



# Responding with Respect: A Mental Health First Aid Course

## CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Vancouver-Burnaby Branch

(604) 872-4902, ext. 226

### What is Mental Illness First Aid?

**T**his course is based on the concept of First Aid courses for physical emergencies. The basic idea for first aid is to train the general public in first response procedures in order to reduce harm and to save lives. It seems amazing that up until this point in time, there has not been any first aid training to address psychological issues. CMHA Vancouver – Burnaby Branch developed the Mental Illness First Aid course to give people the skills to respond to someone experiencing a mental illness. Similar to physical first aid courses, Mental Illness First Aid is meant to **reduce harm and save lives** in those individuals who are living with an untreated mental illness.

### What are the major components of the course?

*Mental Illness First Aid is a two-day course that teaches participants the 3 Rs:*

- (1) **Recognize** the signs and symptoms of four major mental illnesses,
- (2) **Respond** appropriately to the individual requiring treatment, and
- (3) **Refer** the person to a variety of agencies and supports in the community.

(1) **RECOGNIZE:** Participants learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of four major mental illnesses including: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia

Participants learn about each mental illness through reviewing basic facts, learning about the signs and symptoms, and watching video clips that highlight the personal impact of each illness. In addition, participants are taught an ABC approach to dealing with specific first aid situations. Stimulating discussions about stereotypes and mental illness in the media are also a part of the course.

Participants then apply their new knowledge by working on case studies. Participants are not taught to diagnose mental illnesses, but instead are given the basic knowledge and skills to be able to recognize that something is not right and then respond to the situation effectively.

(2) **RESPOND:** Participants learn how to appropriately respond to people who appear to be suffering from a major mental illness. They learn effective ways to approach and address the is-

sue, while also learning what doesn't work. The Mental Illness First Aid course also examines two particular types of mental health crisis situations: (1) concurrent disorders and (2) psychosis. In both of these crisis situations, participants learn about the facts of the problem and appropriate intervention techniques.

(3) **REFER:** Participants learn about CMHA's *Framework for Support: Community Resource Base and The Helping Continuum*. Through an examination of these two frameworks, participants learn about a full range of support agencies and groups from formal to informal. Participants will learn about the local community resources available and how best to access them.

## **What is the format of the Mental Illness First Aid course?**

This course was designed with best practices in adult education in mind. The course can be delivered in two full days or four half days. A variety of effective strategies are utilized to optimize learning and increase retention of the material. The learning strategies include mini-lectures, large and small group discussions, personal stories, case studies, video clips, demonstrations and role-plays, and individual writing.

The course is facilitated by a mental health professional such as a counsellor, social worker or psychiatric nurse with experience in working with mental health issues and skill as a presenter and educator. An individual who is in treatment or recovery for a serious mental illness co-facilitates the Mental Illness First Aid course. Their personal story about their illness and subsequent treatment and recovery is always a memorable experience and highlight of this course.

## **Who should take Mental Illness First Aid?**

Anyone with little or some knowledge of mental health issues would benefit from taking this course. The course has been developed for people working in the helping and public service professions including education, health, business, government, social work and anyone who knows or works with people who have a mental illness. Mental Illness First Aid is not designed for professional mental health workers with advanced knowledge and skill in psychological assessment and intervention.

## **What do participants say about the Mental Illness First Aid course?**

- ◆ It was an excellent workshop to help us in our work with clients but I believe that it helped everybody personally as well. It also reminds me that we play an important role & can influence people's lives – it is very important to take the time to help and understand our clients.
- ◆ Everyone that deals with clients should be required to take this training.
- ◆ One of the most effective, interesting and useful workshops I have attended.

## **How do I sign up for a course?**

Call CMHA Vancouver Burnaby at 604-872-4902 and speak with the Health Promotions Department at Extension 226 or email [stephanie\\_innes@cmhavb.bc.ca](mailto:stephanie_innes@cmhavb.bc.ca). We can deliver courses to your workplace, offer individual spaces in ongoing courses and customize courses for your specific needs. Course costs and dates can be discussed with the Health Promotions Co-ordinator.