

MENTAL HEALTH: HOW TO BEST SUPPORT YOUR CLIENTS AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

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CLIENT MANAGEMENT AND SELF-CARE – A GUIDE FOR PRO BONO LAWYERS

- Practical steps lawyers can take to work effectively with their clients and associated role play scripts
 - Assessing capacity
 - Managing expectations
 - Ensuring effective communication
 - Cultural awareness
 - Working with interpreters
 - Managing communication challenges
 - Common mental health problems
 - Managing difficult behaviour
 - Threats of harm
 - Mental health services and other resources

- Educates pro bono lawyers on how to be mindful of their own wellbeing
 - Impact of particular types of work
 - How to recognise symptoms in yourself and others
 - Triggers
 - How to look after yourself
 - Mental health services and other resources
- Template Mental Health Services Cards that provide the details of health services to assist clients in distress, and also services that lawyers can access to debrief and seek support

OVERVIEW OF THE SESSION

- Part 1: Mental Health - Dr Katie Seidler, Clinical and Forensic Psychologist, LSC Psychology
- Part 2: Self-Care - Rebecca Abbott, Director of Abbott Witness Services
- Q&A / discussion / case study

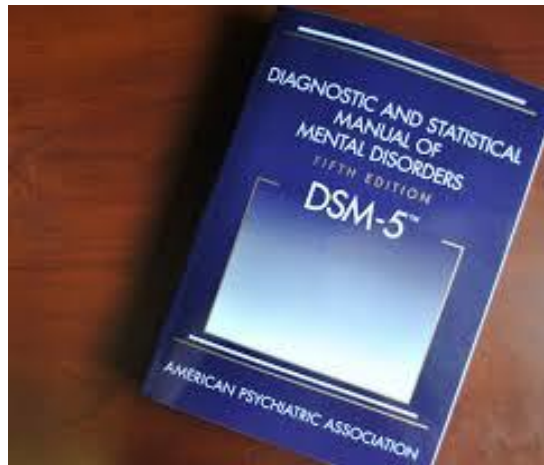



Part 1: Mental Health Overview

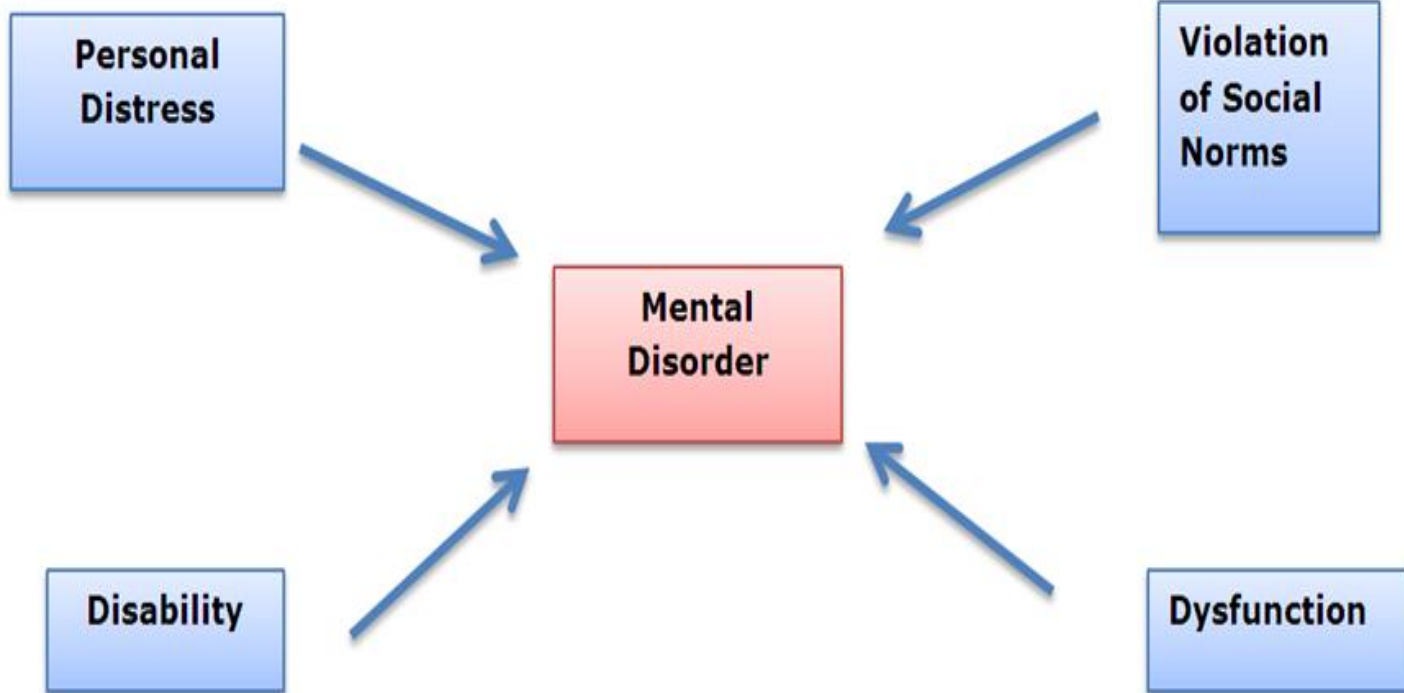
- * What are mental health problems and where do they come from?
- * Warning signs in a client's presentation
- * Basic engagement skills
- * The role of mental health professionals and where to refer for what?

