

The Road to Recovery

-When life hurts

This pamphlet is written to people with mental health problems and their relatives.

DO YOU NEED HELP?

Mental illness can be many things. It can occur suddenly, but can also develop over a longer period of time. Therefore it might be difficult to know if you, or someone close to you, need help.

The sooner you receive treatment for your illness the better your chances of recovery.

You have to seek treatment and use the social services in your municipality.

Here are some examples of the symptoms:

- Hiding from other people and not wanting anything to do with others.
- Sleeping all day and switching around night and day
- You don't want to eat or drink
- You are filled with sorrow or anger
- Behaving aggressively and threatening, and not being able to find anything positive about people around you or your life.
- Having visions or hear voices
- You are too happy one day and too sad the next
- Seem like another person or feel like you are somebody else
- Wanting to take your own life because you are depressed and don't want to live anymore.
- Thinking that you are being followed and someone wants to hurt you.
- Fainting when you can't stand it anymore or have inexplicable pains.
- Have an illness the doctor can't find.

GETTING HELP

Tell your doctor that something is wrong with you. Maybe your doctor has already noticed that you have mental health problems.

If your doctor does not understand

Maybe your doctor finds it difficult to understand what you mean. This is because doctors, psychiatrists and other health workers in use their own knowledge and belief as reference point. This goes for the cause of the illness as well as methods of treatment.

Perhaps you have another reference point in your own knowledge and belief.

An example could be that you and your relatives think evil spirits possess you, while the doctor or the psychiatrist thinks there is another cause.

Keep in mind that it is not your values and beliefs that should be discussed or treated. It is solely your mental illness.

Have the doctor explain what is wrong and what is going to happen.

It is important that you make sure to get the doctors explanation of what he/she thinks has happened to you. And an explanation of what will happen next and why.

The doctor might prescribe different medicine for a pain in the body and a pain in life. It is said that a mental illness is in the head, even if the cause is sometimes unknown.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Sometimes your own doctor will treat you.

In other cases you will be referred to a specialist. It can be a psychologist or a psychiatrist or treatment in a hospital or a district psychiatric centre. Maybe you will be hospitalized. A doctor will make that decision together with you.

Psychiatric treatment is free of charge (not a psychologist)

The worst thing you can do is hide the illness from yourself and the people close to you. Even if you worry about your reputation within your family, circle of friends and acquaintances you must not hide your illness, even if you are the one responsible for the family.

If you receive treatment you can recover.

Get help from your family and the things you believe in

It will often be an invaluable support for you if you get help from family or friends. Perhaps they also need help to understand what is happening.

It is, however, your decision whether to give permission to have your family involved in the treatment.

There is nothing wrong with looking to whatever you believe in for support while getting treated.

Being a danger to yourself

If you suddenly take so ill that it is feared you will commit suicide or hurt others, a doctor can decide to have you admitted to a hospital or psychiatric centre until you feel better. There are very specific rules for a situation like this, including your right to file a formal complaint over this decision.

IN THE HOSPITAL

In most psychiatric wards a contact person will be allocated to you. It is her or his job to keep contact with you and inform you.

In your daily treatment you will meet many employed men and women. They are doctors, nurses, caretakers, social- and health workers, psychologists, social workers and therapists. They are all experts in their own certain area. Staff will normally not wear a uniform. If you are in doubt ask the staff to tell you their function.

Hospital without admission

You can also get treated without being hospitalised. This will take place either in a day hospital or a district psychiatric centre.

The food in the hospital

It cannot be guaranteed that the hospital can take special consideration to your eating habits, but you can still tell them what you will and will not eat. All hospitals have a vegetarian option. In some hospitals there will be more choices.

Rules in the hospital

You will have to know and respect the rules in the hospital. For instance there are rules about smoking and visitors. The hospital staff also has to respect your wishes and try to meet them if possible.

When you are hospitalised you will be given a pamphlet with guidance on your rights as a patient.

GET HELP TO BE UNDERSTOOD

Problems with the language

You have the right to an interpreter if you are unable to tell about your thoughts or feelings in Danish. Or if you do not understand what the doctor or other staff members say.

It is not always possible to get an interpreter, but you should make sure to have one present at important talks.

The interpreter has an obligation of confidentiality. It is the job of the interpreter to translate what is being said. The interpreter should not analyse what you say. You should make it known if you are unhappy with the interpreter.

Problems with different cultures

Maybe the person treating you does not know of your way of thinking, or of your culture, your beliefs and your everyday life.

You might not know of his or her ideas of a normal everyday life.

People working in the district psychiatric institutions, in drop-in centres and accommodation facilities are there to help you and others with mental problems.

Tell them what you are experiencing. The more they know about you, the better they can help you.

DURING TREATMENT

The importance of being with others and doing activities

In your treatment it is important that you have personal talks with the people treating you. It is also important that you take part in activities with other patients.

The idea is that activities and social connections – possibly combined with medication – will prevent hospitalisation.

