



MRS Guidance

Essential Safeguards series: 4. Mental Health

January 2021

MRS guidance – Essential Safeguards series

Part 4. Mental Health

One in four people in the UK will have a mental health problem at some point. While mental health problems are common, most are mild, tend to be short-term and are normally successfully treated, with medication, by a GP.

Mental health is about how we think, feel and behave. Anxiety and depression are the most common mental health problems. They are often a reaction to a difficult life event, such as bereavement, but can also be caused by work-related issues.

Scope of guidance

The guidance aims to help practitioners identify the signs of anxiety and depression to assist in their professional activities. The relevant clause within the MRS Code of Conduct (2019):

MRS Code Rule 9:

Members must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are not harmed or adversely affected by their professional activities and ensure that there are measures in place to guard against potential harm.

What is anxiety and depression?

Anxiety

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a natural human response when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

Some symptoms of anxiety may include:

- feeling restless
- being agitated
- struggling to sleep and eat.

Many people feel anxious at times. It's particularly common to experience some anxiety while coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they could have a big impact on your life.

Depression

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time and affects your everyday life.

In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirit. It doesn't stop you leading your normal life but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make you feel suicidal.

Here are some common signs of depression

Appearance:

- down, upset or tearful
- restless, agitated or irritable
- hopeless and despairing
- suicidal

Behaviour:

- self-harming or suicidal behaviour
- difficulty speaking, thinking clearly or making decisions
- difficulty remembering or concentrating on things
- moving very slowly or being restless and agitated.

What should you do?

Mental health issues can be a fluctuating characteristic which may not be necessarily obvious at first glance. If it is known that the topic of the data collection is likely to cause distress, it is advisable to take steps to address any adverse effects that may occur.

What should you do if a participant describes a mental distress?

Example: A participant comments about suffering from depression, self-harming or mentions having suicidal thoughts

Prepare – be able to provide helpline numbers, charity details and any other information which can offer support and help.

Assist – offer to put the participant in touch with individuals or services that can provide support and help. Bear in mind that this must only be done with permission of the participant, they must agree what will be revealed, to whom and for what purpose.

Aware – learning of others mental health issues can be distressing to hear, you may need support as a practitioner when these issues emerge in your professional activities. Talk to someone such as a colleague, or a workplace mental health advisor – it is often helpful to share such experiences.

Useful information sources

[Mind](#)

[Mental Health UK](#)

[Together UK](#)

[NHS](#)