

**NC Department of  
Health and Human Services  
NC Nurse Aide I Curriculum**

**Module U  
Mental Health and Mental Illness**

July 2024

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**Objectives**

1. Discuss the risk factors of social isolation and loneliness for the older adult
2. Describe the most common mental health illnesses for older adults
3. Identify symptoms of mental illness in the older adult
4. Explain the role of the nurse aide in the de-escalation of the resident who is agitated

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**Mental Health and the Older Adult**

- Older adults may experience
  - Life changes impacting their mental health
  - Feelings of grief
  - Social isolation or loneliness
- Persistent feelings related to loss may lead to a clinical diagnosis of mental illness

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### Causes of Mental Illness

**Contributing Factors**

- Physical factors
- Psychosocial factors
- Genetics
- Stress



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### Symptoms of Mental Illness for the Older Adult

Noticeable changes in mood, energy level, or appetite

Seeing, hearing, and feeling things other people do not see, hear, or feel

Thoughts of death or suicide

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### Most Common Mental Health Illness for Older Adult

Mood Disorder

Anxiety Disorder

Psychotic Disorder

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### Mood Disorders



- Major Depression
- Dysthymia
- Bipolar Disorder

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### Mood Disorders and the Older Adult

- Feelings of sadness, anxiety or emptiness
- A persistent sense of hopelessness, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities
- Decreased energy and increased fatigue
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Thoughts about death or suicide

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### Anxiety Disorders and the Older Adult

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder



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### Anxiety and the Older Adult

- Anxiety disorders are frequently related to:
  - Traumatic events such as a fall or acute illness
  - Multiple medical conditions
  - Concern for physical problems
  - Use of numerous prescription medications
- Symptoms of anxiety may include headaches, back pain, or a rapid heartbeat

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### Psychotic Disorders

- Schizophrenia
- Schizoaffective Disorder
- Delusional Disorder
- Substance/Medication Induced Psychotic Disorder

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### Psychotic Disorders and the Older Adult

Psychotic disorders can be highly distressing and greatly impact a resident's quality of life

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Residents with a psychotic disorder often lose touch with reality

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The disorder is often managed with medication and therapy

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### Psychotic Disorders and the Older Adult

- Refusal of care by nursing staff
- Refusal of medical treatment
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts

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### Treatment for Mental Illness



MEDICATIONS      PSYCHOTHERAPY

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### Mental Health and the Older Adult Nurse Aide's Role

Observe	for changes in resident's mental health
Recognize	inappropriate behavior
Report	observations to the nurse
Document	observations
Participate	in de-escalation

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**De-escalation of an Agitated Resident**

- Supportive day-to-day relationships are the heart of de-escalation
- Know what is normal for the resident
- Be aware of specific triggers for the resident
- The primary objective in de-escalation is to reduce the level and intensity of the resident's behavior
- If de-escalation is not working, the nurse aide should STOP and calmly call for help
- Trust your instincts

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**Nurse Aide's Role in De-escalation**

- Control the environment
- Look for meaning of the behavior
- Check for underlying causes
- Respond in the resident's reality
- Engage in resident's story

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**Nurse Aide's Awareness of Self Behaviors in De-escalation**

- Behavior
- Posture
- Position self for safety
- Body movement and language
- Facial expression
- Eye contact
- Attitude
- Tone
- Responses
- Reasoning

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**Points to Remember**

- All behavior has meaning. Identifying the meaning behind the behavior is key
- Each resident diagnosed with a mental illness is different from other residents with same diagnosis
- Residents with a mental health disorder are more than the metal health diagnosis

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**Points to Remember**

- The interdisciplinary care plan should identify specific interventions
- Healthcare professionals should acknowledge a resident with a mental illness as an individual with a unique background and often challenging life experiences
- Nurse aides can successfully handle situations when a resident is stressed and agitated by using effective communication skills

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**Points to Remember**

- A resident with a mental illness may display behaviors beyond their control
- When unusual or inappropriate behavior escalates safety concerns should be the primary focus for the resident and others
- An important tool is de-escalation

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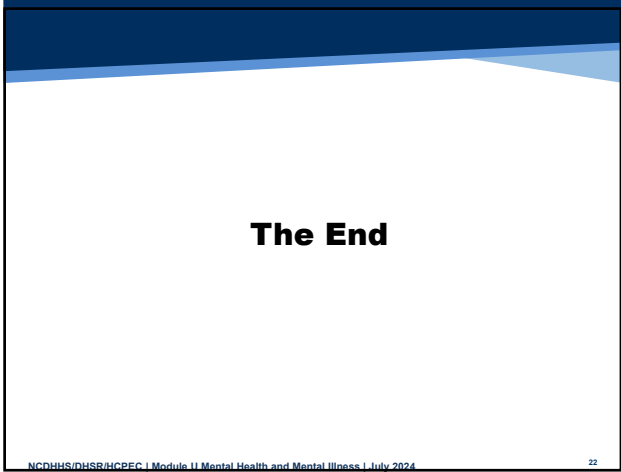
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