

MENTAL ILLNESS

One in four people in Britain have a diagnosis of a form of mental illness. There is a great deal of controversy about what mental illness is, what causes it, and how people can be helped to recover. People with a mental illness can experience problems in the way they think, feel or behave. This can significantly affect their relationships, their work, and their quality of life. Having a mental illness is difficult, not only for the person concerned, but also for their family and friends.

Mental illnesses are some of the least understood conditions in society. Because of this, many people face prejudice and discrimination in their everyday lives. However, unlike the images often found in books, on television and in films, most people can lead productive and fulfilling lives with appropriate treatment and support. For some people, drugs and other medical treatments are helpful, but for others they are not. Medical treatment may only be a part of what helps recovery, and not necessarily the main part. It is important to remember that having a mental illness is not someone's fault, it is not a sign of weakness, and it's not something to be ashamed of.

Seeing a person's problems solely as an illness that requires medical treatment is far too narrow a view. It discourages people from thinking about the many different influences on their life, thoughts, feelings and behaviour that can cause mental distress. It may also prevent people from exploring the various non-medical treatment options that are available. For these reasons, some people prefer to talk about mental or emotional distress, rather than mental illness.

Depression

Depression lowers a person's mood, and can make them feel hopeless, worthless, unmotivated and exhausted. It can affect sleep, appetite and self-esteem, and interfere with daily activities. It may even affect their physical health. This may set off a vicious cycle, because the worse they feel, the more depressed they are likely to get. Depression often goes hand in hand with anxiety.

Anxiety

Anxiety can mean constant and unrealistic worry about any aspect of daily life. It may cause restlessness, sleeping problems and possibly physical symptoms, for example, an increased heart beat, stomach upset, muscle tension or feeling shaky. Someone who is highly anxious may also develop related problems such as panic attacks, phobias or obsessive compulsive behaviour.

Panic attacks

These are sudden, unexpected bouts of intense terror. A person experiencing a panic attack may find it hard to breathe, and feel their heart beating hard. They may have a choking sensation and a pain in the chest, begin to tremble or feel faint. It is easy to mistake these for the signs of a heart attack or other serious problem. Panic attacks can occur at any time, and this is what distinguishes them from a natural response to real danger. Having one panic attack does not necessarily mean that someone will have another one. But sometimes the experience is so frightening that people become afraid of having another. This fear may actually trigger another attack when a similar situation arises.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Someone with an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder feels that they have no control over certain thoughts or ideas that are highly disturbing to them, but which seem to force themselves into their consciousness. These thoughts, or obsessions, create unbearable anxiety, which can only be relieved by performing a particular ritual to neutralise them. This could be something like repeatedly opening and closing a door, washing their hands, or counting.

Phobias

A phobia is an unreasonable fear of a particular situation or object. It may cause major disruption to life because it imposes such restrictions on the way people live. Agoraphobia can cause such paralysing fear that a person may remain isolated in their own home, afraid to go out. Other common phobias include fear of animals, heights, flying and enclosed spaces.

Bipolar disorder (manic depression)

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder. During 'manic' episodes, people tend to be hyperactive, uninhibited, reckless, full of grandiose schemes and scattered ideas. At other times, they may go through long periods of being very depressed. Not everyone experiences both these extremes.

Schizophrenia and related conditions

Schizophrenia is one of the most debilitating of all mental illnesses and can severely interfere with someone's ability to perform everyday tasks and activities. Symptoms may include hearing voices and seeing things that other people cannot. Someone with these problems may become confused and withdrawn.

At Cherry Tree Nursery we believe and promote the fact that people with a mental illness can lead happy and fulfilled lives.