

On The Horizon:

Serving Co-Occurring Populations in the Older Adult Setting



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What is Mental Health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.

Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

What is Substance Abuse?

A condition in which a person engages in the use of a substance or in a behavior for which the rewarding effects provide a compelling incentive to repeatedly pursue the behavior despite detrimental consequences.

Addiction may involve the use of substances such as;

- Alcohol
- Inhalants
- Opioids
- Cocaine
- Nicotine, and others
- Behaviors such as gambling

There is scientific evidence that the addictive substances and behaviors share a key neurobiological feature—they intensely activate brain pathways of reward and reinforcement, many of which involve the neurotransmitter dopamine.

Clients with co-occurring disorders (COD)

Typically have one or more disorders relating to the use of alcohol and/or other drugs as well as one or more mental disorders

Common examples of co-occurring disorders include combinations of:

- Major depression with cocaine addiction
- Alcohol addiction with panic disorder
- Alcoholism and poly-substance use with schizophrenia
- Borderline personality disorder with episodic poly-drug abuse

Seniors and Substance Use: The Facts:

- More than 2.5 million older adults suffer from a drug or alcohol problem.
- The highest rate of alcoholism in the U.S. is observed in widowers over the age of 75.
- Up to 11% of hospital admissions of older adults are due to alcohol or drug problems.
- Older adults are hospitalized as often for heart attacks as for alcohol-related issues.
- More than half of the people in nursing homes suffer from alcohol-related problems.
- Seniors get almost 17 million prescriptions a year for tranquilizers, the most abused drugs.



Triggers

Triggers are external events or circumstances that may produce very uncomfortable emotional or psychiatric symptoms, such as anxiety, panic, discouragement, despair, or negative self-talk.



Insights to Consider

- Understand clients using unfamiliar materials may have frustration
- Making mistakes
- Recognize limitations
- Accepting what is imperfect

Activity Leader Suggestion:

- The process is more important than the product of the activity.
- Decreases pressure to perform, minimizes perfectionism, self-esteem issues
- Potential Happenings
- Participation reluctance
- Holiday blues

Disparity of skills:

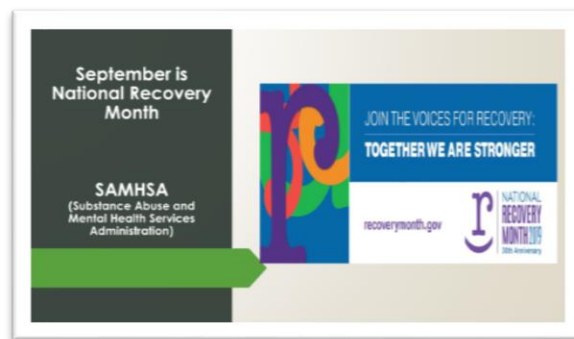
- broad range of abilities, some have never learned basic skills of drawing, using scissors
- Others feel sadness over loss of skills they once had
- Many comment on the limitations of their work as an indicator of how their addictions have affected them in way in which they had not been fully aware of

Tips for Activity Facilitation

- Clients may project anger onto you as group leader
- Strong emotions are expressed, and client needs to feel safe, judgement free
- Often tied into client defense mechanism
- Don't personalize it, it's the disease (much like Dementia)

Suggested Programming

- Self-help groups
- Opportunities to enhance self through novelty, enrichment and exercise
- Purposeful projects
- Dignity and respect
- Create conversations to inform and decrease the stigma of the disease



Resources

<https://addictionresource.com/addiction/substance-abuse-among-seniors/>

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/elderly/>

https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report_2792/ShortReport-2792.html

<https://health.usnews.com/health-care/for-better/articles/2018-07-16/the-dos-and-donts-of-alcohol-intervention-for-seniors>

<https://recoverymonth.gov/recovery-month>

TED Talks- Shame, Stigma of Mental Health

Podcasts

bringchange2mind.org/learn/psas/strongerthanstigma/

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