

I. INFORMATION ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

LEARNING ACTIVITY The Famous Newspaper Man

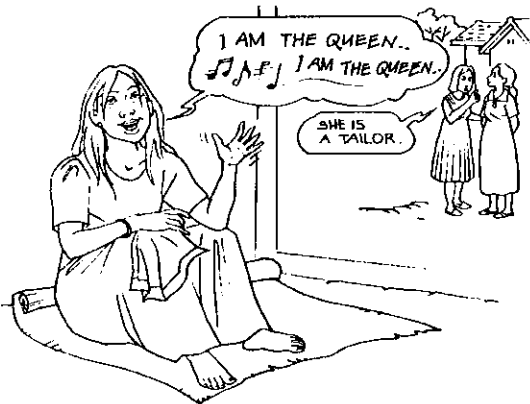
Kudu became a "famous" newspaper man in about one month. He did not finish high school but had a job at a small shop. He had lots of friends and liked drawing, reading magazines and football. His friends began to notice that he was always talking about his "important" writing. He started to miss work and sit in the tea shop and write letters. He even began smoking. Soon his friends got tired of Kudu always talking about what article he was writing for the national newspaper-when they asked to see the articles -he never seemed to have them with him in his big briefcase. After a few weeks Kudu quit his job because it was "too low for him" and began to tell people he was a famous reporter. He went to the court houses and town meetings to "get stories" that he never sent to the newspaper. He also began to follow the mayor of the town and other important people saying he wanted to "write their story". One night Kudu tried to get into a big ceremony that the mayor was holding, claiming he was from an international newspaper. He bothered the mayor so much that finally the police were called. The police came and took Kudu to the hospital where he shouted that he was a famous person and that they should call the president of the country who knew him well. The doctors realized that Kudu was very ill and gave him an injection to calm him down. They decide to keep him in hospital and try to help him.



Read the story about Kudu and answer the following questions in a large discussion group or in small groups.

1. Is Kudu mentally ill ?
2. If you think he is, why do you think so ?
3. What do you think will happen to him when he leaves the hospital ?

1. WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS ?



Mental illness is caused by problems in the mind. Because of it, the person can not behave as she did before. Her mind does not work the way it used to so her behaviour changes. Usually the person can not think clearly and does not understand what is going on around her. She may describe strange experiences (sights and sounds) which others around her do not see or hear. The person with mental illness does not always understand what has happened to her. Often the person does not even know that she is behaving differently.

In most types of mental illness, the person's ability to do daily activities, work or go to school and talk with friends and family changes. The changes may be small for example, a person may not be able to pay attention when a friend is talking with him for more than a few minutes or he may not be able to sleep. Others changes are more serious, for example when the person does not eat, drink or talk for several days.

People with mental illness may begin to think, talk or act differently suddenly, over just a few days, or it may happen more slowly over many months. Without help, the new behaviour usually stays the same or becomes worse.

A person with mental illness may show strange behaviour at certain times and seem normal at other times, acting just like she did before the illness. But usually over a few months, the person has more and more strange behaviour and hardly ever acts like they did before the illness.

2. WHEN IS A PERSON MENTALLY ILL AND NOT JUST A "STRANGE PERSON" ?

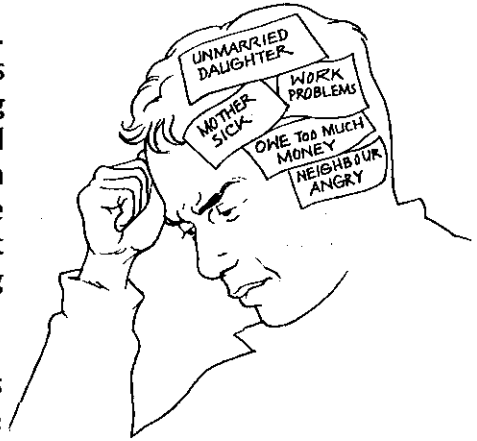
Every community has a few people who are odd or different. Many people dress and act differently than their neighbours but they do the usual activities around their house and go to work or school. These people always acts a bit strangely, it is their usual way of doing things. The community knows this and usually do not pay much attention.

