

Mental Illness & Emotional Disorders

First Responder Training Video Series—Information Sheet

Provided by the County
of San Diego Office of
Emergency Services

This document provides a brief summary of the information presented in the first responder training video relating to those members of our community who have a mental illness or emotional disorder.

Understanding individuals with mental health conditions:

- Common mental health conditions include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety.
- Some individuals may feel comfortable explaining their mental health condition, but many may not volunteer this information because of the stigma associated with mental health diagnoses.
- Common misunderstandings associated with individuals who have a mental health condition include assuming that the individual will become out of control, that they will be reluctant to follow directions, and that they don't understand what they are being told.

Visual cues to look for:

- Individuals with a mental illness or emotional disorder may appear anxious, nervous, or agitated.
- Look for signs of disorganized thinking and forgetfulness.

Best practices for communicating with individuals who have a mental illness or emotional disorder:

- Introduce yourself by name and title. Describe why you are there and reinforce that you are there to help. Ask for their name, to build familiarity.
- Be sure to ask how they are feeling and inquire about any medications they may need to take with them. Ask the individual if you can provide them with any assistance.
- Speak clearly and calmly with an empathetic low tone to gently guide and direct the individual. Raising your voice may cause the individual to escalate.
- Try to minimize touching or holding the individual.
- Treat the person the same way you would anyone else; with respect.

Special thanks to the following organizations for participating in this video:

County of San Diego Behavioral Health Services
San Diego Police Department

