



Being Alongside / APCMH
Registered Charity No 1081642 Limited Company No.3957730
Patrons: Professor Andrew Sims, Rev'd Canon Roger Royle

Action Sheet: Challenging the Stigma

*Hopefully, this will give you some ideas and pointers to help you get going.
If you have any ideas or comments of your own to add, please do contact us.*

Whether you like it or not, mental health is an issue in every community. It should be high on every church's agenda. And yet, mental illness is still a taboo subject in many places. It is often swept under the carpet and ignored. This perpetuates the stigma and makes it even more painful for those who suffer and for their relatives.

One of the main aims of BA /APCMH is to raise awareness of mental health issues amongst church and other faith communities. We believe that the whole community, not just those who are in distress, will reap the benefits of openness and honesty.

*"We encourage you not to run away from people who are in pain or who are broken, but to walk towards them, to touch them. Then you will find rising up within you a well of love, springing from resurrection."
(Jean Vanier: The Broken Body)*

There are many ways of raising awareness within your own church:

- small group discussions or meetings
- sermons
- inclusion in Intercessions or Prayers
- training for pastoral workers
- accessible literature and information
- articles in church magazines
- positive attitudes and openness in the church

But a good start may be to hold a seminar, open meeting or video evening

Our experience is that there is increasing interest in mental health. When people come together to discuss it, they very often feel encouraged and moved. The performance of the speakers may be of secondary importance! So do not worry. Have a go. Of course there are many different ways of doing things. You will soon find out what works for you and your church. Set out overleaf are some ideas and tips from our own experience. We hope they may be of some help.

Please feel free to photocopy this action sheet and pass it around. For more information, please contact:

Being Alongside / APCMH
St Paul's Church Centre,
5 Rossmore Road, Marylebone, NW1 6NJ
Contact line: **02033 972 497** or visit our website at
www.beingalongside.org.uk

ACTION / TIPS

Form Planning Group:

It may be helpful to involve people with personal experience of mental health problems (such as sufferers, carers, friends or relatives.)

Budget and Funding:

Consider the cost of the venue, refreshments, speaker (fee and expenses), literature and publicity.

A Planning Group to decide:

a) Topic / title: *try a start with understanding mental health. Other topics might be particular disorders, the importance of friendship, the stigma and how to challenge it, and how to get help.*

Avoid 'mental illness' in the title. Consider 'Understanding Mental Health', or 'Hope Through the Darkness'.

b) Speakers: *have at least one person with personal experience of mental distress. Relatives can be effective in sharing experience. Local mental health team may help with the professional side. A mix of professional and someone with personal experience works well.*

c) Format / small groups: *Don't worry about filling time as discussion will develop. What about the video "With a Little Help from my Friends" from the Bishop of Ely's Office? Consider a time of worship or reflection, 2 speakers, questions, small discussion groups and an open discussion. Encourage those with personal experience to share their art, poetry, music etc. Also a coffee time is important for chat. Decide on size, leaders, how to form groups, whether to set questions / feedback. Huddles" of 3 or 4 without a pre-determined leader and without pressure of feedback often work well.*

d) Chair: *The chair should be able to encourage people to relax and have their say without dominating proceedings - this may be difficult in a mental health setting as those who are in emotional pain may feel the need to talk. Everyone's point of view should be acknowledged.*

e) Place and Time: *2 hours may be about right. (Disability) access to the venue, suitable space for small group work, discussions and kitchen area are important. Church halls are often ideal and modestly priced.*

f) Booking / Forms: *Consider charge / fee or ask for donations. Pre-booking causes more work but helps with catering.*

g) Refreshments: *pre-booking creates more work but helps with catering.*

h) Information for the Day: *this is often sought by people coming. Generally keep it simple. Include local contact numbers for further information / help; the local mental health team may be able to help.*

i) Evaluation Form / Review: *This may help if you are thinking of holding further events Maybe fix a follow up meeting of the Planning Group?*

i) Publicity: *Word of Mouth is best. Posters / fliers may help; also church notice boards / magazines. be cautious about wide publicity through the media as this will open the event up and discussion groups may become more difficult.*