

# COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS GUIDEBOOK



# CONTRIBUTIONS

The content in this guidebook has been developed in coordination with:

- Person's with lived experience of having a mental health condition,
- Caregivers,
- Ministry of Health, Department of Health Promotions,
- Nairobi County, Covid IEC TWG partners

**Speak up**  
on Mental Health Problems

  
**BasicNeeds**  
Better Mental Health, Better Lives



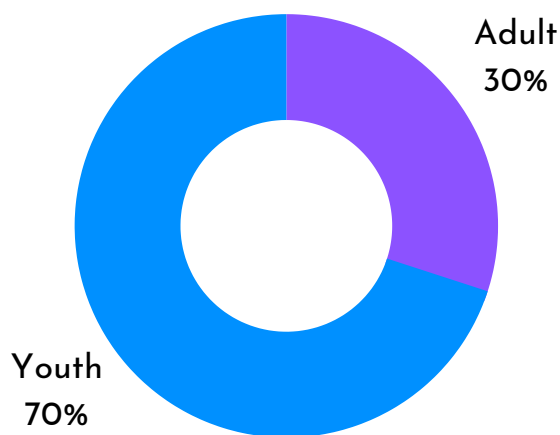
This funding is from Comic Relief & UK aid Mental Health Programme

# INTRODUCTION

The aim of this guidebook is to improve Community Health Volunteers' understanding of mental health, and help them develop skills to support their own wellbeing and provide adequate support to people with lived experiences of mental health conditions (Champions) and their families. It also demonstrates the various ways that others can show their support to champions.

# IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Youth in Nairobi face challenges to their mental wellbeing such as rising alcohol and drug misuse, increased gambling and urbanization.



**70%**  
of the Kenyan population is below 24 years of age (2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census)

The consequences of not addressing mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.



Mental disorders begin early in life and young people comprise the group that is most affected.

# UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of well-being in which the individual:

- Realizes his or her own abilities,
- Can cope with the normal stresses of life,
- Can work productively fully, and
- Is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

A healthy person has a healthy mind and is able to:

- Think clearly,
- Solve problems in life,
- Work productively,
- Enjoy good relationships with other people,
- Feel spiritually at ease, and
- Make a contribution to the community.

It is these aspects of functioning that can be considered as mental health. Mental health is vital for individuals, families and communities, and is more than just the absence of a mental disorder.

# THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS IN MENTAL HEALTH

A CHV is very well placed to:

- Recognise when a person in their community is experiencing symptoms of mental disorder.
- Respond appropriately to a person experiencing the symptoms of mental disorder, and can
- Encourage the person to seek assistance from the most effective available services.
- Support families who have a mentally ill family member.
- Promote mental health in the community more broadly.

There is rarely one single cause of a mental disorder.

Most mental disorders are caused by a combination of factors including:

- Stressful life events
- Body functions
- Individual psychological factors e.g. poor self-esteem, negative thinking
- Adverse life experiences during childhood e.g. abuse, neglect, death of parents or other traumatic experiences.

## ***FACTORS AFFECTING MENTAL HEALTH***

Stressful life events can contribute to the development of mental disorders e.g. family conflicts, unemployment, death of a loved one, money problems, infertility and violence. A lot of stress may also contribute to an imbalance of chemicals in the brain.

Body functions can include genetics, brain injury, and chemical imbalance in the brain. Sometimes people experiencing chronic medical problems such as heart, kidney and liver failure, and diabetes may develop mental health problems, as living with a chronic illness can be very stressful.

Poverty can place a person at risk of mental disorders because of the stresses associated with low levels of education, poor housing and low income.

Difficulties in childhood such as sexual or physical violence, emotional neglect, or early death of a parent can sometimes lead to a mental disorder later in life. Unhealthy behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse can also lead to the development of a mental disorder.

# MENTAL DISORDERS



Mental disorders can be divided into two main categories:

- **Common Mental Disorders:** which include symptoms that we all experience from time to time, for example, feelings of fear, worry or sadness.
- **Severe Mental Disorders:** which are often difficult for the general community to understand, for example, hearing voices or expressing strange or unusual beliefs.

*(Source: Mental Health 101, Dr. Stan Kutcher)*

**NB: If a person in your community is experiencing symptoms that you think may be linked to a mental disorder, it is important to refer them to a doctor or mental health specialist**



# ***WARNINGS SIGNS IN MENTAL HEALTH***

The warning signs in mental health can be physical or psychological:

1. Physical signs are those that involve the physical functioning of the body e.g. aches and pains, weakness, tiredness, sleep disturbance, and increased or decreased appetite.

2. Psychological signs are those that involve the mental functioning of the body (see diagram)

**01**

## **Feeling signs**

The physical functioning of the body e.g. aches and pains, weakness, tiredness, sleep disturbance, and increased or decreased appetite

**02**

## **Thinking signs**

Are those that affect the way a person thinks e.g. problems in understanding, concentrating, memory, and judgment (decision-making). Thinking about ending your life (suicide) or thinking that someone else is going to harm you are examples of thinking symptoms.

