

## WORKING WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES, MENTAL ILLNESS, CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY, PHYSICAL DISABILITIES & FAMILY MALFUNCTION

Working with individuals with any type of disability is a challenge. There are physical and mental disadvantages that people, young and old, may have according to their diagnoses and symptoms. Some reasons for disability are:

- Developmental disabilities (DD)
- Mental Illness (MI)
- Physical disabilities
- Chemical Dependency (CD)
- Family malfunction

Many times, a person has more than one disability. For example, a person with developmental disabilities and physical impairment may also have mental health issues. When a person's disabilities interfere with their ability to complete their daily living tasks or with ability to be independent at the age appropriate level (such as a child) the individual may need a home care worker to assist them. The type and amount of assistance necessary is specific for the person's individual problems. Each client has their own individual plan of care to meet their needs.

When working with a person with disabilities, the home care staff understands the client's plan of care for the level of care associated with their job. Home care workers need to understand their client's disabilities in order to deliver the best care possible. A person's disabilities or incapacities are directly related to what areas of daily living a client needs help with.

The client or client's responsible party help develop a plan of home care that guides home care staff how to take care of the individual's daily needs in relation to the disabilities.

**A person with disabilities has different levels of ability such as:**

- Independent or age appropriate (no help needed)
- Intermittent supervision
- Constant supervision
- Help of another with hands-on assistance
- Dependent on another with total hands-on assistance

**Service goals for working with children and adults in the home care setting are the same. Goals include:**

- Promote self-care and independence
- Assure safety, comfort, cleanliness
- Maintain dignity
- Maintain stability

It is important to always keep the goals for service in mind every time home health care is done.

### **Developmental Disability (DD)**

Developmental disability is defined as a group of chronic conditions that are due to mental (cognitive) and/or physical impairment. DD may occur during pregnancy, early childhood, or

anytime before the age of 22. DD may cause impairment in areas of life such as language, mobility, self-help, and independent living.

Some examples of developmental disability diagnoses include:

- Mental Retardation
- Autism
- Down syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Traumatic brain injury
- Epilepsy

There are many more.

### **Causes of Developmental Disabilities:**

- Brain injury before, during, after pregnancy
- Growth or nutritional problems
- Abnormal chromosomes and genes
- Prematurity
- Poor diet and health care
- Drug misuse during pregnancy
- Child abuse

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, DD affects 1-2 % of the population of the US. Developmental disabilities are twice as common in males as in females. Some research has found a higher incidence of DD in areas of poverty and deprivation. The life expectancy of a person with a developmental disability is 20 years below average. With advancements in adaptive equipments, medical technology, and care people with DD are living more fulfilling lives.

As stated people with developmental disabilities may have physical and/or cognitive impairments. For example- a person with Down's syndrome will likely have heart problems. A child with Autism may likely have a behavioral mental illness diagnosis. Each diagnosis has its own set of challenges, physically and mentally.

### **Working with Developmental Disabilities**

A home care worker will be assigned to assist the child or adult client with routine daily activities. The home care staff working with a child or adult with a responsible party, such as a parent, understands that the responsible party will best know how the daily cares need to be done, as the responsible party will take part in creating the plan of care. An adult client with developmental disabilities who does not have a responsible party directs his/her own plan of care.

Home care staff needs to communicate with the individual with developmental disabilities at a level and in the form of communication the person understands. Sometimes aids such as flash cards or sign language helps with communication. On the other hand, do not assume that a person, who has a speech problem, also has a problem understanding speech. Be careful not to shout or talk down to a person who appears different. Be careful to not talk 3<sup>rd</sup> person about the client. Remember that people who grow up with disability - the disability is all they know, and it is normal for them.

### **Physical Disabilities**

While some physical impairment is a result of a developmental disability, people acquire physical problems later in life as a result of accidents, genetics, lifestyle choices, and acquired diseases. Physical disabilities all fall under the broad categories of: skeletal disabilities and/or

neuromuscular disabilities. Skeletal disabilities affect the bones. Neuromuscular disabilities affect the brain, nerves and muscles.

### **Areas of Physical Disability:**

- Brain: thinking, remembering, learning, communicating
- Eyes or vision: blindness, blurred vision, night or color blindness
- Ears or hearing: deafness or hearing loss
- Coordination: trouble with gross motor skills such as walking; and fine motor skill such as eating, balance issues
- Movement: walking, bearing weight, inability of use of a limb
- Paralysis and decreased feeling
- Limited activity (restricted or supervised social life)

### **Adaptive equipment for Physical Disabilities:**

- Visual impairment: glasses, good lighting, magnifiers, white cane, large numbered phone, etc.
- Hearing problems: hearing aids, (speaking at client's level clearly and directly)
- Mobility issues: cane, crutches, walker, wheelchair, leg/ arm braces and splints
- Transfer issues: transfer belts, chair lifts, handles, slide boards, Hoyer lifts
- Toileting: raised toilet seats, handle bars, commodes
- Bathing: shower benches and chairs
- Memory issues: diary books and calendars
- Communication: electronic and computer communication devices, flash cards, sign language

Some homes have modifications to help for the physical handicaps. There are ramps or elevators instead of stairs. Some homes have handicapped accessible kitchens and bathrooms to improve client's independence. The home care worker will provide reminders for the client to use the assisted devices. The support includes help with use of the adaptive equipment. The home care worker assists to keep adaptive equipment clean and maintained. The staff will be trained in the use of the equipments when needed.

