Helping People with Mental Illness

A Mental Health Training Programme for Community Health Workers

Module A

What is Mental Illness?
Helping People with Mental Illness

A Mental Health Training Programme for
Community Health Workers

About this course

This course is designed to help Community Health Workers with some of their day to
day work. It was developed after consultation with Community Health Workers,
Health and Social Care Forum members, psychiatric nurses and lecturers at the
University of Port Elizabeth. We have tried to understand the needs of both
community health workers and members of Township communities who suffer from
or care for people with mental illness.

We have based the whole course on the idea that people with mental illness are
vulnerable to stress. Stress can have a powerful effect on mental health. Helping
people with mental health problems and those that care for them to reduce stress can
be very helpful indeed. We hope this approach will be useful to Community Health
Workers.

The course consists of eight modules on different topics in mental health. There are
introduction modules and modules on helping people with their drug treatments, other
ways to manage mental health problems and a module on how to assist with tracing
people who default from the mental health services. It is possible to design your own
course by picking from these modules. It is not necessary to use all eight modules. On
the next page we make some suggestions as to how different courses might use the
different modules.

The course is a ‘train the trainers’ course so each module contains:

- A plan of each module divided into ‘activities’
- Clear instructions on how to teach the module including resources needed
- A set of full size photocopies of all the slides used to teach the course.

We hope that Community Health Workers in communities, their colleagues and most
importantly South Africans with mental health problems gain something positive for
themselves from the course. We wish you luck with all your endeavours.

David Richards
Tim Bradshaw
Hilary Mairs
The University of Manchester, UK. November 2003.
Course Outline

There are eight modules in this course. They are:

Module A  
What is Mental Illness?

Module A2  
Introduction to the Treatment of Mental Health Problems

Module B  
Understanding Mental Illness

Module C  
Responding to People with Mental Health Problems

Module D  
Drug Treatments and Mental Illness

Module E  
Helping Families Cope with Mental Health Problems

Module F  
Living Well with Mental Health Problems

Module G  
Tracing People who Default from Mental Health Services

The course is very flexible. It is not necessary to teach all eight modules. Some modules contain similar material organised in a different way to suit different courses.

Organising a Course

Below are suggestions for three different types of courses:

1. A course to introduce people to some basic knowledge about mental illness and how to talk to people who have mental health problems
   - Modules A, B and C

2. A course to prepare volunteers to assist medical and nursing staff trace people with mental health problems who have defaulted from their clinic appointments
   - Modules A2, C and G

3. A comprehensive course for volunteers who want to work with people with mental illness in the community
   - Modules A, B, C, D, E, F

Each module lasts three or three and a half hours. The instructions are easy to follow and all the materials are included in each pack. Although it is not necessary to take all the modules the ones chosen for any course should be taken in the order above. They can be spaced out over days or weeks or run together over a few days. The materials are designed so that an ordinary person can use them to train other people. You do not have to be an expert to teach this course. However, you should have done the course yourself before you can become a trainer.
Module A

What is Mental Illness?

Introduction

- This module teaches people about what mental illness is and explores the impact of mental illness on people

Purpose

- For participants to get to know one another
- For participants to explore their understanding of mental illness
- For participants to understand the main features of severe and common mental illness
- To understand the impact of symptoms of mental illness on people
- To recognise how different mental illnesses can be confused with laziness or childishness

Materials

- Slides A1 – A11
- Case studies A1, A2, A3 and A4
- Pens and paper
- Flipchart or chalkboard
- Flip chart pens or chalk

Activities

Activity 1: Aims and objectives 10 minutes
Activity 2: Introductions 30 minutes
Activity 3: What do we mean by mental illness? 60 minutes
Activity 4: Severe and common mental illness 40 minutes
Activity 5: Recognising mental illness 30 minutes
Activity 6: What have we learnt? 10 minutes

Overall Time Needed Three hours
Activity 1: Aims and Objectives 10 minutes

Methods
• Presentation

Use slide A1 to start the activity

**Session A:**
What is Mental Illness?

*Slide A1*

Explain to participants that during the module we will be introducing information about mental illness and will explore the impact of mental illness on people. Explain that this module is important because in it we will discuss what we mean by mental illness.

Using slides A2 and A3 explain to the group the aims and objectives of the module. Ask them if there are questions that they would like to ask at this point.

**Aims**
• For community volunteer mental health workers to be provided with information about mental illness that will help enhance the support that they provide to mentally ill people and their families

*Slide A2*
Objectives

- For participants to get to know one another
- For participants to explore their understanding of mental illness
- For participants to understand the main features of severe and common mental illness
- To understand the impact of symptoms of mental illness on people
- To recognise how different mental illnesses can be confused with laziness or childishness
Activity 2: Introductions 30 minutes

Method
- Working in pairs
- Discussion

Before we start the course it would be useful to get to know one another. This exercise is intended to help participants become comfortable with their colleagues.

1. Ask each person to have a conversation with the person they are sat next to and to find out their name, why they are interested in this course and one interesting fact about them.

