

# MENTAL HEALTH\*

## ▶ ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

🕒 **Time:** 35 minutes

➔ **Objectives:** By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize that stress, depression and anxiety may be common responses to dealing with HIV infection for many people;
- Recognize when a person needs more help than a peer educator can handle on their own;
- Recognize a mental health emergency and know how to get help in an emergency.

### ✔ In This Activity You Will...

- Facilitate a discussion on coping with stress (5 minutes)
- Conduct “Helpful/Unhelpful Response” activity and process (15 minutes)
- Conduct Green, yellow and red light activity and process (15 minutes)

(continued next page)

## Instructions

We all want to be as healthy as possible. As we have discussed in self-care, stress can affect our health. Similarly, when we feel sick or are in pain, it can affect our mood and make us anxious or depressed. Side effects from medication can also affect our state of mind. Mental health and physical health are closely related to one another.

1. We all have things that create stress in our lives. Ask group members to take a moment to think about this question:
  - What is one thing you find stressful and how do you cope with it?
  - What is one way that you deal with stress? [List coping strategies on the flip chart.]
2. Some stressors are small and easy to deal with while others are huge and can be overwhelming. HIV is a long term stressor that is difficult to live with. For some people HIV may be the most stressful thing in their lives, but other people living with HIV may have other things that stress them more, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, death of a loved one, or other serious problems.
  - People living with HIV/AIDS often deal with emotional problems like depression and anxiety. In a survey at local infectious diseases clinics, 2/3 of PLWHAs self reported depression and/or anxiety symptoms.
  - In the United States more than 17 million people every year are affected by depression.
3. Prepare to distribute cards and explain what participants will do.
  - When someone is feeling depressed or anxious people want to help. Some of the things they say may be helpful, and others are not helpful.
  - Here are some common responses. Please take a card. When you are ready, come up and stick the card up under the heading where you think it belongs – helpful or unhelpful.

\* This module comes from Duke University, Partners in Caring; Center for Creative Education, 2006.

# MENTAL HEALTH

## ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY (CONT.)

### Materials:

- Markers
- Flip chart
- Response cards
- Green, yellow & red cards
- Green-Yellow-Red light Situations
- Handout - Tips for Stress, Anxiety or Depression
- Handout – Mental Health Emergencies
- Handout - Symptoms of Clinical Depression
- Handout - Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

### Preparation:

- Print handouts
- Flipchart with two headings “Helpful Response” and “Unhelpful Response”
- Prepare individual cards, each with a different response

4. Read the responses and discuss some of them with the group.
5. If time permits ask group members to think of other helpful things they could say.
  - What are some helpful things that you could say?
6. Sometimes problems are more complex.
  - You might encounter a peer who needs more help than you can provide. Here are a few signs of more serious problems:
    - Feeling depressed or anxious for more than two weeks
    - Not keeping appointments
    - Not getting out of bed
    - Not eating, bathing, dressing
    - Thoughts of hurting themselves or someone else
  - If a peer expresses thoughts about suicide or homicide, DO NOT try to decide whether the person is “serious” or “just wants attention.” If she or he says it, it IS serious.
  - How could you still assist your peer?
    - Find community resources, refer to physician or specialist.
    - Accompany them to the emergency room or mental health center
    - Call the crisis line
    - Make sure they are not alone
7. Distribute colored cards. Explain the Green-Yellow-Red light activity.
  - I am going to read some different situations. Each of you should hold up the color of card they think corresponds to the situation.
    - A green light situation would be what you would consider normal levels of stress, anxiety, or depression.
    - A yellow light situation is more serious and requires a referral.
    - A red light situation indicates an emergency – take immediate action.
8. Discuss answers when participants have different interpretations of the situations.

# MENTAL HEALTH

## ▶ TRAINING TIP

Participants may argue that they have been helped by being confronted, and told to get off their pity pot, or to count their blessings. If this comes up, explain that there are exceptions to every rule, but usually, a peer educator can be more effective using a supportive, non-judgmental response.

- It's ok to trust your instincts, and make an emergency referral in a borderline situation between yellow and red, when you have a strong "gut feeling" about it.

### 9. Wrap up and link to the next discussion.

- HIV, mental health issues, and substance abuse have a lot in common. In all three, adherence to treatment or programs can be challenging. There can be "stigma" around all three. People dealing with any of them may find it hard to ask for help, and feel very alone. As a peer educator you may be the first person a peer opens up to. You can't diagnose or treat, but you can make a big difference by providing non-judgmental listening, information and referrals.
- Thank you for participating in ways to recognize and respond to mental health challenges.

