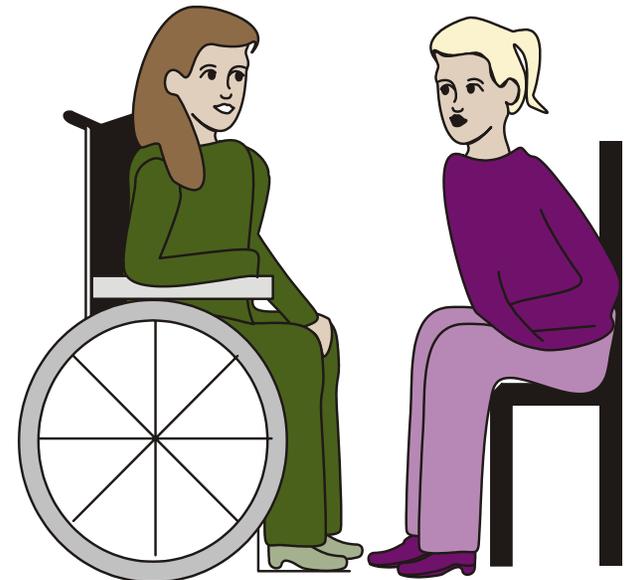# Understanding Mental Health Conditions

A mental health condition is an illness that affects your brain.

- This means that a mental health condition can affect the way you think, feel, or act.
- For instance, if you have been diagnosed with a mental health condition you may:
  - Think that other people are trying to hurt you, even when they are not
  - Feel very sad for long periods of time
  - Act in ways that others find strange, such as talking loudly to yourself

There are many different types of mental health conditions.

- Different mental health conditions can cause you to think, feel, or act in different ways.
- Common types of mental health conditions are:
  - Depression
  - Anxiety disorder
  - Schizophrenia
  - Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Mental health conditions may be related to:
  - Chemicals in your body
  - Traumatic experiences
  - Family history of mental health conditions

Anyone can develop a mental health condition.

- But, if someone in your family has a mental health condition, you may have a greater chance of developing one too.

  – If you have a family member with a mental health condition, you should tell your doctor so that he or she can pay special attention to your mental health.

You have an extra reason to learn about mental health conditions.

- Because of your developmental disability, it may be harder for your doctor to tell if you have a mental health diagnosis.
  - You and your support person can help your doctors by telling them if you are thinking, feeling, or acting in new ways that concern you or people around you.
  - Your doctor can decide if you have a mental health condition and will provide the right treatment for you, if you do.

If your mental health condition is not treated, it could get worse over time.

- If you have a mental health condition that is not treated properly, you could:
  - Have a hard time living your life in the way that you want to
  - Lose interest in the things you used to enjoy doing
  - Perform poorly in school or lose your job
  - Hurt yourself or others

Mental health can be a frightening and difficult topic to talk about.

- It is often hard for people to remember that the ways they are thinking, feeling, and acting are treatable and manageable.
- This can make mental health conditions a difficult thing to talk about.
  - Remember that there are people all around who want to help you.
  - By telling the people who you trust about how you are feeling, you are taking the first step in treating your mental health diagnosis!

You can manage your condition by telling others how you are feeling!

- Different mental health conditions have different signs and symptoms, but all mental health conditions will make you think, act, or feel differently than you are used to.
  - This is a sign that you should talk to your doctor, family member, or support provider!
- It may be hard to admit that you need to talk to a doctor, but there are signs that you can look out for.

For example, you should talk to your doctor if you:

- Are feeling sad all of the time

- Feel nervous about everything

- Are afraid to go out or talk to people

- Hear voices that are not really there

- Get very angry or upset whenever something small goes wrong

- Feel like hurting yourself in any way

You should be honest with your doctor, even if you feel embarrassed.

- You can tell your doctor about:
  - How you are feeling and how this is different from the way you normally feel
  - If you are having any thoughts that scare you or that are different than usual
  - If you are acting in ways that you do not normally act
- This will help your doctor to decide if you have a mental health condition.

If you have a mental health condition, your doctor will find a treatment for you.

- There are different ways to treat different mental health conditions.
  - Your doctor will be able to tell you which treatment will work best for you!

- Many mental health conditions can be treated with medications or with therapy.

Medications may help you to get better or stop you from getting worse.

- Before you start a new medication, be sure to tell your doctor what other medications you take.
  - Your doctor will know which medications can go together and which cannot.
- You should keep taking your medication until your doctor tells you to stop.
  - Even after you are feeling better, you may need to keep taking your medication.
  - If something does not feel right, tell someone!

Your mental health condition may also get better with therapy.

- Therapy means talking with a doctor, nurse, or other therapist about your thoughts and feelings.

- Therapy can also mean using art or music to express how you are feeling.

- Your doctor will talk with you about what kind of therapy is right for you.
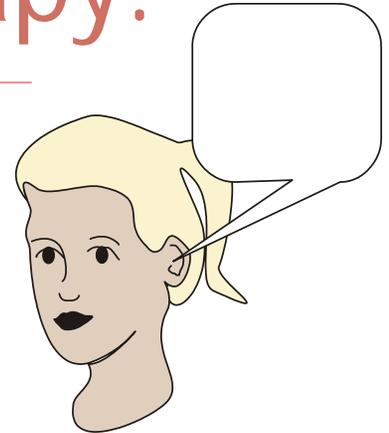
You can tell your doctor about how your treatment is working.

- You are the person who knows best about how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

- You can tell your doctor about changes in your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

- If your treatment is not working well, your doctor will find another treatment that may work better.

To keep yourself healthy, talk to others about your concerns.

- Most mental health conditions cannot be prevented.
- But, by talking to people about how you are feeling and what you are thinking, you can stop your mental health condition from becoming worse.
  - You can talk to anyone you trust – your friends, family members, support providers, or health care providers.

You and your supports can learn more about mental health conditions.

- National Alliance on Mental Illness:
  - http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=By_Illness

- The Arc:
  - http://www.thearc.org/faqs/mimrqa.html

- The Missouri Developmental Disability Resource Center:
  - http://www.moddrc.com/Information-Disabilities/FastFacts/DDandMentalHealthIssues.htm

Your family and support providers can also check out these articles.

- An article for family members on "Dual Diagnosis and Your Family Member"
  - http://www.ddssafety.net/Archives/Archives/Consumers/DualDiagnosis.aspx

- An article for support providers on "Understanding Dual Diagnosis"
  - http://www.ddssafety.net/Archives/Archives/Providers/UnderstandingDual.aspx