Mental illness means a big change in the way the person used to behave in the past. When mental illness starts, the way the person acts begins to be a problem for the family and neighbours. The strange behaviour may prevent others from doing their own activities. Family and neighbours begin to worry or to be afraid. Soon the person with mental illness is not able to be part of family and community social activities.



3. WHAT CAUSES MENTAL ILLNESS ?

1. Stress - Everyone has many duties and activities to do. Sometimes a person begins to worry about these duties all the time and he is not able to think about anything else. He can not do his regular activities and work and does not finish anything. As a result, he becomes even more upset. Stress comes from situations, for example within the family (an older daughter is unmarried) or at school (unable to make friends) or work (not making enough money).
2. Chemical imbalance - The brain has special substances called brain chemicals. Too much or too little of them can cause mental illness.
3. Strong drugs and alcohol - Sometimes after many years of taking drugs and alcohol, a person can become mentally ill. Also many "illegal" drugs may have poison or bad ingredients which can cause mental illness. Even if the person stops taking illegal pills, smoking drugs or illegal injection, she can still become mentally ill.
4. Injury and changes to the brain - Damage to a person's brain can result in strange behaviour, for example after a fall from a tree or a motorcycle accident. Some changes also happen to older people.



Brain Injury

Sometimes people who have had brain injury look and act like they have mental illness. A person with severe brain damage may look and walk like they did before their accident, but the way they act at home and at work may be very disruptive to others. They may not be able to do routine activities without assistance because they forget what action comes next. They may suddenly change their mind and become very angry, as well as develop other forms of strange behavior they never had before the accident. Sometimes medical drugs will help to calm them down, but the person will never return to being like they were before the accident.

Ageing

As people get older, often they become a bit forgetful and think more slowly than they did when younger. This is normal. But a few people develop mental illness because of unusual changes in their brains as they get old. These changes are caused by a disease and are not normal. When this happens the older person may become very confused, may not even remember his son or daughter's name, and often gets lost, even in his own home. He may become very worried and sometimes angry or sad.





LEARNING ACTIVITY

Why is Tata Crazy ?

Tata is a 17 years old and just finished high school. Over the last two months she has become a worry to her family. She has lost a lot of weight and her hair is falling out. Tata cries loudly most of the day and even the neighbour can hear her. When her family tries to talk to her, she says things like "it is hopeless". Tata does not sleep or eat unless her family force her and often at night she wanders around the house and neighbourhood unless her father locks her in her room.

This role play needs 6 people, one person to play Tata, 3 to play her father, mother, and grandmother, and two others to role play the CBR workers. The "Father" describes his daughter's strange behaviour. He is worried about what the neighbours think of Tata's behaviour. He has a small business and thinks people will not come because of his crazy daughter. The "Mother" and "Grandmother" say that Tata's behaviour is caused by the curse of a neighbour's son whom she refused to marry. They have been giving Tata special tonics to make her change her mind and to marry the boy. The "field worker's" role is to explain to the family the causes of mental illness.

4. BELIEFS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

LEARNING ACTIVITY "Cruel Help" for Alam

Alam has been tied to a tree by his ankle for nine days. He has had only a little water and a few bowls of rice. His bed is a straw mat.

For many weeks before this, Alam did not bath or change his clothes. He did not go to work and refused to be with his wife and family. Alam hears voices all the time which tell him he is a terrible father or the voices comments on what he is doing. Sometimes the voices make him so frightened he thinks that his family want to kill him. He tried to stab his wife with a knife.

Alam's father brought him to a tree in a special area where a famous teacher was buried over a 1000 years ago. His family hopes he will be cured by the "teacher" and that Alam will be able to return home. All around Alam, there are many other people also tied to the trees.



In a small group, discuss the following questions:

1. Is Alam mentally ill ?
2. What are the behaviours that tell you he is mentally ill ?
3. How do you think that being tied to a tree will change Alam's strange behaviour?
4. What other ways could Alam's family get help for him ?

There are many false stories about what makes a person mentally ill.

Some people believe that mental illness is caused by:

- a spirit entering a person's body
- the person doing something very bad in the past
- a spell cast on the person by someone else
- a magic substance entering the body
- someone else in the family doing something wrong.

None of these are true but many people, even those with a lot of education, believe these stories.



