Helping People with Mental Illness

A Mental Health Training Programme for Community Health Workers

Module F

Living Well with Mental Health Problems
Helping People with Mental Illness

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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.
Helping People With Mental Illness

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 F

Living Well With Mental Health Problems

Introduction

- This module introduces ways in which people can keep mentally healthy

Purpose

- To identify additional factors (for example diet, exercise and occupation) which influence mental and physical health
- To highlight social/community projects already in place which assist people with mental health problems in these areas
- To consider future projects which may enhance the well being of local people with mental health problems

Materials

- Slides F1 to F8
- Flip chart or chalkboard
- Flip chart pens or chalk
- Pens and paper
- Information sheets on diet, exercise, occupation, alcohol/drugs and social networks

Overview

Activity 1: Introduction 10 minutes
Activity 2: Social and community strategies for living well with mental illness 50 minutes
Activity 3: What do we know about mental illness? 60 minutes
Activity 4: Goodbyes 60 minutes

Overall Time Needed Three hours
Activity 1: Introduction 10 minutes

Method
- Presentation

Use slide F1 to start the activity

Slide F1

Explain that this module is a module to consider wider social/community strategies for helping individuals with mental health problems. The module will present information about how diet and exercise for example can also enhance mental health and discuss social/community strategies which may assist people with mental health problems in these areas.

Use slide F2 to outline the aims of the module:

Aims
- To identify additional factors (for example diet, exercise and occupation) which influence mental and physical health
- To highlight social/community projects already in place which assist people with mental health problems in these areas
- To consider future projects which may enhance the well being of local people with mental health problems

Slide F2
Remind the group of the information given earlier in the training about how stress that can lead to deterioration in mental health. Individuals and families can be helped to reduce stress – for example, by patients taking medication regularly, family members being supportive, not criticising and not treating individuals with mental health problems like children.

Show slide F3 and explain that workers will already be involved in a number of activities that are helpful in supporting people with mental health problems and their families. It is useful to acknowledge these and also to consider other strategies which can be put in place. Slide F3 identifies the strategies which will be covered during this module:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living well with mental health problems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Balanced diet</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Regular physical exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increasing participation in activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reducing intake of non-prescribed drugs &amp; alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Developing social support networks</td>
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</table>

*Slide F3*
Activity 2: Social and community strategies for living well with mental illness

40 minutes

Method

- Small group exercise

1. Ask participants to get into five groups and complete the exercises outlined below. Each group is asked to complete a different task which they will then share with the rest of the group. Ask each group to identify one member of the group who will make notes of the discussions to feedback to the whole group. Allow 20 minutes for this task.

**Group 1 – Diet**

Ask the group to read the information leaflet re: the importance of maintaining a good balanced diet for both mental and physical health.

Having read the information ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What activities are available within the local community to encourage good diet for people with mental health problems?

- Are there any other activities that could be developed within the local community?

**Group 2 – Exercise**

Ask the group to read the attached information leaflet re: the importance of taking regular exercise for both mental and physical health.

Having read the information ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What activities are available within the local community to encourage people with mental health problems to take regular exercise?

- Are there any activities that could be developed within the local community?
**Group 3 – Occupation**

Ask the group to read the attached information leaflet re: the importance of participation in meaningful occupation for mental health.

Having read the information ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What activities are available within the local community to encourage participation in meaningful activity for people with mental health problems?
- Are there any activities that could be developed within the local community?

**Group 4 – Drugs and alcohol**

Ask the group to read the attached information leaflet re: the importance of reducing the intake of non-prescribed drugs and alcohol for both mental and physical health.

Having read the information ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What activities are available within the local community to encourage reduced substance use for people with mental health problems?
- Are there any activities that could be developed within the local community?

**Group 5 – Social support**

Ask the group to read the attached information leaflet re: the importance of good social networks for people with mental health problems.

Having read the information ask the group to answer the following questions:

- What activities are available within the local community to encourage the development of social networks for people with mental health problems?
- Are there any activities that could be developed within the local community?
2. Ask the groups to come back into the main group. Show slide F4 and ask a member of the group who were discussing diet to feedback the answers of the questions to the main group. Record the activities currently undertaken and proposed developments on a flip chart. Ask if any other members of the large group have any additional comments/suggestions and then record these.

**Diet**

- Eating a balanced diet is important for mental and physical health
- Healthier diets are those that include a range of different foods
- Providing meals or helping people to access a variety of foods will be useful in enhancing the diet of people with mental illness.

*Slide F4*

3. Show slide F5 and ask a member of the group who were discussing exercise to feedback the answers of the questions to the main group. Record the activities currently undertaken and proposed developments on a flip chart. Ask if any other members of the large group have any additional comments/suggestions and then record these.

