

Working with a Consumer Who Is Depressed

Handout 1

Your Consumer Profile

Write a brief description of your consumer. Include:

- Age
- Where he/she lives now
- Where she/he grew up
- Married or not
- Having children or not
- What kind of work he/she does or did
- What makes your consumer happy now
- What makes her/him sad

What has changed in your consumer's life over the past year? Over the past 5 years?

What could you ask your consumer about his/her life that would help you to understand her/him better?



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Learning about Depression

Life changes for older adults:

Older adults are often dealing with various kinds of losses:

- Loss of physical and mental abilities
- Loss of independence
- Loss of income
- Loss of their homes
- Loss of friends and loved ones who die

Life changes for consumers with acquired disabilities.

“Acquired disabilities” means that the person has become disabled as a result of injury or illness. Adult consumers with acquired disabilities *suddenly* cannot do many things that they took for granted before. In addition to their physical and health issues, their life changes may include:

- Changes in routine
- Changes in income
- Changes in plans for the future (career or family)
- Role changes within the family
- Changes in self-image

Depression is more than just feeling sad.

These kinds of life changes can make anyone feel sad, hopeless, grumpy, guilty, and worthless. But, when you’re depressed, these feelings do not go away.

Depression is a “mood disorder” that usually has physical signs, too.

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Other signs of depression:

Depression is the most common mental health problem for older adults. But it is often not reported or not recognized. This is because the signs of depression can also be signs of other problems.

- Weight gain—or weight loss
- Trouble sleeping—or sleeping more than usual
- No energy—or lots of nervous energy
- No interest in activities and hobbies they used to enjoy
- Trouble with thinking or decision-making
- Drinking too much or taking drugs
- Thinking about suicide

Different signs for men and women¹:

- Women are more likely to feel sad and worthless.
- Men are more likely to be grumpy, angry, or abusive.
- Men are also more likely than women to use drugs or alcohol to deal with their depression (“self-medicating”).

Some of your consumers may be depressed. Here are some challenges you may face:

- Depression is an illness—you can’t make it go away by telling your consumer to “think happy thoughts.”
- Depressed people may be less willing to take medicines, do activities, and get counseling.
- Depression can make it easier for your consumer to get other illnesses.

¹ WebMD. *Quiz: Myths and Facts about Depression*. <http://www.webmd.com/depression/rm-quiz-depression>

Working with a Consumer Who Is Depressed

Learning about Depression

Handout 2

Page 3 of 3

Depression and suicide²:

- Depression is the most common risk factor for suicide. About 6,000 older people kill themselves in the U.S. each year.
- Older adults are less likely than younger people to show signs of suicide and less likely to respond to offers of help.

² Family Caregivers Online/Education: Behavior and Emotions of Aging.
<http://www.familycaregiversonline.net/behaviorm2.html>



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Handout 3

How Consumers Might Describe their Depression

Consumers don't usually tell you that they're "depressed." But they often give signs by what they say. Read what these depressed people say about what they are going through.

Maria—Low appetite

"I just don't feel like eating. I haven't been hungry for about a month."

Omar—Increased appetite

"I just want to eat all the time."

Sara—Feels restless

"I just can't sit still."

Christiana—Loss of energy

"I have no energy to do anything."

Parvati—Trouble concentrating

"I can't think straight. You decide what we should do."

Ron—Loss of memory

"I keep forgetting things lately."

Carla—Thoughts of suicide

"I have no future. I just want to die."



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Handout 4

What You Can Do

Page 1 of 2

Recognizing signs of depression early and encouraging your consumer to see their doctor can help them to avoid the more serious symptoms of depression.

The good news—depression can be treated!

- Depression is not “normal” for older people. Encourage your consumer to get help if you notice the signs.
- The best treatment is a mixture of taking medicine (antidepressants) and talking with a trained counselor, or psychotherapist.
- Talk-therapy helps people figure out what may be triggering their depression. They can also identify strategies for dealing with stress and getting help when they need it.

Resources for your consumer—and for you, if you have questions or concerns:

- Call the DHS Help Line **1-800-843-6154** (1-800-447-6404 TTY)
- Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS) Mental Health Providers (not an emergency):
<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?module=12>
- Illinois DHS, Emergency Mental Health Services:
<http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=30893>
- **In a crisis—call 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Room.**



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Really listen to your consumer who sounds depressed.

- Take him or her seriously. Just trying to cheer up your depressed consumer may make things worse.
- Ask your consumer what he or she needs. Work with him or her to try to figure out a way to meet that need, or come close.
- If there are things your consumer used to do and cannot anymore, try to find other things he or she *can* do.
- Depression is an illness--be supportive by encouraging them to see their doctor!

What else can I do?

- Encourage your consumer to stay active and eat a balanced diet.
- Take care of yourself, too—be clear about your limits in terms of time and skills.
- Share your observations and concerns with other caregivers for your consumer (if any) and/or family members. Talk about how you all can support each other in assisting your consumer.

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Handout 5

Pulling Back

The Goal of Pulling Back:

To give you time to:

- Calm down
- Set your emotions aside
- Get clear
- Focus on understanding the situation and responding appropriately.

When you start to get upset, take these steps:

1. Stop. Take a deep breath.
2. Pay attention to how you feel. Are you mad? Sad? Worried?
3. Set your feelings aside—maybe you'll get back to them later.
4. Think clearly about what is going on.
5. Pay attention to the other person and try to see the situation from their point of view.

Tips for Pulling Back:

- Take a deep breath
- Silently say a prayer
- Count to 10
- Silently say an affirmation—"I have the strength to deal with what is happening here."



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Handout 6

How Would You Respond to Your Consumer?

Page 1 of 2

Imagine you are caring for Mrs. Johnson and Joe Cabrini. What would you say or do in each of these situations?

Situation A

You walk into Mrs. Johnson's apartment. You notice that she didn't pick up her newspaper or mail over the weekend. When you ask her about it, she says, "I just don't have the energy to read anymore. And what difference does it make? I won't be around much longer..."

What would you say or do?

Situation B

Joe has been spending more and more time alone in his room. Today as you were leaving, he gave you some money and asked you to buy him two bottles of whiskey to bring to him tomorrow. And he added, "Make sure my mother doesn't find out about this, okay?"

What would you say or do?



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How Would You Help Mrs. Johnson?

Page 2 of 2

Situation C

It's 2:30 in the afternoon. Mrs. Johnson is sitting and staring at the TV. She hasn't eaten the lunch you fixed for her. Her doctor is really worried because she's lost a lot a weight in the past month. You fix her what used to be her favorite snack—a peanut butter and banana sandwich. When you offer it to her, she says, "I just don't feel like eating much anymore..."

What would you say or do?

Situation D

It's been many months since Joe spent any time with woman friends. But he talks about meeting women all the time. One day Joe asked if you would help him bring a woman into the house without his mother finding out about it. When you asked for more information about this woman, it became obvious that she was a prostitute.

What would you say or do?



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