2. Teachers should also participate in this exercise.

3. Give the group around 10 minutes to do this then ask each participant to introduce their neighbour, tell the group why their neighbour is interested in the course and to tell the group their interesting fact.

4. Go around the group until everyone has had chance to speak.
Activity 3: What do we mean by mental illness?  60 minutes

Method
- Small group work
- Large group discussion

This activity will allow the group to explore some of their ideas about mental illness.

1. Ask the participants to get into small groups of about 6 to 8 people. If possible allocate one teacher to each group.

2. Ask the groups to discuss the topics outlined in slide A4. Groups should be encouraged to write down as many of their thoughts as possible about each of the topics. Give the groups 30 minutes to do this part of the activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics for Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do you think causes mental illness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do we know when someone is mentally ill?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What sort of things can we do to help people with mental illness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What sorts of things aren’t helpful to mentally ill people and what might make them worse?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide A4

3. Get the groups together in a large group. Starting with the first topic ask a spokesperson from each small group to feedback to everyone what they thought. Record this on a large paper sheet or chalkboard. Repeat this exercise for each of the four topics. Take 20 minutes to do this.

4. Spend the last 10 minutes of the exercise discussing what you have collected on the paper or chalkboard. Explain to participants that the whole of this course will help them to recognise mental illness and know how to help people.
Activity 4: Severe and Common Mental Illness  40 minutes

Method
- Presentation

This activity will introduce some basic categories of mental illness.

1. Use slide A5 to illustrate how we often divide mental illness into two types: ‘serious mental illness’ and ‘common mental illness’. Serious mental illnesses consist of experiences which most people would find it hard to understand – for example hearing voices or having strange ideas. Common mental illnesses consist of experiences which most people can relate to – for example fear or sadness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some examples of serious and common mental illnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Serious mental illnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosis (schizophrenia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manic depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common mental illnesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Serious mental illnesses are difficult to understand for the ordinary person (e.g. hearing voices, having odd ideas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common mental illnesses are often like experiences we have had ourselves (e.g. fear or depression).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide A5

2. Use slide A6 to describe some of the positive symptoms of psychosis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive symptoms of psychosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• hearing voices when no one is around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• strange beliefs or fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fear, confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• disturbances in the way they see, hear or feel things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• agitated behaviour such as shouting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• attacks of extreme emotion – positive or negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• speech which appears strange or disorganised to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide A6
3. As a contrast, show slide A7, which lists some ‘negative’ symptoms of psychosis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Negative symptoms of psychosis</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• difficulties with thinking or concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• poor motivation to do things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• withdrawal from social and family contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• problems in managing work, studies or relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• slow movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• poor care of personal hygiene and diet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• reduction in speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Slide A7*

4. Use slide A8 to make the point that many people can confuse these symptoms with laziness, wickedness or being childish. Ask the group to think about what it must feel like to be a person who has these positive and negative symptoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Positive and negative symptoms of psychosis are part of the illness</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Psychosis <em>does not</em> mean the person is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a bad person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• being wicked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• childish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• being lazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• a dirty person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Slide A8*

5. Next, describe the main symptoms of anxiety using slides A9. Ask the group to think of times when people might feel like this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Anxiety</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of unreality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Slide A9*
6. Describe the main symptoms of depression using slide A10. Ask the group to think of times when people might feel like this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
<th>Physical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous low</td>
<td>Guilt/negative attitude to self</td>
<td>Slowing down or agitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mood</td>
<td>Poor concentration/memory</td>
<td>Tiredness/lack of energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of interest</td>
<td>Thoughts of death or suicide</td>
<td>Sleep problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or pleasure</td>
<td>Tearfulness</td>
<td>Disturbed appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopelessness</td>
<td></td>
<td>(weight loss/increase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthlessness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties</td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulties carrying out routine activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carrying out</td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulties performing at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>routine activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Difficulties with home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Withdrawal from friends and social activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from friends and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide A10

7. The final slide in this activity is slide A11. Use it to make the point that many people think common mental illnesses like anxiety and depression are not important. This is not the case. Anxiety and depression can be very distressing for people and can also be very serious.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anxiety and depression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not mean weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not mean loosing the mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not mean personality problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe anxiety does mean an illness which requires treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not mean weakness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does not mean laziness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• does mean that a person has a medical disorder which requires treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression can be triggered by bereavement, physical illness, financial problems, childbirth and many other factors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide A11
Activity 5: Recognising Mental Illness  30 minutes

Method
- Small group work
- Large group discussion

This activity is used to help the group start to recognise some of the main types of mental illness.

1. Ask the group to divide into four smaller groups. Ask each of the groups to read one of the case studies: A1, A2, A3 or A4. Ask each group to identify one member of the group who will make notes of the discussions to feedback to the whole group.

2. Ask the groups to read their case studies and decide what type of mental illness the person in the case study is suffering from.