Use activities in your treatment

In your treatment you can take part in a number of activities. Participation is voluntary but once you have signed up for something, you have to take part.

It is believed by organisations for mentally ill as well as the local authorities that participation in activities and being with others is beneficial to you.

Therefore in all treatment, gathering with others, talks and activities have a high priority.

Remember to take your medication

During the course of treatment you will be provided with the medication prescribed to you. The medication must be taken in the doses stated on the packaging. If you have trouble reading it you should get someone to help you.

Tell about side effects of the medication

Perhaps the medication prescribed to you has some side effects.

Some of them your doctor might already know and can tell you about. Maybe you experience other side effects.

It is important that you tell your doctor of any side effects you may experience.

USE THE SERVICES IN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Special services for people with mental illness

Besides the offers of treatment in the hospital or the psychiatric centres, your local authority will have a number of special services for people with mental health problems. These services are often referred to as social psychiatry.

You have the right to use these services whether you are in treatment or not.

People with mental illness have the same rights as other citizens.

You can ask your case worker to tell you more about the offers and services available from your local authority. You have a right to receive advice and guidance regarding your personal situation.

Therefore:

- Consider in advance what you wish to discuss with your case worker
- Maybe bring a relative or friend when meeting your case worker
- Ask to have plans and decisions in writing.
- Remember that you have a right to an interpreter if you find it difficult speaking or understanding Danish

Action plan of the local municipal authority

The municipal authority might draw up an action plan which describes the goals and activities the local authority will initiate for you. It can be about your living arrangements, employment, personal assistance, treatment, technical assistance etc.

This action plan should be drawn up together with you.

SERVICES

Support and contact person

A support and contact person can be given to socially isolated people with a mental illness. You can request a support and contact person to assist you with problems in your everyday life. Assistance from a support and contact person is free of charge.

A support and contact person

- Will use your wishes as reference point
- Will support you in your daily life
- Is an offer of contact
- Will visit you in your home by appointment
- Can help you with a number of practical problems
- Will help you take advantage of what society offers

Drop-in centres

Drop-in centres exist in most municipalities. They are centres open to people who need a place where they can get in touch with others. Most drop-in centres are open during the day and users can come there freely without charge. Some drop-in centres are membership based.

Drop-in centres offer:

- Alcohol-free beverages, coffee/tea and food at reasonable prices
- Social contact with staff and other users
- The option of just being there
- Activities (e.g. cooking, sports, photographing, sewing, games, second hand shop and more)
- Social arrangement (e.g. parties, excursions, travel etc)
- Education (e.g. Danish, English, maths, computers etc)

Education

In several towns you can find offers of education for people with a mental illness. It can be in connection with a drop-in centre or a small school for adults. There will also be special needs education for adults which you can

take part in. it can be education in languages (also Danish) and other ordinary school subjects.

You can gain from these offers of education if

- You need education to take place in a safe environment in small groups
- You find it difficult to learn Danish in normal schools for foreigners
- You need to refresh ordinary school subjects

Work – employment – activating

Mental illness and vulnerability will not necessarily affect your ability to work. It is important that you work. At the same time, you might feel so bad for a period of time that you have to take a break.

Your local municipal authority can assist you in starting a job or finding another form of employment.

Employment can be

- Rehabilitation, which aims at making you capable of having a normal job.
- Work try-outs which aims at finding out which types of jobs you can handle
- Flexi-jobs, which are jobs with a wage subsidy in a normal work place
- Job training, which aims at keeping you activated while you receive cash benefit

Accommodation

Normally you will stay in your own home, either with your family or on your own. If you live on your own you might, in particular circumstances, receive help if you can not cope with daily household tasks.

The local authority might temporarily provide another form of accommodation e.g.:

- Shared accommodation facility where you will have your own room and live with 4-6 other people.
- Accommodation in a half-way house where you will get relief, training, testing of future accommodation options etc.

There are other forms of accommodation facilities to which your local authority can refer you and where you can stay for a longer period of time.

ORGANISATIONS

Help from private organisations

In most towns you can find organisations where you can take part in various activities.

It can be education, informal gatherings and excursions to mention a few. Education takes place in small groups to ensure a safe environment.

Your family and relatives might be able to obtain psychological advice and participate in group talks.

Participation is normally free of charge.

Watch the video “the Road to Recovery – when life hurts”

The information video “the road to recovery – when life hurts” shows the options and offers available to people with mental health problems.

The video has been made by Heller Film for The Social Development Centre SUS on an initiative by the organisation SIND in Frederiksberg.

This pamphlet is financed by the Ministry of Refugees, Immigration and Integration.

Printing is financed by the Ministry of Education’s football pools and lotto funds, and the Ministry of Social Affairs have provided financial support to the editing process.

Written by: Lotte Bøggild and Anita Barfod
Edited by: Christian Schmidt
Translated into English by: Mara Johansen
Published by: Socialt Udviklingscenter SUS

Nørre Farimagsgade 13
1364 København K
tel.: 33934450
sus@sus.dk
www.sus.dk