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Working with mental health issues – some tips for SVP visitors

- Mental Health issues are not always easy to discern – without being intrusive its sometimes easier to take the lead but ask questions in a non-intrusive way. Questions such as 'How are you feeling' ? might be a good start. Often men can find it harder to talk about these issues than women.
- Listen and discern – remember that people are not always ready to talk, particularly at a first visit. Give the person an expectation that you are there to listen but that you understand that now may not be the right time. Let the person know that you are there for them. Avoid cliches – 'It'll all pass and you'll be OK' – we don't want to give assurances which may not come to fruition.
- Remember that there are many situations, including loss and bereavement, in which it is natural to feel 'down'. Carers are particularly susceptible to mental health problems. We can help by focusing on what helps someone to cope with their situation and sometimes, but not always, helping them to see 'the other end of the tunnel'. Hope is an essential ingredient to recovery from mental illness. See the website www.mentalhealth.org.uk for tips on how to keep mentally healthy – keeping active is an important part of this.
- Ask - What are the things which help you ? What are your support systems – for example family, the parish community, work colleagues, etc ? Are there ways in which we can help you to stay in touch with the networks which have supported them you to now ? Going to Church can be challenging - we might help by providing reassurance and offering to be with someone in Church and in sharing a cup of coffee afterwards.
- Mental distress – or mental illness ? Sometimes feelings such as low mood and lack of energy just don't go away. This could indicate the onset of a clinical depression - that's when you may want to suggest a visit to the GP, or contact with one of the helplines available. (see below). Emphasise that its perfectly normal to visit your GP with a mental health problem – one in four of us do. And most GP surgeries will be able to refer someone for help to trained counsellors. Remember also that factors such as poor housing conditions, low income etc have a major effect on mental health.
- Other mental illnesses you may encounter include anxiety conditions, manic depressive (bi-polar) illness and psychosis. These are clearly explained in the factsheets listed below.
- Be aware of boundaries and confidentiality. Don't promise that you will keep all information confidential. In particular:

- If someone is at immediate risk, for example having taken an overdose, call the emergency services.
- If you are concerned that someone could be at risk to themselves or others in the immediate future, or, for example they disclose that they have been victims of abuse, call your Safeguarding Lead for your Central Council and inform your local Conference President.

Some helplines available on a national basis – there may be others available in your local area

- Cruse Bereavement Care (www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk) The national telephone helpline **0844 477 9400** is open for calls from 9.30am to 5pm working days, and until 7pm on Mondays and Wednesdays, answered mainly by a team of trained volunteers working in the special helpline area of the central offices in Richmond, Surrey.
- There is a 24 Hour Mental Health Matters Helpline on **0800 107 0160** and a trained telephone adviser will support you to find help, or link through to the Time Online Support by either clicking the link in the right hand menu (time online is not a 24 hour service).
- NHS Direct also provide a 24 hour helpline: **0845 4647**
- SANEline is available 6pm – 11pm every evening – **0845 767 8000**. They also have SANEmail, offering the same services online via email. www.sane.org.uk
- The Samaritans (www.samaritans.org.uk) for 24 hour support for people experiencing a crisis – **Call 08457 90 90 90**, they also offer support via email, letter and face-to-face.

Some useful web resources (some with factsheets on mental health conditions such as psychosis and manic depression:)

Royal College of Psychiatrists – www.rcpsych.ac.uk (includes factsheets)

Depression Alliance – www.depressionalliance.org (includes factsheets)

MIND – www.mind.org.uk (includes factsheets)

NHS Direct: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Rethink – www.rethink.org (includes factsheets)

Mental Health Foundation – www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Young Peoples Mental Health and well being – www.youngminds.org.uk

Information on dementia – www.alzheimers.org.uk (includes factsheets)

Support for Carers : www.carersuk.org.uk

Time to Change (useful information on resources) : www.time-to-change.org.uk

National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum www.mhspirituality.org.uk

Life Story Network www.lifestorynetwork.org.uk

Please note that this information has been compiled in September 2011. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this factsheet, you should verify any details as contact numbers, etc, may change. The information above applies to England and Wales only. The contribution of the 'Time to Change' campaign is acknowledged in it's compilation. which is downloadable on www.welcomemeasiam.org.uk. This is a general guide only and when in doubt you should recommend that someone seeks professional help. You should follow the SVP guidelines on risk assessment before a visit.