

# The Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health

Registered Charity No. 327532

## Action Sheet

### Challenging the Stigma of Mental Illness (raising awareness in your local church)

Whether you like it or not, mental health is an issue in every community. It should be high on every church's agenda. And yet, mental illness is still a taboo subject in many places. It is often swept under the carpet and ignored. This perpetuates the stigma and makes it even more painful for those who suffer and for their relatives.

**One of our main aims is to raise awareness of mental health issues amongst church and other faith communities.**

We believe that the whole community, not just those who are in distress, will reap the benefits of openness and honesty.

We encourage you *".....not to run away from people who are in pain or who are broken, but to walk towards them, to touch them. Then you will find rising up within you a well of love, springing from resurrection."* (Jean Vanier; *The Broken Body*)

There are many ways of raising awareness within your own church:

- small group discussions or meetings
- sermons
- inclusion in intercessions or prayers.
- training for pastoral workers
- accessible literature and information
- articles in church magazines
- positive attitudes and openness in the church.

**But a good start may be to hold a seminar, open meeting or video evening.**

Our experience is that there is increasing interest in mental health. When people come together to discuss it, they very often feel encouraged and moved. The performance of the speakers may be of secondary importance! So do not worry. Have a go. Of course there are many different ways of doing things. You will soon find out what works for you and your church. Set out overleaf are some ideas and tips from our own experience. We hope they may be of some help.

**Please feel free to photocopy this action sheet and pass it around!**

This action sheet is produced by APCMH (The Association for Pastoral Care in Mental Health) Draft March 1999  
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<b>ACTION</b>	<b>TIPS</b>
<b>Form Planning Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>it may be helpful to involve people with personal experience of mental health problems and relatives in the planning</i></li> </ul>
<b>Budget and Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>consider cost of venue, refreshments, speakers fees and expenses, literature and publicity</i></li> <li>• <i>a small charge or even donations on the day may cover these expenses but they do need to be underwritten.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Open Planning Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>this may sometimes be helpful to identify who is interested and what topic or topics might be covered</i></li> </ul>
<b>Planning Group decide:</b>	
<b>a) Topic and title</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>possibly start with understanding mental health</i></li> <li>• <i>other topics might be particular disorders, the importance of friendship, the stigma and how to challenge it and how to get help</i></li> <li>• <i>we suggest you avoid the term mental illness in the title.</i></li> <li>• <i>Consider titles such as “Understanding Mental Health” or “Hope through the Darkness”</i></li> </ul>
<b>b) Speakers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>we would encourage you always to have at least one person with personal experience of mental distress</i></li> <li>• <i>relatives can also be effective in sharing their experience.</i></li> <li>• <i>The local mental health team may help with the professional side.</i></li> <li>• <i>A mix of professional and someone with personal experience works well</i></li> </ul>
<b>c) Format and small groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>don't worry about filling the time as discussion will develop</i></li> <li>• <i>what about the video “With a Little Help from my Friends” distributed through the Bishop Of Ely's Office?</i></li> <li>• <i>Consider a time of worship or reflection, 2 speakers, questions, small discussion groups and an open discussion.</i></li> <li>• <i>Encourage those with personal experience to share their art, poetry, music etc..</i></li> <li>• <i>Also the coffee time is important for people to chat</i></li> <li>• <i>Decide on size, possible leaders, how to form groups, whether to set questions and whether to have feedback</i></li> <li>• <i>Informal “huddles” of 3 or 4 without a pre-determined leader and without pressure of feedback often work well.</i></li> </ul>
<b>d) Chair</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>the chair should be able to encourage people to relax and have their say without dominating proceedings - this may be difficult in a mental health setting as those who are in emotional pain may feel the need to talk</i></li> <li>• <i>everyone's point of view should be acknowledged</i></li> </ul>
<b>e) Place and time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>2 hours may be about right.</i></li> <li>• <i>Access to the venue, suitable space for small group discussions and kitchen area are important. Church halls are often ideal.</i></li> </ul>
<b>f) Booking forms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>consider whether to charge a small fee or ask for donations</i></li> </ul>
<b>g) Refreshments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>pre-booking causes more administrative work but helps with catering arrangements</i></li> </ul>
<b>h) Information and literature for the day</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>this is often sought by people coming to the event</i></li> <li>• <i>generally keep it simple</i></li> <li>• <i>local contact numbers for further information help</i></li> <li>• <i>again the local mental health team may be able to help</i></li> </ul>
<b>j) Evaluation Form and Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>this may help if you are thinking of holding further events</i></li> <li>• <i>Maybe fix a follow-up meeting of the planning group?</i></li> </ul>
<b>k) Publicity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>posters and flyers may help - also church notices</i></li> <li>• <i>be cautious about wide publicity through the media as this will open the event up and discussion groups may become more difficult.</i></li> <li>• <i>Word of mouth is often the best publicity so get talking about it</i></li> </ul>
<b>THE EVENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Keep smiling!</i></b></li> </ul>