

## **The ABC of Mental Health**

The ABC of mental health - acceptance, belonging, connecting...these are all key aspects of mental health – things we can easily take for granted. We often do not realise just how fortunate we are.

This week is Mental Health Awareness Week. The themes are acceptance, belonging and connecting.

It is about being aware that these issues are so very important to each of us and realising that not all people are accepted, feel as if they belong or are connected with family, friends, neighbours or workmates.

Social relationships are important to maintaining good health. Think what it would be like to spend most of your time alone because being around other people is too difficult. You feel that others may be judging you because of your mental illness so you avoid contact wherever possible. This social withdrawal depletes your self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. And just as you withdraw from society – society withdraws from you.

Social isolation is both a cause and an effect of mental illness. The more isolated a person becomes, the more mental distress they face. With more mental distress comes the wish for more isolation.

The stigma associated with mental illness creates huge barriers to socialization. Many people with a severe mental illness say that the stigma they face because of their diagnosis is often as distressing as the symptoms themselves. This stigmatisation not only prevents them from interacting with others but may be a barrier to them seeking treatment.

Sadly, too many families, friends and workmates withdraw their support, leaving the very person in need - being and feeling more rejected than ever. For many, the sheer loneliness, associated depression, loss of self-esteem, stress and often the poverty of severe mental illness can be too much to bear.

But it needn't be this way.

Showing awareness and acceptance, including people with a mental illness in your life and supporting them in their road to recovery is just so important. It is what family and friendship is all about.

Just as it is important to show and provide support for someone you suspect may need some encouragement in seeking professional help for their mental health problems.

Being accepted, achieving a sense of belonging and feeling connected with their community is essential for the fullest recovery possible for people with a mental illness.

There are a very wide range of very effective services offering treatment for people with a mental illness. What we need more of - is ordinary people like you and i being a little more aware, a little more understanding and a little more inclusive in our support of anyone with a mental or physical illness.

Our friendship and support may be the first step towards ending their social isolation.

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