

level, individual and congregational prayer is powerful. Support from pastoral care teams can provide invaluable ministry, promoting self esteem and a sense that a person's and family's journey and burden are shared. As Paul reminds us in his letter to the church in Galatia:

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

It is important to recognise that, in addition to pastoral support, professional psychiatric help may be necessary, in which case the person should be advised to contact their GP or a member of the specialist healthcare team. Resources are available to help members of pastoral care teams to learn about mental illness and to help them to be a listening ear to people who are struggling with mental health problems, for example:

#### **CrossReach**

[www.crossreach.org.uk/mental-health](http://www.crossreach.org.uk/mental-health)  
The Social Care Council of the Church of Scotland runs three innovative mental health services.

#### **See Me...**

[www.seemescotland.org](http://www.seemescotland.org)  
A national organisation working to challenge the stigma of mental ill- health.

#### **Breathing Space**

[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)  
A free and confidential helpline targeted at people experiencing low mood, depression or extreme worry.

#### **Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)  
A confidential emotional support service available 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

1 Mental Health and the Friendly Church. Waller, R, Seedall, S and T Wood. Accord (Magazine of the Association of Christian Counsellors) January 2011  
2 Mental Health Foundation. [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/information/mental-health-overview/mental-health-problems/](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/information/mental-health-overview/mental-health-problems/) accessed 18/01/2015.  
3 Galatians 6:2



## Discussion Questions:

As many of the issues in mental health are life-long in nature, are there ways in which we can help to "care for those who care"?

Is your church sensitive to issues of mental health? How can your church become more "mental health friendly"?

Sometimes in churches we may seem to suggest that those struggling with depression or other mental health issues should "trust more in God to see them through". Is this fair or helpful?

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## Mental health issues



Discussion Points



## Mental Health Issues

What makes a church a good one to belong to if you are struggling with your mental health? Is it the fact they have a Counsellor on staff or have an annual Depression Awareness Day? Or is it that they are aware enough to care, small enough to notice and moving slowly enough to actually deliver? How can we assist those who wish to take that first perilous step of crossing the threshold one Sunday morning to see if the Peace really is shared!

The term 'mental health problem' covers a wide range of issues which affect a person's ability to get on with their daily life. Mental health problems can affect anyone, of any age and background, and have an impact on the people around them such as their family, friends and carers. They take many different forms and affect people in different ways. Mental health impacts on all aspects of life, including our social status, our employment status, our relationships with those round about us, and on our status within the church. There is no single cause of mental health problems and the reasons they develop are complex<sup>2</sup>.

Depression and anxiety may accompany difficult life events, such as moving house, losing a job or the death of someone close but for many people, disabling feelings of depression and anxiety often develop



out of the blue, nature and nurture both having a role. It is generally accepted that, on average, one in four people experience some kind of mental health problem at some stage in their lives. Of these, however, only a relatively small number experience a serious and enduring mental health problem. Some forms of mental illness present as an exaggeration of the normal emotions and moods which we all experience. These include debilitating anxiety and panic attacks, or serious depression which, in bipolar disorder, is linked with episodes of inappropriate elation and overactivity. There is no clear demarcation between normal emotions and the heightened moods associated with mental illness. It is when this interferes with a person's ability to cope with every-day life that they may be experiencing an illness.

A person with schizophrenia or a severe form of mood disorder may have episodes when they lose touch with reality and experience delusions (false beliefs) or hallucinations (false perceptions, such as seeing sights or hearing voices that don't exist). This can cause them



to feel frightened or angry and appear to be acting (or reacting) irrationally. Diseases such as dementia generally develop in old age, whereas eating disorders, mood disorders and schizophrenia commonly first present in young adults.

Each of these labels can be highly stigmatising. The burden which must be carried by those affected by mental health problems, and those who care for them, is not only heavy, but can be life-long. How can we support people through dark times? Guilt feelings are usual in someone with depression and parents will often blame themselves for the distress in their family. One of the best ways of dealing with mental health issues is through healthy uncritical relationships that can give strong reassurance to a sufferer that their distressing thoughts and feelings are understood and not blameworthy. Our churches should surely be places where everybody can be sure of having someone to listen, somebody who cares and values each and every man, woman and child. The presence of the church as a community of people who care and who can simply 'be there' can be very important in times of need. At parish