

Section 3: Specific offender groups and issues

11. Women and alcohol

11.1. What every woman needs to know

Alcohol affects women and men differently. It takes longer for a woman's body to get rid of alcohol than a man's. So women run greater health risks than men if they drink similar amounts. That is why the government advice is that women should not regularly drink more than **2-3 units** of alcohol a day.

Even if you do drink within these limits, it is a good idea to have alcohol free days every now and then. After a heavy drinking session it is sensible not to drink alcohol for up to 48 hours. This allows your body to recover from the effects of alcohol.

11.2. Women - you are different

Women are usually smaller than men and do not have as high a proportion of water to fat. This means alcohol stays more concentrated inside a woman's body. Women's livers don't deal with alcohol as quickly as men's and can't remove it from the blood as quickly either. In short, the same amount of alcohol is liable to get you more drunk more quickly and, if you exceed sensible limits, may harm you more.

Remember the sensible limits

Women:

No more than 2-3 units a day.

Men:

No more than 3-4 units a day.

After a heavy drinking session give your body a break by not drinking up to 48 hours afterwards.

11.3. Alcohol and weight gain

There are almost 200 calories in a large glass of red wine. At 7 calories per gram, alcohol contains more calories than many foods. Sugar in drinks comes on top of that. Alcohol can stimulate the appetite too, so you're more likely to eat more.

11.4. Your personal safety

Alcohol affects what we do and can lower inhibitions. This can possibly make us more likely to get into risky situations. Being drunk makes us more vulnerable to accidents and physical and sexual assault. Keep an eye on each other when you're out and don't let anyone walk home alone, or with a stranger. Make sure you travel home safely. A good tip is to leave enough money for the taxi fare home in the house before going out. That way you can always get home safe. Be sure to only get into licensed cabs.

11.5. Contraception

The contraceptive pill can slow the rate alcohol gets into the bloodstream so you won't get drunk as fast. This doesn't mean you can ignore **sensible limits**. Heavy use can make the pill less effective. If in doubt, ask your doctor for details. Having sex while drunk increases the risk of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

11.6. Alcohol and your period

Some women find alcohol affects them more during their period. This is because the rate alcohol is dealt with by the body can slow during this time. Heavy, prolonged drinking can result in irregular periods or stop them altogether (though you can still get pregnant).

11.7. Fertility

Alcohol lowers sperm count in men and fertility in women. If you're trying for a baby, consider cutting down or cutting alcohol out altogether.

11.8. Pregnancy

Even small amounts of alcohol can increase the risk of harm to your unborn child. Avoid alcohol if pregnant or trying to conceive.

If you do choose to drink, do not drink more than one to two units of alcohol once or twice a week and don't get drunk.

If you drink through your pregnancy there is a greater chance of miscarriage or giving birth to an underweight baby. You increase the risks of your baby being born with a range of health problems that are often called Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. These disorders can leave your child with problems that will affect them throughout life.

Drinking alcohol while you are pregnant **CAN** damage an unborn baby mentally and physically.

It is best to ask your GP, doctor, health visitor or antenatal class about the dangers and any worries you may have.

11.9. Breastfeeding

When breastfeeding, your baby consumes most of what you eat and drink – including alcohol. If you choose to drink at all, keep to minimal amounts.

11.10. Mental well-being

Alcohol can make feelings of anxiety and depression worse and add to stress. Better ways to cope with life's challenges include:

- Learning problem solving and relaxation techniques
- Taking regular exercise
- Sharing worries with someone you trust

11.11. Breast cancer

The world's largest study of women's drinking habits found that the risk of breast cancer can increase by 10% for every alcoholic drink over the **sensible limit** of 2-3 units a day.

11.12. Coping with someone else's drinking

A heavy drinker can make the whole family unhappy and leave you angry, scared, confused, guilty and unable to cope – even if you are drinking yourself. If the person tends to be violent towards you, you must seek help.

Before confronting them, talk it through with someone else first that you trust and always consider your own safety.

11.13. Doing something about your drinking

You may find it difficult talking about problems to do with alcohol and drinking. This may be because you think people will judge you or that it will affect your kids (if you have any). Remember getting in touch with services that can help is a first step and they will explain all the options to you.

A lot of the services that you can get in touch with are:

- Women only
- Sensitive to your cultural and religious beliefs
- Confidential
- Able to offer child care facilities
- Open at times that suit you

You may feel at the moment that your friends and family may not be that helpful or they may judge you - or they may be the problem

But there are other people out there who will listen.

The most important thing is getting in touch with someone who can help and give you advice.

Your offender manager can help you through that process if you want. But remember, if you feel uncomfortable doing that, there are lots of services and helplines in this book which can point you in the right direction.

12. Young people and drinking

12.1. Useful stuff to remember

Most of us start to try alcohol without any problems when we are in our teens. However, for some young people drinking a lot of alcohol, often or in one go, can lead to a lot of problems. So there are some things you need to know.