Because the community or the family do not know that mental illness is disease, they are uncomfortable around people with mental illness. They may be afraid of him and try to stay far away. Or they may be angry or blame the person for doing something evil and causing the illness. In some cases they lock the person up or treat him badly.

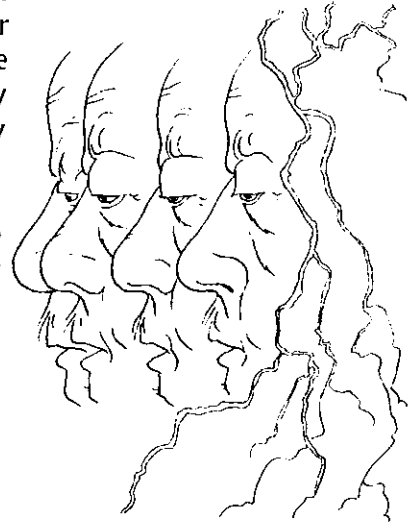
Some persons with a mental illness are even beaten just because people are afraid of them.

Many people who were once mentally ill and are now better are ignored or talked about in their community for many years after the illness has gone away.

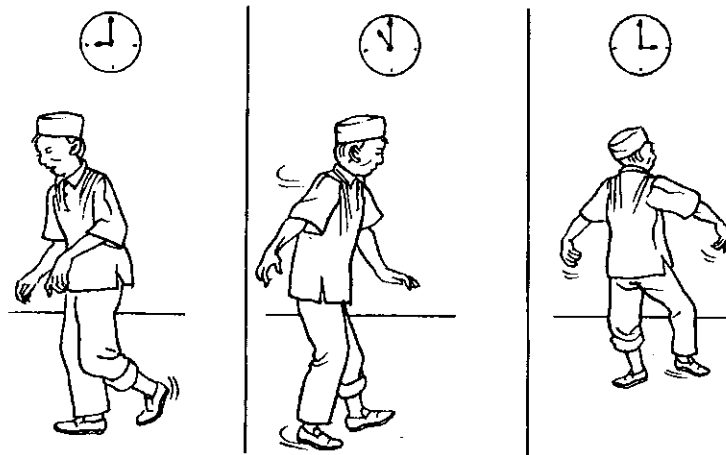
5. HOW ARE PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS ?

People with mental illness do not all act the same way but they all have behaviour that is unusual for them. Family members are usually the first to notice this change. Some ways that a person might act differently from usual are:

1. A person may be worried. Sometimes he can not sleep and can not stop thinking and worrying about a simple thing like going to the market. No matter what other people say, he keeps worrying.
2. A person may suddenly feel his heart beating very quickly, his breathing becomes very fast and he is afraid for no reason. He is unable to think clearly and does not know what to do. This feeling lasts a short time but returns again at any time.
3. People with mental illness can look very different. Sometimes they do not comb their hair, or change their clothes for weeks. Their facial expressions can also change: for example the space between their eyebrows has deep lines and they look like they are thinking about something unpleasant. They can also lose a great deal of weight in a short period of time.
4. Some people with a mental illness show they have severe mental problems by complaining about their body. They always seem to have pain which can move around the body, headaches, sore bones, or just say they "feel sick". Even after the doctor has done tests and says there is nothing wrong, they continue to worry. Others believe that their stomachs are rotting or that something is growing inside their head. Even after many expensive tests and visits to specialists who say they are healthy, the person with mental illness still believes there is something wrong.



- Sometimes a person with mental illness keeps walking around for hours and cannot sit or rest because he is so anxious and worrying about silly things that others do not worry about. Other people with a mental illness are unusually happy (too happy in fact) and very energetic, making all kinds of strange unrealistic plans and being too busy to eat or sleep.



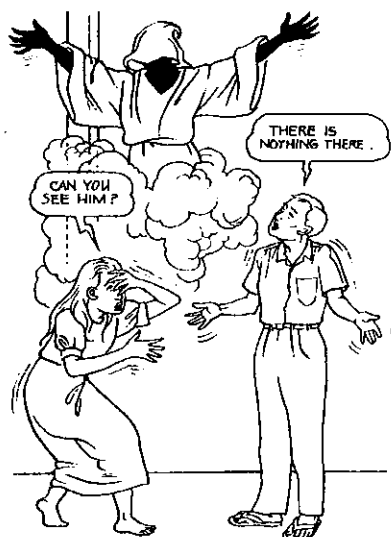
- Some people lose all interest in their family or job or school activities. They act like they do not care about anything any more. They may sit at home alone and not visit with others. Sometimes people with mental illness stay in one room and do not want to eat or talk to anyone.
- A person may begin to say strange things and make strange decisions that no one in the family can understand. For example, she might start buying rice and storing it under the bed. She might buy hundreds of kilos of rice and spend all the money the family has for no good reason.

