

Sexual Health Young People With Mental Illnesses

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Adolescent Development

Physical Development:

- Secondary sex characteristics
- On-going brain development

Psychological Development:

- Establishing identity, autonomy and intimacy
- Advanced thinking and reasoning

Social development:

- Becoming comfortable with sexuality
- Achievement (especially educational)

Sexual Behaviour in Young People and Influencing Factors

- Personal values
- Personality strengths
- Physical, social and emotional maturity
- Family and cultural values
- Peer relationships

Major Types of Mental Illness

- Anxiety Disorder
- Substance Misuse Disorder
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Psychoses

Common Symptoms That May Impact on Sexual Health

- Impaired judgement
- Social isolation
- Increased dependence
- Lowered self-esteem
- Impaired sense of reality
- Changes to sexual drive
- Drug or alcohol use

Potential Risks

- Unsafe sexual practices
- Entering / remaining in abusive or co-dependant relationships
- Vulnerability to sexual predators
- Damage to family relationships
- Promiscuity
- Feelings of regret, remorse
- Damage to social standing
- Rape
- Prostitution
- Heightened risk of suicide

Complexity of the Problem

- Highly emotive and conflicting values of sexual behaviour
- Number of people involved
- Their varying roles rights and responsibilities
- The possible long term ramifications

Relevant Parties

- The young person
- Parents
- Siblings
- Boyfriend/girlfriend
- Friends
- Professionals- teachers, counsellors, youth workers, GP, Mental Health worker/services etc.



Aim

- Create an environment of trust
- Clarify existence and possible role of Mental Illness
- Access and commence treatment
- Establish strategies for managing risk behaviour
- Relapse Prevention

Creating an Environment of Trust

- Identify and engage all key parties
- Establish and maintain rapport with all parties
- Distinguish and respect different rights, responsibilities and values
- Overt the boundaries and legalities
- Listen without judgement to all parties and keep listening

Clarifying the problem

- Establish whether a mental illness is present
- Distinguish between normal and symptomatic behaviours
- Assess risks

Accessing and Commencing Treatment

- Provide information to all necessary parties
- Understand legal and service provision realities and work with what is possible

Managing risk behaviour

- Differentiate between true risk behaviour and “unpalatable” behaviour.
- Identify the risk behaviours and their precursors
- Establish agreed responses for identified risk behaviours
- Keep communication channels open

Relapse Prevention

- Psycho-education
- Ensure a non-judgemental response to relapse
- Recognition of early warning signs
- Early Treatment