Mental health problems

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders –
5th Edition



- 
- * A mental disorder is a condition that:
 - * Exists in the individual,
 - * Causes the individual significant distress or functional impairment,
 - * Is not a culturally specific reaction to an event (e.g., the death of a loved one), and
 - * Is not the result of social deviancy or some other conflict with society.



Nature vs Nurture



Warning Signs in a Client's Presentation

- * It is helpful if lawyers can recognise what might be happening for a client so that they:
 - * a) understand how to manage and work with the client and
 - * b) are able to identify a course of action that will assist the client in the most useful manner.

I will focus on ...

- * 1) mental health conditions,
- * 2) Psychosis,
- * 3) ID/TBI etc

Warning Signs: Mental Health

Tearfulness,
Shaking,
Appearing scared or
uncomfortable,
Lack of eye contact,
Taking a long time to answer,
Pressured speech,
Fidgety/restless,

Slowed or increased psychomotor
activity,
Blunted affect,
Not reactive to engagement,
Sweating,
Eyes darting around,
Agitation,
Hypervigilance.

Section 10 in the Guide deals with signs and responses to depression, anxiety, trauma, panic attacks in the lawyer/client context

Warning Signs: Psychosis

Inconsistencies in account,
Things don't make sense,
Not connected to reality,
Seems to be responding to internal stimuli,
Tangential,
Fixed gaze,
Thought stopping,
Intense manner,
Nonsensical responding,

Lack of insight,
Blunted affect,
Poor social skills,
Psychomotor retardation (vegetation),
Agitation,
Disjointed communication,
Long pauses,
Poor self-care/hygiene,
Dishevelled presentation.

Section 10 in the Guide also deals with signs and responses to psychosis in the lawyer/client context

