinations.
- World Health Organization (WHO) stated in 2020, due to COVID-19 there was almost a 30% increase in people diagnosed with anxiety and major depressive disorders in just one year.

MENTAL HEALTH

Depression is not an automatic symptom of the aging process. However, older adults have a higher risk of experiencing a mood disorder due to specific potential unique factors:

- ✓ Life changes – moving into a retirement community, inability to care for self, and losing family and friends to death
- ✓ Chronic pain due to lack of mobility
- ✓ Substance abuse such as alcohol or drugs
- ✓ Financial stress due to overwhelming medical costs, lack of spousal income, and lack of retirement savings
- ✓ Lack of social community
- ✓ Family history of depression may also be a risk factor
- ✓ Sense a lack of purpose
 - Depression in older adults is often referred to as geriatric depression

While depression and/or anxiety may be the most common mental issues an in home aide may encounter with home care patients, there are additional mental health conditions that an in-home aide may see.

- Schizophrenia is a term that historically has been misunderstood. Schizophrenia does not mean that a person has multiple personalities of which he or she is unaware (that is called dissociative identity disorder and is uncommon). Instead, schizophrenia refers to a mental condition in which the person has an altered sense of reality. Some common traits include: False beliefs or delusions (e.g. person believes they are someone they are not; person believes their every move is being watched by the FBI), auditory and/or visual hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that are not there), paranoia (e.g. person believes someone is trying to kill them), communication problems/rambling speech, and social withdrawal
- Bipolar disorder is another condition that can be easily misunderstood. With bipolar disorder, a person can have severe mood disruptions. The person can be manic or high, depressed or low, or alter between the two. It is possible that a person can be more manic than depressed, and vice versa.
- Substance use disorder, formerly known as substance abuse, is also considered a mental health condition when the person is psychologically addicted to the substance. A physical addiction is when a person has physical withdrawal symptoms if the substance is removed or stopped. A psychological addiction is when a person feels they need the substance and while they have no physical symptoms, they feel they cannot cope without the drug. Home care clients could have either type of substance use conditions.

Mental health is not simply the absence of a mental health condition; it is also about the presence of well-being and the ability to thrive. Mental health is a key component to overall health and is closely linked to physical health. For example, depression increases the risk for many types of physical, long-lasting (chronic) conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Similarly, the presence of chronic conditions can increase the risk for developing a mental health condition.

Mental health issues are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing. Understanding mental health is not only about being able to identify symptoms and having a name for conditions but setting aside false ideas about mental health conditions as well.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA envisions that people with, affected by, or at risk for mental health and substance use conditions receive care, achieve well-being, and thrive. Find support at- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support>

MENTAL HEALTH

There are many treatment options for someone with a mental health condition. Most involve some sort of therapy to assist in allowing and encouraging the exploration of feelings and thought processes:

- ✓ Individual psychotherapy
- ✓ Group psychotherapy
- ✓ Family psychotherapy
- ✓ Art therapy
- ✓ Occupational therapy

In recent years, alternative therapies have proven to be helpful for certain issues. For example, acupuncture and healing touch can be used to assist with the symptoms associated with anxiety.

Medications may also be prescribed to assist with certain symptoms, with depression and anxiety being the disorders for which medications are most prescribed. It is important to remember that medications are used to treat symptoms and are not a comprehensive treatment for mental health conditions. It is most helpful when a person combines treatments. For example, simply putting someone on an antidepressant may not give him/her relief as soon as someone who is on an antidepressant and is in individual therapy simultaneously. Likewise, medications can take up to 4 – 6 weeks to work, while therapy can be helpful immediately.

An in home aide is there to help ensure their client's needs are met. This includes mental health needs. The in home aide can be of assistance by reminding the client about his or her treatment and watching for anything out of the ordinary and reporting per the plan of care. The in home aide can assist with medication reminders, keeping an eye out for medication side effects, changes in behavior, unusual comments, or other specific observations according to the client's plan of care. The nurse involved will outline specifics on the plan of care, and the in home aide should not deviate from that plan of care but should notify the supervisor to request changes in the plan of care. Older clients or clients who have other conditions may be taking medications for other issues. Therefore, it is important to watch for drug interactions or negative side effects according to the plan of care.

Clients with a mental illness need to be seen by a professional. Whether they are suffering from depression or another type of mental health issue, they could be emotionally fragile and will need specialized care. Never give advice or play the role of the therapist in the client's life. It is also important to remember professional boundaries. It is important for an in home aide to know that a client may not be aware of how they are dealing with their psychological stressors. Most people use what are called defense mechanisms as a way of coping or dealing with a situation. Clients will be unaware they are using these strategies to work out or deal with their issues. One type of defense mechanism is displacement. To displace means to move or take the place of. Displacement is when an individual moves his or her behavior or emotions from one person, place, or thing to another person, place or thing; the behavior or emotion is directed at a safe person, place, or thing. In home aides should never take a client's personal issues or things they may say personally or take on the issue themselves. It may just be that client's way of dealing with stress. Talk to your supervisor and report any concerns in working with your clients that may be dealing with a mental health condition. An in home aide can also assist the client as he/she would with any other client – encourage the client to get plenty of rest, eat a well balanced meals, stay mentally active, have activities to do, spend time with others, and other ways to assist clients with as much independence as possible. If a client's life is stable and in order, it will help with the potential mental turmoil they may be experiencing.

It is also important to take care of yourself. If you have been diagnosed with a mental health condition or feel you may have signs or symptoms of a mental health condition, treatment is important. Many individuals live healthy lives while on treatment. Contact your Healthcare provider for assistance.

- If you or someone you know is struggling or having thoughts of suicide, call or text the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](https://www.988lifeline.org/) at **988** or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org/). In life-threatening situations, call **911**.