## Summary

- Understanding your labs enables you to play an active and proactive role in your health care
- Use your new knowledge of lab tests and lab values to be a partner with your doctor
- Live smarter, healthier, and happier by being in control

\* This module is part of the online toolkit *Building Blocks to Peer Success*. For more information, visit [http://www.hdwg.org/peer\\_center/training\\_toolkit](http://www.hdwg.org/peer_center/training_toolkit). This module comes from Duke University, Partners in Caring; Center for Creative Education, 2006.

### HELPFUL AND UNHELPFUL RESPONSES

#### Usually helpful

- I know you are hurting.
- You're not alone in this.
- I'm here for you.
- Do you want a hug?
- These feelings will pass; you'll get through this.
- I'm sorry you're in so much pain.
- If you need someone to talk to, I'm here for you.

#### Usually unhelpful

- It's all in your mind.
- No one ever said life was fair.
- There are a lot of people worse off than you.
- You should count your blessings.
- Stop your pity party
- Stop thinking about yourself and focus on your kids.
- You think you've got problems!
- Cheer up! Come on and give me a smile.

### GREEN-YELLOW-RED LIGHT SITUATIONS

[Green means normal response to difficult things in life, yellow means referral is needed, and red means emergency referral. Some of these may vary depending on the context so it's ok if different group members have different opinions about them.]

- Your peer is feeling really blue on the anniversary of his partner's death [green]
- Your peer has a history of suicide attempts and is feeling REALLY blue today on the anniversary of his partner's death [yellow or red]
- Your peer is feeling unusually tense and angry today. [green]
- Your peer is so anxious and panicky lately that she can't eat and is losing a lot of weight [yellow]
- You call your peer to find out why he missed his appointment, and he says he just can't get out of bed.
- Your peer tells you wanted to tell you goodbye, because he plans to kill himself tonight. [red]
- Your peer says she can't come to her appointments anymore because she feels too panicky when she leaves her apartment. [yellow]
- Your peer says her meds have been making her feel moody and depressed [green to yellow]
- Your peer says she has had really bad insomnia for over two weeks. [yellow]
- Your peer is making plans to kill the person who infected her. [red]
- Your peer says "Nothing matters to me anymore. I wish I were dead." [probably red – peer educator may need to probe for more information to find out if actively suicidal]
- Your peer says he has been "cutting" himself to help him cope with all the emotional pain he is going through [yellow to red]

### MENTAL HEALTH EMERGENCIES

- If a peer expresses thoughts about suicide or homicide or wanting to hurt themselves or others, DO NOT try to decide whether the person is “serious” or “just wants attention.” If she or he says it, it IS serious.
- What can you do in an emergency? Depending on the situation and resources in your area, you could:
  - Ask members of your team to help you make an emergency referral.
  - Refer to physician or specialist.
  - Accompany your peer to the emergency room or mental health center
  - Call the crisis line
  - Call 911
  - Make sure they are not alone

### TIPS FOR DEALING WITH STRESS, ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION (MILD)

- Talking to a trusted friend, family member or religious leader
- Exercising (Exercise has been found to be as effective as medications in treatment of depression)
- Helping others
- Keeping busy, finding something positive to do
- Writing in journals
- Take deep breaths
- Spend time in nature
- Relaxation, meditation
- Prayer
- Creative projects, arts, crafts, hobbies, or gardening
- Attending a support group meeting
- Attending religious services or other gatherings
- Add self-care tips that work well for you

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### SYMPTOMS OF CLINICAL DEPRESSION

Not everyone experiences clinical depression in the same way. Different people have different symptoms. The National Mental Health Association recommends that you see a doctor or a qualified mental health professional if you experience five or more of these symptoms for longer than two weeks, or if the symptoms are severe enough to interfere with your daily routine.

- A persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Sleeping too little or sleeping too much
- Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Restlessness or irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that don’t respond to treatment [such as headaches, chronic pain, or constipation and other digestive disorders]
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Thoughts of death or suicide

### SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

There are several types of anxiety disorders and not everyone experiences the same symptoms. An accurate diagnosis and treatment should be made by a qualified mental health provider.

- Excessive worry more days than not
- Inability to control the worry
- Restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge
- Fatigue, feeling easily tired
- Irritability, or sudden anger outburst
- Muscle tension
- Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Repeated, unexpected “attacks” when you are suddenly overcome by intense fear or discomfort, for no apparent reason
- Repeated, distressing memories or dreams of a life-threatening event you experienced
- Feeling “on guard”
- Feeling detached from other people
- Intense, persistent fear of a social situation in which people might judge you
- Extreme anxiety with pounding heart, trembling or shaking, sweating, nausea or abdominal discomfort, fear of losing control
- Feeling worthless or guilty