



REMOVING BARRIERS SERIES

Interacting with Persons with Mental Health Issues

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE



Removing Barriers

Stigma and stereotyping persons with mental health issues are significant barriers to the social inclusion of persons in recovery. It prevents persons with mental health issues from accepting their condition and seeking help, and it perpetuates a culture of secrecy and a sense of despair. It alienates people and contributes to low self-esteem.

Yet, many people with mental health issues do recover, and when they recover, they can function effectively just as anyone else. Persons with mental health issues need to be given a chance to contribute to society and to show what they can do.



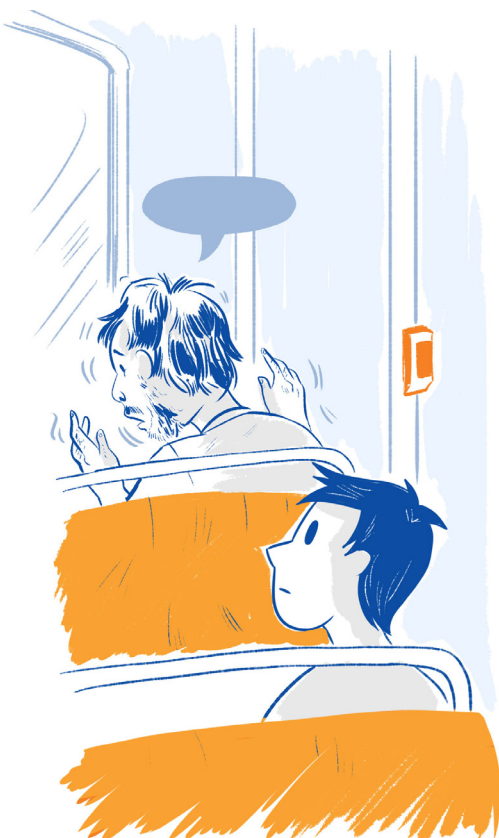
Can you tell who has a mental health issue? We can't.

Yet many around us do struggle through daily life with problems related to mental health. These people may be our neighbours, our classmates at school, our family members, and our colleagues at work. To understand how we can best support them, read on.

IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

.....

You are on a public bus and sitting across from you is an old man who looks unkempt. His clothes are crumpled and he probably has not bathed. He keeps muttering to himself.



WATCH AND SEE

Observe his behaviour:

- Where did he board from and what time of the day is it?
- Is he carrying anything unusual?
- Is he able to pay for his bus fare?

FIND OUT MORE...

- If you are concerned about the safety of a person who may have Dementia, find out more about the Safe Return Card by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) at http://www.ncss.gov.sg/social_service/SafeReturnCard.aspx

TALK

- Smile and acknowledge him, but do not stare.
- Ask him if he is okay, if he needs help or is lost.
- Speak up on his behalf if he is being ridiculed by other passengers on the bus.
- Ask him if he has a card with contact information of his family members.

SEEK HELP

- Use the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) Services Directory to see if there are services available to help him. <https://careinmind.aic.sg/services>
- Contact the Family Service Centres (FSC) or Senior Activity Centres in your area for assistance.
- Call his family members through the contact details on his Safe Return Card if he has one.

Your next-door neighbour spends hours to repeatedly wash the corridor of her flat. She also washes the plants on the corridor forty times a day. When you ask why, she looks agitated and replies, "But everything is so dirty!"



WATCH AND SEE

Gather more information:

- Does she stay alone?
- Who are her caregivers/ friends/ family members? Do they see it as a problem?
- Anyone you can gain more information from about your neighbour's behaviour?

Observe the frequency of her cleaning behaviour:

- Is it disruptive to her daily activities?
- Who else sees this behaviour as a problem?

FIND OUT MORE...

- For more information, visit the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) website at www.imh.com.sg and navigate to Clinical Services » Common Conditions.

TALK

- Start by smiling or saying hi to her when you see her.
- If she responds to you, get to know her better as a person.
- If you have the opportunity, share your concern with her and her loved ones.
- Encourage her to seek help.
- Inform your Residents' Committee (RC) about your concerns.

SEEK HELP

- You can also contact mental health agencies such as Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS) at <http://www.sacs.org.sg/> or Silver Ribbon Singapore at <http://www.silverribbonsingapore.com/> for help.

