

Serving Customers with Mental Health Disabilities

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You may not know that someone has a mental health disability unless informed. Usually it will not affect your customer service at all. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to provide assistance.

Mood Disorders are characterized by “highs and lows” that can be accompanied by excessive and persistent feelings of apprehension, worry and fear. Defined Mood Disorders may be Depression, Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Postpartum Depression and Anxiety, and Seasonal Affective Disorder. Mood Disorders are often an “invisible illness” but their symptoms can be distressing nonetheless. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help. Mental health disabilities are defined as the absence of psychological well-being and satisfactory adjustment to society. Some common features of mental health disabilities include phobias, panic attacks, hallucinations, mood swings, and Bipolar disorders (depression and manic phases).

Tips:

- Treat each individual with the same level of respect and consideration.
- Be confident and reassuring.
- Listen carefully and work with the person to meet their needs.
- Do not be confrontational. Be aware of your body language and maintain eye contact as some symptoms of a mood disorder are not apparent (e.g. Hearing voices or feeling “foggy” due to medications). It may be necessary to repeat information, do not speak too rapidly and allow for extra time to respond if necessary.
- If the person is in a crisis, ask how best to help; be aware the customer may not be able to provide this information.
- Don’t take things personally.

Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, **Mental Health First Aid** is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved. Between October 2016 and March 2017, 122 City employees have received Mental Health First Aid Training. More sessions will be offered in early 2018.

1. Recognize a change in behaviour
2. Assess for risk of suicide or harm
3. Respond with a confident reassurance and information
4. Guide to appropriate resources and support
 - a. 2016 Brandon Resource Guide distributed by BNRC (http://www.brandon.ca/images/pdf/resources/2016_resource_guide_update.pdf)
 - b. City Resource Guide on ESS/Company Documents

ALGEE – Mental Health First Aid’s 5-step Action Plan:

- A – Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- L – Listen nonjudgmentally
- G – Give reassurance and information
- E – Encourage appropriate professional help
- E – Encourage self-help and other support strategies