3. After 10 minutes ask the small groups to read their case study out to the larger group and tell the group what they thought the mental illness was. The correct answers are:

   A1: Themba  positive symptoms of psychosis
   A2: Peter    negative symptoms of psychosis
   A3: Nokhaya  anxiety
   A4: David    depression

4. Summarise the discussion by asking the group how difficult this was for them to recognise the different mental illnesses. Make the point that it is difficult for ordinary people and community members to distinguish between severe and common illnesses. Although medication is useful for all mental illnesses, it is vital for serious mental illnesses such as psychosis/schizophrenia. Recognising the different illnesses is the first step to helping people cope with their problems.
Activity 6: What Have We Learnt? 10 minutes

Method
• Large Group Discussion

1. Ask participants to say what they have learned from the whole of module A.

2. Do not discuss the individual contributions at this stage. Allow individual participants to say whatever they wish about the module.

3. Write each contribution down on a flipchart or chalkboard.

4. Summarise the groups’ suggestions at the end. Feedback what the group have said and end on a positive note.

5. Take a well earned break.
### Module A: Case Studies

**Case Study A1: Themba**

When Themba hasn’t slept for a couple of nights she becomes quite restless and often starts ‘talking to herself’.

Usually this is only quietly in her own room but at times she begins shouting and becomes agitated.

When asked who she is talking to Themba becomes upset and says it is the man who is following her and attempting to hurt her. She believes he is a ‘dark lord from Satan’.

**Case Study A2: Peter**

Peter is 28 years old and has experienced mental health problems for the last ten years.

Peter takes the medication prescribed for his mental health problems regularly. This helps with the odd beliefs he used to have about being a local ruler and landlord and he no longer worries about this.

However he spends a lot of time in bed and does not help the rest of the family look after the house and garden. He does not wash himself very often and seems to find it difficult to do anything – he always seems to walk very slowly.

**Case Study A3: Nokhaya**

Nokhaya seems generally happy when at home but when asked to go out starts to shake and gives a number of reasons why he cannot go out (his heart isn’t working properly) and must stay at home. He goes pale and goes to lie down.

About half an hour later he will get up and once again seems okay until someone asks him to go out again when the same thing happens again.

**Case Study A4: David**

David has recently lost his daughter and brother, dying of to HIV/Aids. He feels that the world is against him, all is terrible and hopeless.

He finds it difficult to sleep and eat. He feels guilty that he should have done more to protect his daughter from this illness. He has no energy to go to his work and has withdrawn from contact with his friends and neighbours.
Module A:
What is Mental Illness?
Aims of the Module

• For community volunteer mental health workers to be provided with information about mental illness that will help enhance the support that they provide to mentally ill people and their families
Objectives

• For participants to get to know one another
• For participants to explore their understanding of mental illness
• For participants to understand the main features of severe and common mental illness
• To understand the impact of symptoms of mental illness on people
• To recognise how different mental illnesses can be confused with laziness or childishness
Topics for Discussion

• What do you think causes mental illness?

• How do we know when someone is mentally ill?

• What sort of things can we do to help people with mental illness?

• What sorts of things aren’t helpful to mentally ill people and what might make them worse?
Some examples of serious and common mental illnesses

- **Serious mental illnesses**
  - Psychosis (schizophrenia)
  - Manic depression

- **Common mental illnesses**
  - Anxiety
  - Depression

- Serious mental illnesses are difficult to understand for the ordinary person (e.g. hearing voices, having odd ideas).

- Common mental illnesses are often like experiences we have had ourselves (e.g. fear or depression).
‘Positive’ symptoms of psychosis

- hearing voices when no one is around
- strange beliefs or fears
- fear, confusion
- disturbances in the way they see, hear or feel things
- agitated behaviour such as shouting
- attacks of extreme emotion – positive or negative
- speech which appears strange or disorganised to others
‘Negative’ symptoms of psychosis

- difficulties with thinking or concentration
- poor motivation to do things
- withdrawal from social and family contact
- problems in managing work, studies or relationships.
- slow movements
- poor care of personal hygiene and diet
- reduction in speech
Positive and negative symptoms of psychosis are part of the illness

- Psychosis *does not* mean the person is:
  - a bad person
  - being wicked
  - stupid
  - childish
  - being lazy
  - a dirty person
# Anxiety

## Psychological:
- Tension
- Worry
- Panic
- Feelings of unreality
- Fear of going crazy
- Fear of dying
- Fear of losing control
- Trembling
- Sweating
- Heart pounding
- Light headedness
- Dizziness

## Physical:
- Muscle tension
- Nausea
- Breathlessness
- Numbness
- Stomach pains
- Tingling sensation

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Disruptive to work, social or family life
Depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mood and motivation</th>
<th>Psychological</th>
<th>Physical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous low mood</td>
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Difficulties carrying out routine activities
Difficulties performing at work
Difficulties with home life
Withdrawal from friends and social activities.
Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety
- *does not* mean weakness
- *does not* mean loosing the mind
- *does not* mean personality problems

• Severe anxiety *does* mean an illness which requires treatment.

Depression
- *does not* mean weakness
- *does not* mean laziness
- *does* mean that a person has a medical disorder which requires treatment

• Depression can be triggered by bereavement, physical illness, financial problems, childbirth and many other factors.