- A person may become suspicious at home or at work for no reason. He may think that others do not like him and that they are talking about him. Sometimes the person may believe that others want to hurt him or cause him trouble but this is not real. This suspicion may begin when the person is normally easily hurt by what others say but as the illness gets worse, the suspiciousness gets much stronger. People with this problem often do not believe what family and friends say and it is hard to convince them that there is no danger.



- A person with mental illness may begin to believe things that everyone knows are not true and may tell other people about these things. For example, he might say that he just lost a great deal of money when he didn't, or that someone is trying to hurt him.

10. When the illness is severe, a person may see or hear things that are not there. This is why you may see people with mental illness talking to themselves while walking. Sometimes they also move in a strange, stiff way.
11. Sometimes when a person is very disturbed she may speak strangely so that her family can not understand what she is saying. The words may be mixed up or be nonsense words. Other people with a mental illness begin to use bad language when before the illness, they did not.



12. A person with mental illness may not know where he is or what day or even what season it is. He is confused and does not understand simple words.
13. A person who is severely mentally ill will sometimes just stop moving for long period for no reason and stand like a statue.

14. Some persons even believe that they are someone else, for example the president or a hero in a story.
15. A person with mental illness, may seem like she does not know that anyone else is in the room, for example she will not talk or look or move. But often she is watching and listening to what is going on around her even though she is not moving.
16. A person may think that his actions are controlled by someone else, for example a "voice" from the sky tells him that his neighbour wants to steal his land.





LEARNING ACTIVITY "At Breakfast"

In pairs, discuss a person with mental illness that you know or have seen or heard about. Role play a scene where that person with mental illness is having breakfast with a member of his or her family.

Have the other members of the group comment on what they think the strange behaviours are. Make a list of things that make this person different than other people. Compare this list to the one on page 12-14.

6. CAN ANYONE BECOME MENTALLY ILL ?

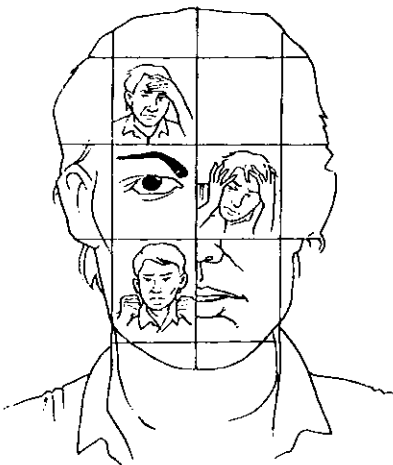
People of all ages can become mentally ill. Even young children can become mentally ill although it is more common in adults.

Some types of mental illnesses are passed down in the family and other relatives may have or have had mental illness. When a family member has been mentally ill, there is a greater chance for another family member to also become ill because they share the same relatives. But this does not happen often and in only some kinds of mental illness and only in a few families.

7. CAN YOU CATCH MENTAL ILLNESS FROM ANOTHER PERSON ?

No. Even though strange behaviour is an illness, it can not be "caught" by being physically close to or being in the house of someone with mental illness.

8. ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF MENTAL ILLNESSES ?



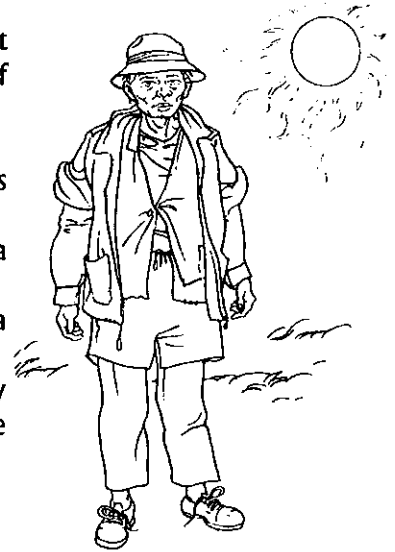
You may have heard of words like neurosis or psychosis. These are types of mental illnesses. Some names of the the specific illnesses that you may hear are schizophrenia, depression, and mania.