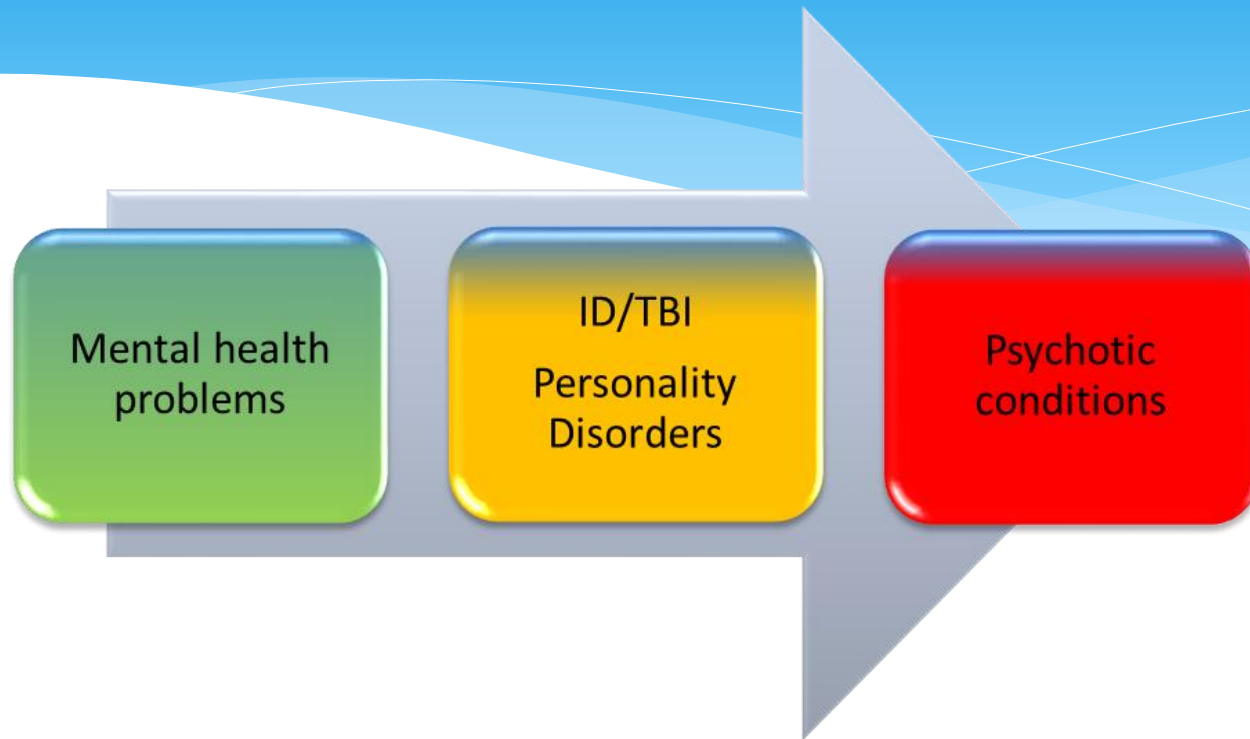
Warning Signs: ID/TBI

Taking a long time to answer,
Tangential,
Poor verbal expression,
Does not understand questions
asked,
Acquiescent,
Perseveration,

Poor memory,
Lack of insight,
Can't reflect on own processes,
Does not learn from experience,
Does not seem to understand
complex or abstract concepts,
Slow speech,
Concrete thinking.

