How are you feeling?

A mental health resource for voluntary sector staff and volunteers

This leaflet is for community workers but may be useful for anyone who works with the public. It is adapted from a leaflet originally designed by the Bangladeshi Mental Health and Wellbeing Forum and Voluntary Action Camden.

What is mental health?

- Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. It is a positive sense of wellbeing and belief in our own and others' dignity and worth.
- There are, however, times when everyone feels stressed or unhappy. Generally these bad times pass, but sometimes they do not just go away and we might need to get professional help.
- Mental health is surrounded by myths, stigma and discrimination. Stigma often stops people from seeking treatment and prevents their recovery. One of the best ways to challenge stigma is to give people the right information about mental health and available services.
- Over the last few years people have begun to have a better understanding of mental health and attitudes are changing.
- It is important we look after our mental health as much as our physical health.

What are mental health problems?

- Mental health problems are common and can affect anyone from any background.
- About 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem in any year.
- There are different types of mental health problems and the signs and symptoms vary. Common problems include depression and anxiety, while less common types include conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.
- Mental health problems can develop as a result of difficult life events, such as bereavement, giving birth, losing a job, moving home, as well as many other reasons, or they can just develop out of the blue.
- People with physical health problems, especially long-term conditions like diabetes or arthritis, can also be at greater risk of developing mental health problems.
- Mental health problems and symptoms can fluctuate over time but people can, and do, recover even from the most severe problems.
- Without support and treatment, mental health problems can get worse and have a serious effect on the individual and their family and friends. Free treatment and support is available to help people move to recovery or cope better with their illness.
- Recovering fully from mental health problems is normal, not the exception.

A mental health problem is just like any other health problem such as flu, a broken leg or diabetes, so people shouldn't be afraid to ask for help.

What can you do to help?

You don't have to be a mental health professional to help a person suffering from mental distress. Although only professionals should make a diagnosis and give treatment, you can still offer support and encourage the person to seek help sooner rather than later.
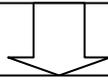

Listen non-judgementally
This means accepting the person exactly as they are and not making any critical or negative comments because of their symptoms
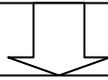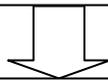

Ask open questions
e.g. "How is your health?" or "How are you feeling?" to encourage them to talk about their feelings
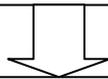

Give reassurance and information
Help them to understand that this is a real illness and effective help is available

---

Encourage them to get appropriate professional help
The first place to go should normally be their GP

Encourage self-help strategies
e.g. keeping physically active, eating well, keeping in touch with friends and loved ones, learning to relax, learning new skills or volunteering

---

If you are worried that the person is at risk of harming themselves, seek professional help immediately: take them to their GP or ask for an emergency home visit, call emergency 999 or take them to a hospital's accident and emergency department.

People with mental health problems are much more likely to be victims of violence, than to be violent themselves. However, if the person is threatening to harm others, call the police. Inform the police that the person has a mental illness, and ask them to send a plain-clothes officer if possible.

What else can you do?

- Improve your own understanding and awareness about mental health.
- Remember it is important for everyone to look after their mental health. For tips go to: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/10-ways-to-look-after-your-mental-health/

Help available in Camden

iCope (Help with stress, anxiety, depression): www.icope.nhs.uk or 020 3317 5600

Psychology Online (support via instant messaging at a time to suit you): www.psychologyonline.co.uk/camden

Age UK Camden (Counselling service for age 55+): www.ageuk.org.uk/camden or 020 7239 0400

Nafsiyat (Intercultural psychotherapy and counselling): www.nafsiyat.org.uk or 020 7263 6947

Women & Health (Counselling and psychotherapy for women): www.womenandhealth.org.uk or 020 7482 2786

CCI&W Bereavement Service (Bereavement counselling): www.bereavement-counselling.org or 020 7284 0090

voluntary
action
camden