There are many kinds of mental illnesses and many ways to group or categorize the illnesses that share a common strange behaviour, for example not being able to think clearly. Usually a trained professional or doctor is able to name or diagnose a person's mental illness. Most community workers though, try to give practical help and do not always know the exact kind of illness the person has.

9. DOES MENTAL ILLNESS GET WORSE ?

There are so many kinds of mental illnesses that this is a difficult question to answer. Each mental illness has a different way of developing and it is not easy to know if it will get worse.

1. Some people may be ill only once and never have problems again.
2. Some mental illnesses do not get worse and stay the same for a long time.
3. For some people, the strange behaviour will go away for a period of time only to come back again later.
4. Other people may become worse over weeks or months. They may become so severely disturbed that their family can not care for them.



10. CAN MENTAL ILLNESS BE CURED ?

There is still a lot not understood or known about mental illness. It is not like some physical disease, for example a broken arm or malaria, where the cause and how to cure the disease are well known.

With the right help, the person's problems and strange behaviour can disappear and she can live a normal life. Others may have problems for his or her whole life.

11. HOW IS MENTAL ILLNESS DIFFERENT FROM MENTAL HANDICAP ?

1. A person with mental illness may have normal or high intelligence. But because of stress in her life or a brain illness, her behaviour becomes strange and she may seem like she can not learn. Mental handicap is caused by damage to the brain before or near the time of birth. The person is born with low intelligence and will always have difficulty learning.
2. People with mental illness are often given medicine when their behaviour becomes strange. Medicine will not help a person with mental handicap to think or learn.

3. A person with mental illness may show strange behaviour only at certain times and then return to normal. A person who has a mental handicap has difficulty learning all the time and this will not change.
4. A mentally handicapped person may also behave in a strange way but that is because he has not learned how to do it correctly. They may learn to do certain things with special teaching and but often need reminding.



A person with a mental handicap can become mentally ill and need help for the illness. For example they become very worried or sad. A person who has mental illness can not become mentally handicapped.

12. HOW IS MENTAL ILLNESS DIFFERENT FROM EPILEPSY ?

1. People with epilepsy are just like anyone else but they have a medical problem. The problem is unpredictable and shows itself in a very specific form of strange behaviour - a seizure or fit. A seizure usually only lasts for a short time (usually a few seconds or minutes).
2. Between seizures, most people with epilepsy have normal lives and continue to do all the regular activities of daily life and work or go to school. Most people with mental illness have strange behaviours for long periods of time (weeks & months) and have difficulty with daily activities, work and family and friends.
3. People with mental illness can also have epilepsy, but they are not closely connected problems. Often people with mental illness and people with epilepsy both take medicine but they are different kinds of medicine.



13. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS ?

Mental illness disrupts a person's life and the lives of their families and friends. It can cause problems with almost every activity they normally do: eating, sleeping, working, speaking to their friends and neighbours and moving around their community.



People with mental illness suffer a great deal just as people with physical illnesses do. Their thoughts and feelings can be very frightening to them and to the people around them. Even if the mentally ill person does not appear to feel badly about her mental illness, she does. But because of the illness she is not able to show or talk about how bad it is for her.

Sometimes others forget, especially when the illness is severe, that the person with mental illness has feelings. Family and friends might think that the strange behaviour is causing them problems and forget how badly the mentally ill person feels herself.

Everyone with a mental illness needs help. There are many ways that help can be given.



LEARNING ACTIVITY Experiencing Mental Illness

Most people have never been mentally ill and have a hard time thinking what it would feel like. These two activities are designed to help you understand what it might feel like to have some of the problems that people with mental illness have.

1. Unclear Thinking

Instructions to participants:

People with a mental illness do not think clearly. They look at a family members' face and around their home and it does not make sense to them as it did before. It is a bit like when you remember a dream in the morning--often they do not make sense. For example we recognize the people in our dream but they are the wrong age or doing the wrong thing. Sometimes they change faces or bodies during the dream or "fly off" to another place.

Have each group member try to remember a dream. After they describe it to the group discuss how it was different from reality and how parts of it did not make sense.

