



How to handle a client with mental illness

Emp_1005_How to handle a client with mental illness

This Tip Sheet can assist you with handling a client who presents with a mental illness.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM A CLIENT WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS?

In most cases you should expect to have clients who can understand you well and who displays good manners and normal communication skills. In fact, in most cases it will not be apparent that the client has a mental illness until they tell you. However, there are exceptions and it may be common to see some of the following symptoms or behaviours in clients:

- 👉 **Emotionally unstable** - In some cases a person with a mental illness may be emotionally unstable, especially if they have not yet come to terms with the idea of having a mental illness or if they have only recently been diagnosed with a condition. Although they may appear to be happy their moods can fluctuate suddenly to depression or anger and then back to normal again. This might be due to confusion or mixed feelings.
- 👉 **Disorganised** - Some clients may come to appointments late and may forget to bring information with them such as referrals.
- 👉 **Poor hygiene** - Although having some mental illness' such as arachnophobia (fear of spiders) will not impact the

hygiene of a client, some of the more critical mental illness such as bipolar or depression can. Unsettled clients may come in with mismatched clothing, dirty hair, and smelly from skipping showers. Some may even forget to eat regular meals and take their medication.

- 👉 **Easily frustrated (out of normal character and behaviour)** – A client might get frustrated if they feel as though they are being undermined or disrespected. If they are suffering from anxiety, they may feel hasty for time or anxious to leave if they feel like they are being judged. If a client is showing signs of frustration, it is important to remain composed and try to calm the client down in a non-derogative manner.
- 👉 **Depressed mood or anxious** – people with a mental illness will sometimes also suffer from depression or anxiety. This might mean that they may often break out into tears, may struggle to concentrate, and may tremble or sweat excessively.
- 👉 **Abnormal memory loss** - This is more common in clients with dementia. Sometimes medication may make clients drowsy or forgetful and they may forget basic facts about themselves such as their home address.



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HOW SHOULD I WORK WITH A CLIENT WHO HAS A MENTAL ILLNESS

All clients should be treated with respect at all times. You should remain friendly and not assume that the client does not understand or is less intelligent just because they have a mental illness. The client will be less inclined to open up to you if they feel like you are undermining them or if they do not trust you.

Are clients with mental illness dangerous? It is more likely that a client would be a danger to themselves than to someone else. However, while not all mental ill persons are dangerous some may display signs of aggression or frustration. This is more common in cases where a person with a mental illness suffers from hallucination (i.e, hearing voices) or extreme delusion (i.e; believing someone is out to get them) or paranoia (i.e; anxious around crowds or social interactions.)

What do I do if I feel like my client is dangerous? If you are feeling threatened by your client and calming them down isn't working then you should try get help immediately. Try excuse yourself from the room and find help discretely as to not distress any clients in the waiting room. If necessary, call security but do not threaten the client. Eg., "if you do not settle down I will have to call security".

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FACTORS THAT MAY INCREASE THE RISK OF AGGRESSION, VIOLENCE AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN A CLIENT WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

- Client mix
- Overcrowding waiting room or office
- Inadequate staffing
- Substance misuse
- Delirium
- Client's history of violence

FACTORS THAT MAY DECREASE THE RISK OF AGGRESSION, VIOLENCE AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN A CLIENT WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

- Good visibility of entrances and exits
- Eliminate any potentially dangerous equipment from the environment
- If possible make sure there is a staff nearby that can run to your aid or call for help if necessary
- Make sure you cannot be locked inside the same room with the client
- Remain calm at all times
- Move slowly as to perceive less threatening

If you are concerned for your jobseekers, please do not hesitate to contact Pure Insights for further advices and tips on supporting your jobseekers.