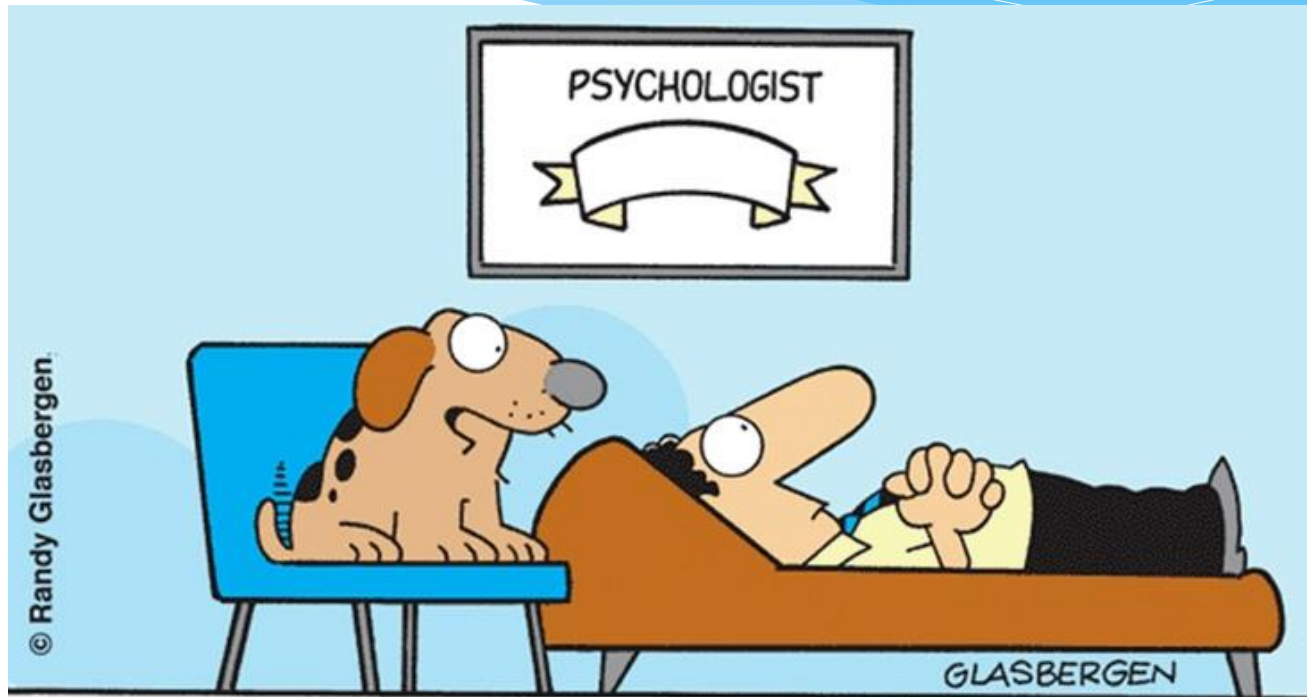
Section 3 in the Guide deals with cognitive capacity more broadly and section 4 assists lawyers to understand the process to assess capacity

Continuum of Severity



Section 10 in the Guide assists lawyers to manage difficult behaviours including clients under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Section 11 provides guidance in circumstances where a client threatens harm to themselves or someone else

Basic Engagement Skills



“My therapy is quite simple: I wag my tail and lick your face until you feel good about yourself again.”

Basic Skills...

- * Take time to build rapport
- * Understand the experience from the client's position – put yourself in their shoes
- * Validate
- * Empathise
- * Be patient
- * Reflect feelings
- * Attend and use active listening
- * Ask open ended questions
- * Summarise to prompt
- * Stay calm

Basic Skills continued...

- * Be non-judgemental
- * Clarify your understanding
- * Be genuine
- * Be specific and not vague in your communication
- * Convey acceptance
- * Create safety
- * Alleviate distress
- * Be client focussed
- * Recognise and pay attention to the human in front of you

Tips

- * Explain your role
- * Check understanding and test knowledge – in your own words....
- * Ask the client if there is anything you need to do about in order to represent them in the best possible way,
- * Offer them someone else to talk to if they are not comfortable with a lawyer,
- * Ask for the client's story – look for the why and not just the what,
- * Be curious about things that don't make sense,
- * Be transparent,

Tips continued...

- * Ask questions that invoke narratives,
- * Be aware that functioning can legitimately vary over time so that people can present differently at different times (e.g., under stress etc),
- * Make careful observations of manner, engagement, ability to attend/respond/communicate,
- * Be mindful of the age of peak onset for MH conditions

Mental Health Services

Treatment



Assessment



Mental Health Professionals...



Psychologists vs Psychiatrists

- * Difference in training,
- * Difference in philosophy,
- * Difference in treatment styles, skills and training,
- * Medication issue.



Questions we can help you with...

- * Does this person have a mental illness or mental condition?
- * Does this person have special defences available to them?
- * Would this person be able to cope with the Court process?
- * How impaired is this person?
- * What is responsible for this impairment?
- * What treatment/rehabilitation needs does this person have?
- * What risk does this person pose?
- * Is this person a suitable parent?
- * Will this person's functioning improve?
- * Why is this person behaving as they do?
- * Are they fit to be tried? Etc etc....

