

# WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

**M**ental illness is a disease resulting in a disorder of thought, mood, perception, orientation or memory. It severely impairs judgment, behavior, the capacity to recognize reality, and the ability to meet the ordinary demands of life.

If you encounter someone who may have a mental illness:

- ✓ DO be respectful.
- ✓ DO attribute the symptoms to the illness.
- ✓ DO maintain poise and self-control.
- ✓ DO maintain personal space.
- ✓ DO keep your voice low and calm.
- ✓ DO use short, simple statements.
- ✓ DO keep your hands in view.
- ✓ DO be matter-of-fact.
- ✓ DO reduce contact if the individual is especially ill.
- ✓ DON'T give sharp commands or use threats.
- ✓ DON'T challenge — verbally or physically.
- ✓ DON'T argue, criticize or be judgmental.
- ✓ DON'T make promises you can't keep.
- ✓ DON'T take anger personally.

# SIGNS A PERSON MAY HAVE A SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

## Appearance

- ◆ Dirty clothing, lack of personal hygiene.
- ◆ Disheveled, unusual or inappropriate clothing.
- ◆ Evidence of self-inflicted wounds.

## Behavior

- ◆ Submissive/domineering, overly suspicious or uncooperative, non-responsive.
- ◆ Talks too loud/soft, too fast/slow, mumbles/stammers.
- ◆ Face is expressionless/inappropriately animated.
- ◆ Movements are stiff/limp; experiences tremors.
- ◆ Paces, rocks back and forth, rubs head or body.
- ◆ Reacts impulsively.

## Mood

- ◆ Mood is inappropriate for situation.
- ◆ Appears sad, anxious, fearful, angry or hostile.
- ◆ Talks about suicidal or homicidal ideas.

## Perception/Thinking

- ◆ Sees or hears things that others do not.
- ◆ Appears disoriented to time, place or self.
- ◆ Isn't alert to surroundings.
- ◆ Can't concentrate.
- ◆ Has irrational fears and illogical thoughts.
- ◆ Has delusions of possessing special powers, of thinking others are plotting against them, or of believing their thoughts are being controlled.
- ◆ Has impaired judgment or insight into their problems.

Funding for this card was provided  
by the Ohio Office of Criminal  
Justice Services.  
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CJS 0030 11/12 [760-1282]