This is the way that some people who have a severe mental illness think when they are sick. Discuss how you would feel if your daily life was like in the dream.

Note: Not everyone may be able to remember a dream well. Even though everyone dreams, it sometimes difficult to remember dreams the next day.

2. "Seeing Things"-Unclear Vision

Find some thick pieces of plastic that are not clear, like the bottom of a soda or water bottle. If you look through the plastic, things will be difficult to see. Have two pieces of plastic for each person in the group to hold up to their eyes like glasses.

Step 1- Put 5-10 familiar objects in a bag: for example spoon, pencil, leaf, plate, rock. Bring the objects out of the bag one at a time.

Looking only through the glass or plastic have the group members in turn name the objects. If they have trouble identifying the object, go around the circle again asking each member to say one thing about the object.

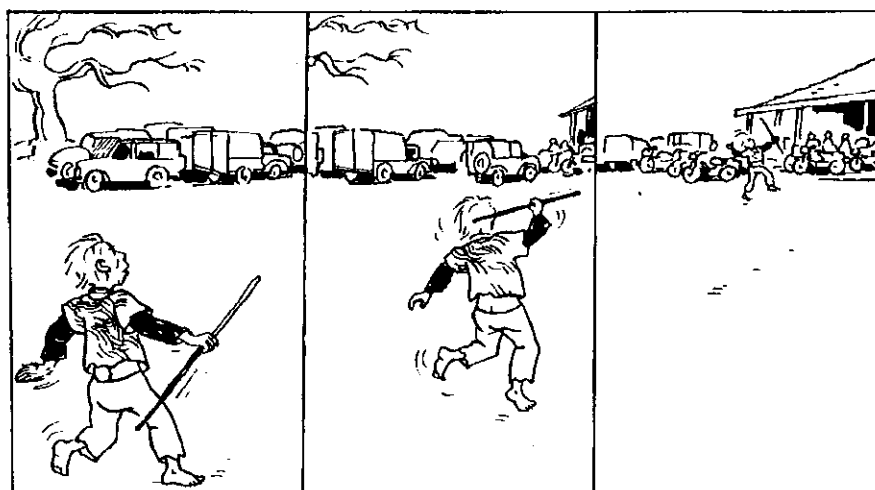
Step 2-If Step 1 is easy and everyone can name the objects make it harder by using pictures from magazine or newspapers. Hold up the picture and move it very slowly from side to side two or three times. Then ask the group members to tell you what they saw through the plastic.

At the end of the activity, have people discuss what it would be like to "see" everything unclearly and differently from other people.

14. WARNING SIGNS OF SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS

Some of the behaviours which can distress the family or neighbours and are signs the illness is severe are :

- not washing himself or changing clothes for a long time;
- being active all the time (hyperactivity) with little or no sleep;
- sitting or standing like a statue for hours without moving;
- running about quickly without any purpose and waving his arms and shouting;



- talking to herself all the time;
- talking but not making sense;
- refusing to be with family members and spending most of her time alone;
- eating or drinking too little so that she loses a great deal of weight; and,
- crying for a long time for no reason.



These warning signs tell the family and community to get help immediately. Many people with mental illness never need to go to hospital if they are given the correct help in their community through the health centre and community field worker.



LEARNING ACTIVITY

Noor's Warning Signs

Noor was very depressed when he finished school because he could not find a job. He was the oldest and had to make money for his widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters. He worried about it a lot and talked to his friends and neighbours about how much he needed a job. At first they all listened to him and tried to help. After a few months it seems that was all Noor could talk about. He worried so much that he quit trying to get a job. He began to have trouble sleeping and stopped visiting friends. He did not seem to be able to do anything but worry. He read the newspaper about 20 times each day but sometimes did not even look in the "Workers Wanted" section. Noor asked everyone if they knew about a job-sometimes he asked the same person 5 or 6 times a day. After 4 months he began to wring his hands and pull at his hair, saying he would die because he did not have a job. He no longer slept for more than one hour at a time and quit eating. Whenever Noor went outside, he thought he heard people calling him "lazy" and pointing at him but these persons were not really there.



Read the case study about Noor. At what time in the story did you think he needed help? Make a list of his behaviours that are warning signs of severe mental illness.