Part 2: Self-care

Terms

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Vicarious Traumatization – described as transformation in a person as a result of working with clients' traumatic experiences

“inner transformation that occurs in the inner experience of the therapist (or other professional) that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with clients' trauma material” Pearlman and Saakvitne 1995

Burnout – occurs as result of prolonged work, leading to emotional exhaustion, erosion of idealism. Can occur in all types of work. Associated with high workload, non supportive environment – your efforts make no difference.

Compassion fatigue – another term used in this field but more in relation to feeling compassion – deep sympathy or sorrow for another.

Terms cont.

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Secondary traumatisation – exposure to traumatic material but not necessary to perform any role.

Vicarious Resilience – the ability to “bounce back” after empathetic engagement with traumatic events. Presence of “protective factors” is important ie. awareness, personal and professional relationships, effective teamwork, supportive workplace and growing sense of spirituality act to buffer negative impacts of work.

Section 16 in the Guide addresses the potential health consequences of working on certain types of legal matters or with certain types of clients

Some contributing factors

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- Nature of the work
- Ourselves
- Clients
- Context



Signs

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- Client/work demands regularly encroach on personal time
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Disturbing imagery
- Becoming pessimistic
- Altered world view
- Hyper-vigilance
- Becoming emotionally detached
- Increased problems in personal relationships



Signs cont.

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- Withdrawing socially and disconnecting
- Becoming demoralised and questioning professional competence/effectiveness
- Self medicating/addiction
- Becoming less productive and effective at work
- Perceiving resources and support available for work as chronically outweighed by the demands

What to do...?

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Awareness

Debrief/vent

Team members can monitor each other for signs of stress and provide mutual support. They can normalise the strong responses members may have after working with a client. Teams can provide the opportunity for informal “debriefs” after a potentially traumatic event or session.” pg. 523

Goodyear-Brown P ed (2012) Handbook of Child Sexual Abuse: Identification, Assessment and Treatment John Wiley and Sons Inc.

Self Care

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- **Self care** refers to activities and practices that we engage in on a regular basis to maintain and enhance short and longer term health and wellbeing
- How we look after ourselves is individual - our cultural backgrounds are unique and we all have different demands and stressors.

Body

Mind

Spirit

Work

Relationships

Emotions



A line in the sand

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- Work hours
- Work responsibilities
- Work boundaries
- Avoid “rescuing” clients
- Sick leave/annual leave/breaks
- Attend to basic needs
- Take note of your gut feeling
- Check in with colleagues
- Separate home from work
- Raise stress/self care at meetings

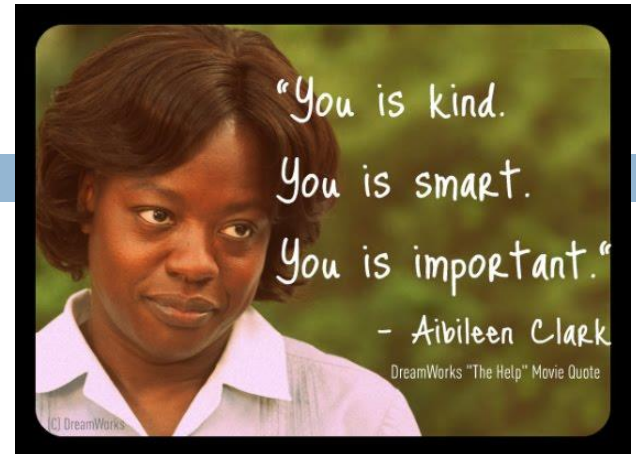


Sections 19 and 20 in the Guide provide practical tips on how lawyers can look after themselves and information on mental health services

WHY? ...

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because you is important



- All need to improve in building our resilience and strengths
- Work is a part of life but it's not everything
- Self care is essential for ethical practice
- You can't look after others if you don't look after yourself
- It's about making yourself a priority
- Time can be a barrier – however we need to commit to ourselves with the same energy we dedicate to clients and work

Q&A / DISCUSSION OR CASE STUDY