**03**

## **Behavioural signs**

Are those that affect the way people act or what they do. Behaviours are what we actually see others doing e.g. being aggressive, increased or decreased talking, withdrawal from family and friends, self-harm e.g. cutting the skin, and attempting suicide.

**04**

## **Imagining signs**

Are those that involve the person perceiving or experiencing things that are not actually real (although they seem very real to the person experiencing them). For example, the person may be hearing voices or seeing things that are not actually present.

1

## **Assess the risk of suicide or harm to self or others**

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Engage the person in conversation about how they are feeling and let them describe why they are feeling this way.

If you believe the person is at risk of harming him/herself then:

- Don't leave the person alone,
- Seek immediate help from someone who knows about mental disorders,
- Try to remove the person from access to the means of taking their own life,
- Try to stop the person continuing to use alcohol or drugs.

# **MENTAL HEALTH**

# **FIRST AID**

2

## **Listen without judgement**

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Listen to what the person describes without being critical or thinking they are weak. Don't give advice such as 'just cheer up' or 'pull yourself together'.

Avoid getting into an argument with the person.

3

## **Give reassurance and information**

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Provide hope for the person and their family and talk about a good outcome for that person.

Tell the person that he/she has an illness that can be treated, and it doesn't mean that he/she is a bad person.

Let them know that you want to help.

4

## **Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help**

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As a CHW you can encourage the person to consult with a doctor who knows about mental disorders, and who is able to prescribe medication if necessary. Then you can follow-up by giving ongoing support to the person and their family.

If the person is very unwell i.e. you think they are suicidal or psychotic, and he/she is refusing to get any help from a doctor, encourage the family to consult with the doctor so that they can explain the situation and get professional support.

5

## **Encourage self help treatments**

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Suggest actions that the person can perform him/herself that can help relieve the symptoms of mental disorder such as:

- Getting enough sleep,
- Eating a healthy diet,
- Regular exercise,
- Relaxation and breathing exercises e.g. yoga,
- Avoiding alcohol,
- Joining support groups for women, men or youth.

# CHV'S selfcare tips

When taking care of others there may be situations or times that are difficult and so it is very important that we think now about how we will support ourselves during our time as caregivers.

1

## Practise problem solving

Divide the problem into small steps and tackle only one problem at a time. Sometimes, it is useful to draw a picture of the problem to help you understand it.

3

## Seek support

Caregivers often feel isolated and may struggle with feelings of frustration, resentment or guilt. Seeking support provides a safe place to express these emotions as well as cope.

2

## Take time off

It may seem like there aren't enough hours in the day, but self-care becomes more important than ever when you're caring for others. Regularly taking some time for yourself can go a long way toward managing caregiver stress.

4

## Ask for help

Enlist backup and work with family members to create a plan together. When friends and neighbours offer to help, take them up on it.

## 1. Mindfulness coloring

This is a form of meditation exercise. Instead of sitting in silence or listening to a piece of music for example, you instead bring your attention to the present moment through coloring – focusing on the colors and shapes.

You can practice mindfulness coloring (see final page) in your own time using this artwork designed by a Champion - Brian Emmanuel Maina.

## 2. Box breathing

This can help your heart rate return to normal, which helps you to relax.

Step 1: Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.

Step 2: Hold your breath for 4 seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.

Step 3: Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.

Step 4: Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing again.

Repeat this process as many times as you can. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control



**Techniques to help  
DEAL WITH  
STRESS**

# MENTAL HEALTH & PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

<b>Sub-county</b>	<b>Facility</b>	<b>Services available</b>	<b>Clinic days</b>
Lang'ata	Mbagathi Hospital	Psychiatric clinic Psychotherapy clinic	Mon to Fri
Makadara	Jericho HC	Psychiatric services	Wed
Dagoretti	Mutuini Hospital	Counselling services Psychiatry clinic	Mon - Thur
Kamukunji	Pumwani Maternity Hospital	Maternal mental health services Psychiatric clinic	Mon - Fri
Ruaraka	Mathare North Health Centre	Psychiatric & Counselling	Tue
Starehe	Ngara health Center & Methadone clinic	Psychotherapy & Counselling	Mon, Tue & Wed
Embakasi East	Mukuru kwa Njenga HC	Counselling services	Daily
Westlands	Kangemi Health Centre	Epilepsy clinic	Monday
Embakasi West	Mama Lucy Kibaki hospital	Psychotherapy (counseling)	Mon - Fri
Kasarani	Kariobangi North HC	Psychiatry Clinic	Monday

# FUN ACTIVITY: MINDFULNESS COLOURING



Designed by Brian Emmanuel Maina