AT SCHOOL

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You are a secondary school student. One of your classmates is reacting strongly to people's comments and flares up at the slightest provocation.

WATCH AND SEE

Note your classmate's behaviour:

- Is she unusually withdrawn?
- Does she react very strongly to what is said in conversations?

FIND OUT MORE...

- Visit the REACH for Students website at <http://reachforstudents.com/>

TALK

- Raise your concern to your classmate. Let her know that you care about her and have observed a change in her behaviour recently.
- Express your support and openness in lending a listening ear.
- If she indicates that she would like to seek help, suggest that she see a school counsellor or visit CHAT Hub for a free assessment <https://www.youthinmind.sg>

SEEK HELP

- Raise your concern with a teacher and the school counsellor on your observation of changes in your classmate's behaviour.

"Over the years, I've come to realise that having goals for myself helps in creating a sense of purpose. This purpose gives meaning to life. I also ensure that I don't miss appointments with my doctor, not only for the medicine, but also because talking helps."

.....

NAWIRA BAIG, WRITER



AT HOME

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Your family member recently has been unusually withdrawn. He has stopped talking to the rest of the family. He keeps to himself and stays in his room. For the last few weeks, he has not been going out or participating in his usual activities.

WATCH AND SEE

Note your family member's behaviour:

- Does he react very strongly to what is said in conversations?
- What does he do when he is in his room?
- Are there any signs of self-hurting behaviour, such as unexplained bruises or cuts on his body?

FIND OUT MORE...

- Visit the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) website at www.imh.com.sg and navigate to Clinical Services » Common Conditions.

TALK

- Express your concern to your family member about your observations of recent changes in his behaviour. Let him know that you care about him and express your support and openness in lending a listening ear.
- Suggest joint activities that you enjoy doing together previously but may have recently stopped engaging in.

SEEK HELP

- Raise your concerns with other family members, share opinions and see if they have any concerns or suggestions.
- You may wish to contact a mental health agency such as Singapore Association for Mental Health (SAMH) at <http://www.samhealth.org.sg/> to seek help on how to support your loved ones.



Your son has been playing computer games all day and all night. He forgot to eat because of the game that he is playing, and it has affected his school performance.

WATCH & SEE

Observe his behaviour:

- Is he losing interest in other activities and social relationships besides gaming?
- Does he flare up at anyone who threatens his gaming habit?
- Has he tried to stop gaming but failed?

FIND OUT MORE...

- Visit the National Addictions Management Service website at <http://www.nams.sg> and navigate to Addictions » Gaming/Internet.

TALK

- Express your concern to your son without nagging. Let him know that you care about him.
- Understand what need your son is meeting through games. Is it a need for achievement, a social need or a need to escape from problems?

SEEK HELP

- Speak to a school counsellor or contact TOUCH Cyber Wellness at cyberwellness@touch.org.sg for more information and assessment.

"Is it true that persons with mental illness are potentially violent or dangerous? No more so than the next normal person."

.....
**YOHANNA ABDULLAH,
WRITER**



Your mother has been forgetting things easily, such as where she has placed her house keys. She has been repeating herself in conversations and has been forgetting important family appointments. When you ask her about her forgetfulness, she gets agitated and on several occasions, claims that she has not been informed.

WATCH & SEE

Observe her behaviour:

- Has she been getting more forgetful only recently?
- Does she often repeat words, forgetting that she has already mentioned it?
- Is she able to keep track of time and place?
- Does she appear more lethargic or withdrawn?
- Does she remember to lock the door?

FIND OUT MORE...

- For more information, visit the Alzheimer's Disease Association (ADA) website at <http://www.alz.org.sg>

Rather than mental illness, the major determinants of violence continue to be socio-demographic and socio-economic factors such as substance abuse and being of lower socio-economic status.

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**MACARTHUR VIOLENCE
RISK ASSESSMENT STUDY
(OXFORD: 2001)**

TALK

- Express your concern to your mother and let her know that you care about her.

SEEK HELP

- Get a referral from your General Practitioner to Tan Tock Seng Hospital's Cognition and Memory Disorders Service at <http://www.ttsh.com.sg/geriatric-medicine/cognition-memory-disorders-service/>



AT WORK

.....

Your co-worker is unusually talkative and seems to be on edge. She sent an email to all the staff in your organisation regarding a personal matter which was somewhat incoherent.

