

MODULE 5

Activity #2 Handout

What if.....Scenarios

- 1** Your friend seems really down and talks about dropping out of school.
- 2** A friend has been on a diet, is getting really skinny and never seems to eat. She thinks she's really fat and will not wear shorts or a bathing suit.
- 3** Since your dad left, your brother/sister is spending almost all of their time smoking, drinking and watching TV, and never wanting to do anything else. You have not told your friends about your parents splitting up.
- 4** There is a situation at school that is really stressing you out. Everyday when you wake up, you remember the situation and start to feel sick.
- 5** Your friend says they would be better off if they ran away. Your friend has already been sleeping over at your house a lot lately.
- 6** Someone in your class has started smoking marijuana before school everyday. The friends who smoke with this person only do it occasionally on the weekends. People are joking about how they are behaving – out of it and spacey. The person seems pretty down to you.
- 7** Your friend has started taking different kinds of pills at school, and is asking other people for painkillers all the time.
- 8** Your friend isn't acting like his old self. He seems really down, and has been doing strange things like giving his favourite things away. He recently told you that he thought that people he knew would be better off without him around, and that he'd thought about killing himself. After he tells you, he asks you not to tell anyone else about what he's said.
- 9** A kid in your class often gets completely ignored and occasionally teased and even bullied. No one will ever be seen talking to this person. The teachers don't seem to notice, and no one does anything to this kid when teachers are around.
- 10** A friend has started skipping a lot of school and seems pretty down.
- 11** Your friend has a parent with mental illness. From time to time, when the parent isn't doing well, your friend has to do everything at home. None of your other friends know about the situation. Your friend doesn't even know that you know. Your mom found out through a neighbour.
- 12** A classmate who is not really your friend, but is not friends with anyone else either, has started acting really strangely. Other kids have been laughing and making fun of them, but underneath you think this is a bit scary, and maybe the person is not doing this on purpose.

Something is Not Quite Right: Getting Help Early for Mental Illness

You have a feeling that something is “not quite right” about the way someone close to you is behaving. You’re worried, but you’re not sure if it might be serious, or if moodiness, irritability and withdrawn behaviour is a stage they’ll grow out of. Could drugs be involved? Do you think you might need a professional opinion to help you decide if there is a serious problem?

Getting Help Early

The chances are that there is not a serious problem, and that time, reassurance and support are all that are needed. However, if a mental illness is developing, then getting help early is very important.

Being unwell for a shorter time means less time lost as school or work and more time for relationships, experiences and activities which help us stay emotionally healthy.

Checklist #1: Difficult behaviour at home, at school or in the workplace

Behaviour which is considered “normal”, although difficult:

People may be:

- rude
- weepy
- thoughtless
- irritable
- argumentative
- over-sensitive
- over-emotional
- lazy
- withdrawn
- rebellious
- shy

These behaviours may also occur as a normal, reaction to stressful events such as:

- breakup of a close relationship
- moving
- divorce
- other family crisis
- death of a loved one
- other personal crisis
- exam failure
- physical illness

Probably no cause for serious concern, but...

It is often best to try not to over-react. Try to be as supportive as possible while waiting for the “bad patch” to pass. If the behaviour is too disruptive or is distressing to other people, or if the difficult behaviour lasts a long time, then you could seek professional counseling, help or advice. Talk it over with your family doctor, school counselor, community or mental health centre.

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Checklist #2: What's the difference between just having a bad day and something potentially more serious?

Signs of Clinical Depression:

- Feeling sad and miserable for most of the day
- Feeling like crying much of the time
- Not wanting to do anything, go anywhere, see anyone
- Having trouble concentrating or getting things done
- Feeling like you're operating in "slow-motion"
- Having trouble sleeping
- Feeling tired and lacking energy – being unable to get out of bed even after a full night's sleep
- Having a change in appetite, usually a loss of appetite
- Feeling hopeless
- Thinking of suicide
- Always putting yourself down and thinking you're no good or that nothing really matters

If you often experience most of these things every day for a number of weeks in a row – you may have Depression. If that is the case, make an appointment with your school counselor to discuss how you feel. Remember that you don't have to be alone with these feelings, and that Depression is treatable!

Checklist #3: Behaviours which are considered **ABNORMAL** for that person, and may seriously affect other people.

People may:

- Withdraw completely from family, friends, and workmates
- Be afraid to leave the house (particularly during daylight hours)
- Sleep or eat poorly
- Sleep by day and stay awake at night, often pacing restlessly
- Be extremely occupied with a particular theme, for example, death, politics or religion
- Uncharacteristically neglect household or parental responsibilities, or personal appearance or hygiene
- Deteriorate in performance at school or work
- Have difficulty concentrating, following conversation or remembering things
- Talk about or write things that do not really make sense
- Panic, be extremely anxious, or significantly depressed and suicidal
- Lose variation in mood – be “flat” – lack emotional expression, for example, humour or friendliness
- Have marked changes in mood, from quiet to excited or agitated
- Hear voices that no one else can hear
- Believe, without reason, that others are plotting against, spying on, or following them. and be extremely angry or afraid of these people
- Believe that they are being harmed or asked to do things against their will, by, for instance, television, radio, aliens, God or the devil
- Believe they have special powers, for example, that they are important religious leaders, politicians or scientists
- Believe that their thoughts are being interfered with or that they can influence the thoughts of others
- Spend extravagant or unrealistic sums of money

Seek medical assessment as soon as possible. These types of behaviours are much clearer signs that someone needs to be checked out, particularly if they have been present for several weeks. They may be only a minor disturbance, but a mental illness such as a psychotic disorder may be developing.