### **Mental Illness (MI)**

Mental Illness (MI) is a brain disorder that affects:

- Thinking
- Mood or feelings
- Behavior and actions

Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors.

According to Center for Disease Control - 1 out of 4 adults and 20% of children in developed countries have mental illness. Depression is the most common mental illness. Studies have shown that mental disorders, especially the depressive disorders are strongly related to the occurrence and successful treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and asthma. MI is strongly linked to risk behaviors such as physical activity, smoking, excessive drinking, and insufficient sleep. MI affects people of any age, race, or income.

### **Some symptoms of Mental Illness are:**

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping, changes eating habits
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Extreme feelings of guilt
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Sex drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. A mental health concern becomes mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect ability to function. Home care workers may likely work with individuals whereby their mental health symptoms pose problems with their ability to take care of daily tasks. A home care worker may be assigned to assist and supervise an adult or child in their home setting, or any setting where normal life activities are done.

### **Causes of MI:**

- Inherited: higher incidence with blood relative with MI
- Environmental: exposure to viruses, toxins, alcohol and drugs (before and after birth)
- Negative life experiences: loss of loved one(s), financial difficulties, family malfunction (poor upbringing), abuse a/o neglect
- Brain chemistry: chemical (neurotransmitter) and hormonal imbalance

A home care worker needs to understand the client has MI symptoms. The home care staff needs to understand that demand of everyday life may increase the symptoms. It is their job to assist the client, young and old, to perform everyday tasks by attempting to reduce the stress of the activity.

### **Some tips for working with clients with MI are:**

- Be patient
- Attempt to help client with a routine schedule
- Be understanding of fluctuation in moods
- Be positive
- Provide positive reinforcement for any small accomplishment
- Avoid judging behavior (such as “lazy”, “bratty”, etc)
- Provide step-by-step simple cues and prompts
- Speak to the client at their level
- Help with calendars and note reminders etc.

- Remain non-reactive with tantrum “type” behavior
- Provide accompaniment for community activities

A home care worker would immediately redirect any unsafe behavior. Any behavior or circumstances that are different than normal for the client need to be reported to a supervisor.

### **Family Malfunction**

Staff working in home care may be assigned to work in homes where there is family dysfunction. A dysfunctional family may have disorganization, conflict, misbehavior, neglect, or abuse. Children growing up in this environment have the understanding that the dysfunction is normal. Dysfunctional families are primarily the result of co-dependent adults. The adults may also be affected by substance abuse or sometimes an untreated mental illness.

Some common characteristics of a dysfunctional family:

- Addiction
- Control
- Unpredictability and fear
- Conflict
- Perfectionism
- Poor communication

### **Chemical Dependency (CD)**

Chemical dependency, or substance dependency, is a condition in which a person has become physically and/or psychologically dependent on a mood-altering substance. Over time, people with chemical dependency issues develop a tolerance for the drug and need higher quantities to feel the same effects. People with CD problems may continue the use of the mood-altering substance despite physical, emotional, social or financial consequences.

Many times, the substance on which a person becomes dependent is a legal prescription medication, making it more difficult for the user to see that they indeed have a problem. In addition, there is a wide range of non-prescribed addictive substances such as --- alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, heroine, steroids, and methamphetamine, to name a few.

Chemical dependency is a medical diagnosis. Physicians diagnose a person as having CD if the person meets certain criteria to have the diagnosis. Home care workers may likely work with individuals with CD diagnosis. It is likely the individual will have other diagnoses, as well.

**Some common behavioral symptoms of Chemical Dependency are:**

- Social isolation
- General lack of motivation, an “I don’t care” attitude
- Poor self-esteem
- Belief they cannot do anything without the substance
- Dishonesty, especially about the chemical use (amount / frequency, etc)
- General mood changes

There are a variety of physical symptoms related to each individual substance of choice. Some general physical signs of CD are weight loss or weight gain, frequent physical complaints

(headache, stomach aches), nausea and vomiting, shakiness, red watery eyes with pupil's abnormally small or large, lack of energy or anxious energy, general lack of caring for self.

There can be stigma associated with Mental Illness, Family Malfunction, and Chemical Dependency. People, in general, tend to judge other people's behavior. Staff working in home care must remain unbiased and non-judgmental about the way their client's live, the lifestyle choices that the clients make, and client's behavior. It is the home care worker's responsibility to be a good role model. A worker must attempt to be positive and encouraging. Staff should adhere to the rules of their job and be professional and reliable to show good boundaries. Staff needs to remain calm when problems arise.

People with disabilities will have safety concerns. All people with disabilities have vulnerability. Home care staff could likely suspect or observe abuse and neglect while working in the home setting. All staff working with vulnerable people are mandated reporter. Any incident of injury or change in condition needs to be reported to the responsible party and/or the agency providing home services.