**Regular Exercise**

- Physical exercise is good for physical and mental health
- Physical needs of the mentally ill are often neglected
- Participating in physical activities helps to reduce depression and anxiety as well as increasing fitness

*Slide F5*

4. Show slide F6 and ask a member of the group who were discussing occupation to feedback the answers of the questions to the main group. Record the activities currently undertaken and proposed developments on a flip chart. Ask if any other members of the large group have any additional comments/suggestions and then record these.

**Increasing participation in occupation and activities**

- People with mental illness often become less active
- Helping people with depression, anxiety and psychosis to increase their activity levels can help them feel better
- Going to work for some people with mental illness can protect them from day to day stressors

*Slide F6*
5. Show slide F7 and ask a member of the group who were discussing drugs and alcohol to feedback the answers of the questions to the main group. Record the activities currently undertaken and proposed developments on a flip chart. Ask if any other members of the large group have any additional comments/suggestions and then record these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reducing alcohol and non-prescribed drug use</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Taking too many non-prescribed drugs or drinking too much alcohol can cause physical and mental health problems for anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For people with mental illness this will often make their symptoms worse and interfere with medication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Providing information about the harmful effects of drugs/alcohol may encourage a reduction in their use which in turn will help their mental health</td>
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_F7 Slide F7_

6. Show slide F8 and ask a member of the group who were discussing social support to feedback the answers of the questions to the main group. Record the activities currently undertaken and proposed developments on a flip chart. Ask if any other members of the large group have any additional comments/suggestions and then record these.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developing social networks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Regular contact with other people is important for everyone’s mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People with mental illness are often isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social networks enhance community functioning &amp; protect against relapse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People with mental illness may benefit from meeting with other people with similar problems</td>
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_F8 Slide F8_

7. Using the notes from the flip chart or chalkboard, summarise the information presented – acknowledging the existing projects/interventions which assist in enhancing the mental health of the local community and identifying the projects which may be developed to build upon the work already undertaken.
Activity 3: What do we know about mental illness? 60 minutes

Method
• Small group work
• Large group discussion

This activity will allow the group to revisit their ideas about mental illness which were discussed in the module A.

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 F9. 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.

Topics for Discussion

1. What do you think causes mental illness?
2. How do we know when someone is mentally ill?
3. What sort of things can we do to help people with mental illness?
4. What sorts of things aren’t helpful to mentally ill people and what might make them worse?

Slide F9

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.

Spend the last 10 minutes of the exercise discussing what you have collected on the paper or chalkboard. Ask the group to compare what they have said with what they believed and thought at the beginning of the course. Explore to see if they think they have different views and knowledge now.
Activity 4: Goodbyes 60 minutes

Method
• Large Group Discussion

For many courses, module F may be the last module on the course. We have provided time for a goodbye session in this module for people to plan what they are going to do next.

1. There is no formal structure to this activity. Some courses may want to use this time to:
   • hand out certificates
   • plan how the participants will continue to meet and discuss their work.

Other courses may just want to leave early. However, everyone should be given the opportunity to say goodbye to their fellow participants if they wish.
Eating a balanced diet is important for physical and mental health.

It is often the case that the physical health needs of people with mental illness are neglected because the primary focus is upon their mental health problems (not unsurprisingly). People who are depressed may eat less than usual and sometimes people with psychosis may forget to eat or worry that the food will be harmful in some way. This can cause additional problems which may have a negative impact upon the mental illness.

Healthier diets are those that include a variety of different foods – fruit and vegetables are particularly important as are foods that are rich in starch and fibre.

As well as eating healthier it is important that food is stored appropriately and is eaten when fresh.

Any community projects, which offer meals or help people to access a variety of foods – for example – teaching people to grow vegetables, will be useful in enhancing the diet of people with mental illness. Encouraging them to help with such projects will also provide opportunities to join in activities and mix with other people which are also likely to be beneficial.
Taking regular exercise is good for the physical and mental health of everyone.

It is often the case that the physical health needs of people with mental illness are neglected because the primary focus is upon their mental health problems (not unsurprisingly).

Therefore encouraging people with mental health problems to take regular exercise is likely to enhance their physical as well as their mental health.

Participation in recreational activities such as running, basketball and football has been shown to help reduce anxiety and depression as well as enhance physical fitness. Some studies have suggested that physical exercise may also protect people against stress.

Exercise may include individual activities such as walking or running or may include team games such as football. Obviously team games hold the additional benefits of spending time with other people and increasing activity levels which are also likely to be beneficial.

Participating in regular exercise is particularly important for those people who experience weight gain as a side effect of medication.

