This information sheet is part of a set that was prepared based on the experiences of NP workers in Quebec. The purpose of these info sheets is to equip facilitators for their facilitation role and for managing more specific situations in order to advance the skills development and support of each participating parent. They complement and supplement other program documents.

Program  Nobody’s Perfect

TIP SHEET 5
Participant with Mental Illness

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITUATION
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

WHO also defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Even though the NP program is not meant for families with serious challenges, we in no way wish to stigmatize or exclude people who have a mental illness.

WHAT DO THESE PEOPLE BRING TO THE GROUP?
Every person in a group is important and can enhance the discussion, regardless of his/her characteristics. For someone with a mental illness participating in such a group can help the person to break out of isolation and increase self-esteem.

HOW CAN YOU INTERVENE SO THAT EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN THE GROUP?

- Promote facilitation in groups of two.
- Regularly revisit the meeting’s objectives.
- Post the rules pre-established by the group and revisit them as often as needed.
- Always target the group, not just one particular individual, e.g., “I see that you (the group) are having difficulty respecting the right to speak.”;
- Regularly refer the group back to the topics addressed.

Someone with a mental illness may be emotionally unstable and exhibit some behaviours that can disrupt the smooth flow of the workshops. In such a case, it may be necessary, out of respect for the other participants, to remove the person in question from the group. To do so, it is crucial to meet with that person individually.

You will then be able to go over the rules that were not followed and tell the person that he/she is not ready at the moment to participate in a group. Suggest another alternative. The fact that the person is in a group means that he/she has a need that has to be met.
The organization La Boussole (http://laboussole.ca) provides a code of conduct to facilitate contact with a person who has a mental illness. The D.O.U.C.E method emphasizes the importance of respect and courtesy in all human relationships.

- **Delimit personal space.** Personal space is the physical distance between you and others and is called the bubble. When you interact with someone, you must respect that distance, which depends on the context, the circumstances and your state of mind.

- **Observe what is happening.** To observe means to direct your attention to the other person, but also to yourself and what is around you, to the person’s statements, facial expressions, gestures and your reactions, etc.

- **Use your observations.** Don’t hesitate to communicate with the person you are observing. Through your words and gestures, you will demonstrate your attention, your respect and your concern for helping him/her.

- **Clarify your role.** Clarifying your role involves specifying the nature of your work and the assistance that you can provide right now. You can thereby set your limits and avoid taking everything onto your own shoulders.

- **Encourage the person to ask for assistance.** You are there to facilitate a group, so you have the reflex of referring the person to another resource. Accompany the person if you are prepared to do so. Don’t hesitate to ask for help for yourself if you feel overwhelmed by the situation.

### SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

If the person is feeling depressed:

- makes pessimistic statements,
- constantly makes self-denigrating comments, and/or
- has no hope.

It is crucial to:

- pay attention to the person’s words, gestures and emotions;
- always take depression and suicidal comments seriously;
- speak calmly;
- identify the physical signs (fatigue, drawn-looking features, slow movements);
- restate the words you heard;
- encourage the person to ask for help;
- accompany the person to local resources if you fear for his/her safety.

It is very important to recognize your limitations and know how to provide referrals. Our role as facilitator of an NP parents’ group is to support parents in developing their skills and social support networks. If the priority need is for something else, the facilitator has the option of referring the parent to another resource to obtain a response that can better meet his/her needs.

Remember that NP does not address every need. This program is part of a trajectory of services and family life development.

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