

Positive interactions in the learning environment

- A positive environment can encourage skill building, learning and asking questions.
- Flexible hours or deadlines may help accommodate doctor or therapist appointments and/or optimum performance times of the individual.

Disclosure is often a very difficult issue for people with a mental illness due to stigma, misconceptions and prejudices demonstrated daily in our community, media and historical literature. Privacy and confidentiality principles are critical for developing and maintaining trust.

It is very rare that a person with a mental illness will display completely unacceptable or challenging behaviour. However, if a person exhibits challenging behaviours the following strategies may be useful.

- Outline clear boundaries of acceptable and non-acceptable behaviour.
- Make tasks clear and precise.
- Where possible, deal with unacceptable behaviour in a confidential setting.
- Remain calm and logical.
- Do not argue. Speak in a calm and clear manner.
- Do not make promises you may not be able to keep.
- Reassure the person that you are trying to help them.

Adjustments may need to be provided to enable a person with a disability to gain equitable access to education. Reasonable adjustments may include:

- modifying or providing equipment
- modifying assessment procedures
- changing course delivery
- modifying educational premises.

Adjustments must be determined in consultation with the student concerned.

For further advice contact your
TAFE NSW Teacher/Consultant

Other sources of support

Mental Health Association NSW Inc.

<http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au/home.htm>

Mental Health Coordinating Council

<http://www.mhcc.org.au/>

Disclosure: It's a Personal Decision

<http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure/>

Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission

www.hreoc.gov.au

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Disability Standards for Education 2005



Mental Illness Awareness

Some advice and strategies for teachers

TAFE NSW

TAFE NSW

What is a mental illness or disorder?

'A mental illness/disorder is a diagnosable illness that significantly interferes with a person's social abilities. Mental illnesses/disorders are of different types and degrees of severity and include depression, anxiety, substance abuse disorders, and psychosis.' (World Health Organisation)

The terms *mental illness* and *psychiatric disability* are often used interchangeably. A mental illness interferes with a person's ability to think or feel; and their behaviour.

Mental illness affects approximately one in five Australians. It can affect people of any age, social or ethnic background or of any intellectual ability. A person can have a mental illness without experiencing a psychiatric disability. The experience of mental illness is unique to each person.

A person is said to experience psychiatric disability when their experience of mental illness is chronic, ongoing and significantly impairs their ability to function in one or more daily activities.

Approximately three to four per cent of people with a mental illness will experience a severe psychiatric disability. Psychiatric disability is seldom permanent and the level of disability is likely to fluctuate.

Common forms of Mental Illness

Anxiety disorders are characterised by extreme anxiety and include:

- **Panic disorder** is when a person feels sudden overwhelming feelings of terror or impending doom.
- **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)** is when a person experiences obsessive thoughts creating a need to perform a particular and sometimes atypical or counter-productive act or behaviour.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is when a person experiences repeated, intrusive, distressing thoughts about a past trauma and may also experience emotional numbing, nightmares, irritability or they may avoid places, things or situations that remind them of the trauma.

Mood disorders are characterised by severe swings in mood and include:

- **Depressive disorders** are when a person experiences prolonged sadness and loses interest and/or pleasure in those things they previously enjoyed.
- **Bipolar disorder** is when a person's mood alternates between depression and elation. Bipolar disorder used to be known as manic depression. The periods of depression and elation are different for each person.

Psychotic disorders are characterised by hallucinations, delusions and sometimes paranoia. Psychotic disorders usually alter and often undermine a person's ability to think clearly, make appropriate judgements and communicate effectively. The most common psychotic disorder is:

- **Schizophrenia** is when a person experiences severe difficulty in thinking clearly, managing emotions, making decisions and relating to others. The person may also experience hallucinations, atypical and fixed, illogical beliefs. The person may also have disjointed thoughts and sometimes feelings of persecution and grandeur.

Personality and disruptive disorders are characterised by significant impairment in social, educational or occupational functioning. The person may have significant difficulty interacting with groups and accommodating group needs. These disorders include:

- **Oppositional defiance disorder** is when a person displays antagonistic, disobedient and hostile behaviour. The person often blames others for mistakes and is easily annoyed by others.
- **Conduct disorder** is when a person displays bullying, intimidating and coercive behaviours and can be cruel.