Creating opportunities for patients to join in individual exercise or group exercise will enhance both their physical and mental health.
Module F:       Activity 2
Increasing Occupation and Activity

All of us benefit from participating in a range of activities which include doing things that we enjoy or feel we are good at and often involve social contact. Anyone who stopped going out to work, spending time with friends etc. would be at a high risk of developing a mental health problem.

People with mental health problems often become less active and may spend more time on their own doing very little. For example, people who are depressed often don’t feel like engaging in activities – even activities that they used to enjoy and may do very little at all.

Helping people who have depression, anxiety or psychosis to increase their activity levels can assist in helping them to feel better.

As it is going to require a lot of effort on the part of the mentally ill person, it is much more likely that they will try to join in activities that they will enjoy.

Research has shown that people with mental health problems who are able to go out to work can do so even if they continue to experience distressing symptoms of mental illness – for example, auditory hallucinations – and that having a job protects them from day to day stressors.

Therefore creating opportunities for those with mental health problems to join in community activities is likely to be beneficial. Activities which involve the chance to spend time with other people will have the extra benefits of helping them to develop social networks. Activities that include physical exercise will help with mental and physical fitness. For some people, participating in activities may reduce levels of boredom and reduce the use of alcohol or other non-prescribed drugs which make mental health problems worse.
Module F: Activity 2
Reducing Alcohol and Non-Prescribed Drug Use

Taking too many drugs that are not prescribed by the nurses (for example Dagga) or drinking too much alcohol can cause a range of physical and mental health problems. These include stomach ulcers, liver disease, asthma and other respiratory problems and brain damage.

Research suggests that a large number of people with mental illness use alcohol and drugs - sometimes to help with their symptoms although non-prescribed drugs and alcohol usually make these symptoms worse and can interfere with medication. They may also have an impact upon sleep and appetite and not eating or sleeping well also makes symptoms worse.

Some patients may smoke Dagga, for example, because they have very little else to do and are bored.

Providing information about the potential harm that using large amounts of drugs and alcohol can cause can be helpful. Just telling people to stop taking these substances is not likely to work. Encouraging them to take less may be more beneficial.

Increasing activity levels may also help some people reduce the amount of drugs or alcohol they take.

If patients are using the drugs to help with their symptoms it will be helpful to check if they are taking their medication. If they are and the medication is not working the nurse may consider other types of medication. If they are not taking their medication – encouraging them to take it may reduce their symptoms. This may reduce how many other non-prescribed drugs they want to take.
Regular contact with other people is important for everyone’s mental health. This is especially the case for people who have mental illnesses. They may find it difficult to make and visit friends regularly or even start a conversation at times.

People with mental health problems can easily become isolated. This can make their mental health problems worse. A good social network, however, can protect against stress.

Research has also shown that people with mental illness who have good social networks tend to function more independently within the community than those who either have limited social networks or no social network at all. Higher levels of social support also seem to protect against relapse.

Creating opportunities for people with mental health problems to spend time with other people and develop social networks is therefore an important and useful way of helping them be mentally healthy.

It can sometimes be useful for people with similar mental health problems to meet up as they may share ways of coping with the illness and can find it reassuring to learn that they are not the only one with such problems.

Another benefit of developing social networks away from family members is that it can reduce contact between someone with mental illness and their family and this can be useful in reducing the stress for both the mentally ill person and their family members.
Module F:
Living Well with Mental Health Problems
Aims of Module

• To identify additional factors which influence mental and physical health
• To highlight existing social/community projects already in place which assist people with mental health problems in these areas
• To consider future projects which may enhance the well being of local people with mental health problems
Living well with mental health problems

• Balanced diet
• Regular physical exercise
• Increasing participation in activities
• Reducing intake of non-prescribed drugs and alcohol
• Developing social support networks
Diet

• Eating a balanced diet is important for mental and physical health
• Healthier diets are those that include a range of different foods
• Providing meals or helping people to access a variety of foods will be useful in enhancing the diet of people with mental illness.
Regular exercise

• Physical exercise is good for physical and mental health
• Physical needs of the mentally ill are often neglected
• Participating in physical activities helps to reduce depression and anxiety as well as increasing fitness
Increasing participation in occupation and activities

- People with mental illness often become less active
- Helping people with depression, anxiety and psychosis to increase their activity levels can help them feel better
- Going to work for some people with mental illness can protect them from day to day stressors
Reducing alcohol and non-prescribed drug use

• Taking too many non-prescribed drugs or drinking too much alcohol can cause physical and mental health problems for anyone

• For people with mental illness this will often make their symptoms worse and interfere with medication

• Providing information about the harmful effects of drugs/alcohol may encourage a reduction in their use which in turn will help their mental health
Developing social networks

- Regular contact with other people is important for everyone’s mental health
- People with mental illness are often isolated
- Social networks enhance community functioning & protect against relapse
- People with mental illness may benefit from meeting with other people with similar problems
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?