

COUNSELING PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Did you know?



Mental Disorders: “Health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior...associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.” (*Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999, pg. 5.*)

According to the same report, almost 20% of the population aged 55 and older experience specific mental disorders that are not part of “normal” aging.

You can help people with Medicare who have mental illness by offering compassion and support without judgment.

The goal of your conversation is to provide as much help as possible. When conversations become difficult, these tips can help things proceed more smoothly.

- 💡 **Start by taking a deep breath.** Don’t rush the conversation, just let it unfold. Realize that the conversation may take a little longer.
- 💡 **Keep the conversation moving forward.** Do not argue. Stay focused on the issue at hand.
- 💡 If the conversation is “stuck” or the person needs additional assistance, ask the question: **“Would it be helpful to call someone you trust to join our conversation?”** A case worker, family member, friend, or peer from a support group may be able to help.
- 💡 Ensure that you **provide follow-up** for someone who is struggling, confused, or overwhelmed. Set up another meeting and indicate that the person can include a family member or another trusted person to attend. Provide your contact information.
- 💡 **Acknowledge the person’s reactions and problems.** Don’t delve into them or try to solve them.
- 💡 **Model calm, appropriate behavior.** For example, if someone gets angry with you, don’t reciprocate. Stay calm.
- 💡 **Ask whether the person wants help...** and trust the answer. If the person you are counseling makes a choice that you do not believe is the right one, express your concerns, but recognize their right to make the final decision.