WATCH & SEE

Note your colleague's behaviour:

- Is your colleague's agitation keeping her from working normally?
- Is her behaviour interrupting others from working?

FIND OUT MORE...

- Visit the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) website at www.imh.com.sg and navigate to Clinical Services » Common Conditions.

TALK

- Have a private chat with her to see what is going on. Does she know that her behaviour of late is different from the usual?
- Express your concerns and note specific incidences to provide a basis for discussion.

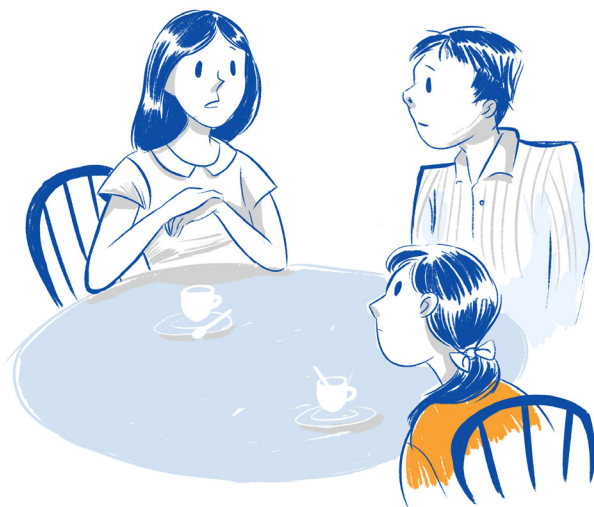
SEEK HELP

- Raise your concerns with other colleagues or supervisor, share opinions and find out if they have any concerns or suggestions.
- You may wish to contact Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS) Employment Support Services at ess@sacs.org.sg to find out how to better support your colleague at work.

"She encouraged me to move on from what I had lost, to focus on what I had gained through my experience, and how it had made me a more resilient and interesting person. She treated me as a friend, with genuine care and concern for my wellbeing. Speaking as someone who was neither preaching, nor trying to force me to think or act in any particular way, she saw the best in me, and I felt respected as a person capable of making the most out of a difficult situation".

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CHAN LI SHAN,
MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCATE





You are interviewing selected candidates for an executive position. One bright young man who has been selected reveals at the interview that he has a mental health condition.

WATCH & SEE

Assess his level of readiness and understanding of the job requirements.

- What is his level of understanding of his condition?
- What is his ability to identify his triggers and his coping skills and support resources?
- Is he motivated?

FIND OUT MORE...

- Visit the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) Job Club website at <http://www.jobclub.sg/>

TALK

- Praise his openness and honesty with regard to his disclosure.
- Engage him further to understand his awareness and ability to manage his condition.
- Be clear and upfront with him on the job description, roles, expectations, working environment, and potential job stressors.
- If the person is agreeable, provide the team with information that he has shared with you so the team will be able to make an informed decision on employment suitability.

SEEK HELP

- Seek the advice of IMH Job Club and Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS) Employment Support Services on how to support him in the workplace.

In her own words...

a note from a person in recovery

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My illness had prevented me from doing many 'normal' things, like meeting people or going to work. On really bad days, I couldn't even leave my room. I was so afraid someone might find out about my diagnosis and I was determined to keep it under wraps. That is, until my life unravelled before me. It was a strange sense, of seeing everything fall apart in my life. I lost some friends, my income, my identity and sense of self-worth. I lost hope.

Noticing my drastic weight loss, the GP prompted some questions pertaining to sleep, appetite, activity, family history, as well as my current home and work environment. That was when he calmly suggested that I might be experiencing Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), and arranged for my first visit to the psychiatrist. I really appreciated how that GP had patiently listened to my concerns. He didn't judge me nor treat me with suspicion. Instead, he brought some clarity as to how MDD could be genetic and triggered by excessive stress, which gave me relief in knowing what was wrong with me and what I needed to do to get better.

With medication and therapy, I've come to this realisation -- that what seemed to be falling apart was actually falling into place. Life, as I know it, has never been the same since. My recovery process had begun with that diagnosis. It gave me the courage I never knew I had, and the insights that came from walking off the beaten path.

Nicole Kay, Founder of The Tapestry Project SG

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Singapore Association for Mental Health
Tan Tock Seng Hospital Cognition and
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