- Alcohol is a depressant drug, even though it may feel stimulating when drunk at first.
- Within minutes of drinking, some alcohol will be absorbed into your bloodstream. It will travel right around your body and have an effect in lots of different ways.
- The rate this happens will be affected by different things e.g. your age, whether you are a girl or boy, if you have eaten or not, what you have drunk, etc.
- When you are younger not a lot of alcohol can have all sorts of effects on your body – the risks will be higher.
- Females have less water in their bodies than males, so they have less to dilute the alcohol. This is one of the reasons why women sometimes get drunk quicker than men.
- Alcohol can often slow down your reactions. So this means that driving, using machinery or doing sport e.g. swimming, even after only small amounts of alcohol is dangerous. Don't risk it!
- Alcohol does not warm you up, despite what many people think. There is a real risk of hypothermia if you fall asleep outside in cold weather after drinking too much.
- Mixing alcohol with drugs, whether illicit, prescribed, bought or over the counter can be dangerous and the results unpredictable. Ask someone like a doctor or a pharmacist for advice.
- If you are a bloke you may think that getting drunk helps in bed but alcohol really does affect your 'performance', and it doesn't make it better!
- Remember when you are drunk, you may behave in ways you wouldn't normally and this can lead to all sorts of risky situations like:
 - not being in control or even losing consciousness;
 - not being able to get home safely;

- getting into an argument or fight;
 - having unsafe sex; or
 - being a victim of an accident or crime.
- It is good to try and think about how you appear to your friends when you've drunk too much. Do you really think they want to spend their night looking after you while you're being sick or get knocked back from a club just because you are all over the place?
 - Never leave someone who is drunk, especially if they're starting to fall asleep. If you're unable to wake the person up, you should turn them on to their side (recovery position) so that if they vomit they won't choke. Get someone quickly who can help for someone who is comatose - they can die if not properly treated.
 - Eat something before you start drinking.
 - Avoid drinking to get drunk - it's not sexy or glamorous or a 'badge of honour'.
 - Stay in control. Watch out for larger measures – people tend to pour bigger drinks at home or at a party compared with pub measures.
 - Don't accept drinks from strangers or leave your drink unattended in case it gets spiked.
 - Slow down and try soft drinks or water in between alcoholic drinks.
 - Avoid cheap drinks promotions or competitions to get you to drink more - it's not a bargain if you end up ill.
 - Be careful about drinking in rounds - you tend to end up drinking at the speed of the fastest drinker.
 - Avoid using alcohol to help you cope with situations like shyness or not sleeping well. Drinking won't solve problems like this. It may even make them worse.

12.2. Keeping track of what you drink

A useful way of keeping track of how much you're drinking is to look at the unit content of drinks.

Not all drinks have the units on their packaging. If they don't, here's how you can work it out:

MULTIPLY THE VOLUME OF THE DRINK BY THE %ABV THEN DIVIDE BY 1000

For example, a bottle of wine at 12%ABV would be: $750\text{ml} \times 12\%\text{ABV} = 9000$
 $9000 \div 1000 = 9$ units

Or if you know the amount you have drunk in litres and the ABV then it is easy to work out the units.

The ABV per litre is the same as the number of units in that drink. So if you have a litre of 6% ABV lager – you have had six units. If you have half a litre of 14% ABV wine you have had 7 units. Working out units can be fiddly but it gets easier with practice and it can really help to keep track of how much you are drinking.

It is recommended that men should not regularly drink more than 3 – 4 units a day and women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units per day.

But remember these rules are for older adults - if you are younger then your body is still growing and alcohol could have a greater effect with a smaller amount of drink. Units are only a guide and can be useful to keep an eye on what you are drinking.

12.3. A survival guide for a good night out

Getting ready

A good night out can be a great one with a bit of planning. A little preparation means your night won't end in a way you didn't plan.

Eat something before you go out

Lining your stomach before drinking alcohol helps you last the night. And you'll have more energy.

Good things include pasta, potatoes, pizza, and a pint of milk.

But remember this isn't an excuse to drink even more. It is about pacing yourself.

Start later – last longer

If you know you get drunk quickly, think about starting drinking later in the evening. You'll keep going if you don't start drinking too early – and you'll make it to the club.

How will you get home?

You might not be so clear-headed by the end of the night. Do you know the last bus or train? Have you got enough money to get home? Lots of people keep their fare home separate from their spending money.

Going out

Drinking alcohol can make you feel great. The trick is to stay feeling great. You know your limits. You don't have to keep up with the fastest. If you stick with others who drink at the same rate as you, you can take charge of how quickly you drink and how much you spend.

If you think the drink is hitting you too quickly, take a break. A small lemonade, water or coke with ice and lemon look just like a short and mixer.

In all drinks the alcohol's the same.

But different drinks have different colours and flavours. The colours and flavours in wines and spirits are chemical 'impurities' also called congeners. Because of these and the way they affect the body, it is true for most people that mixing spirits with beer or wine in an evening's drinking will make them feel much worse next day.

If you take anything else while out clubbing, change to drinking water, not alcohol. A pint of water every hour and a salty snack such as crisps or peanuts will help maintain the fluid and salt balance of the body.

Coming home

Make sure you get home safely and that your friends do too. There's no point in spoiling the fun by getting into a fight or spending the night in the cold. Both could be dangerous.

Don't leave anyone behind. If they've drunk so much that they're being a pain, you'll need to help them to get home safely. Remember, it could be you one day!

If someone passes out:

Don't leave them on their own

Call an ambulance and stay where you are

Help them into the recovery position

Keep them warm. Did you know that after drinking alcohol, the body cools quickly? People can die if they get too cold.

Coming round

If you're facing a hangover there are things you can do to make it better.

Before you go to bed - Drink plenty of water (a couple of pints or more if you can manage it) and keep some beside the bed.

Next day - Keep drinking fluids. Water, milk, soft drinks or cola - whatever works best for you.

You feel bad because alcohol dries you out. Your body is also dealing with the colourings and flavourings (impurities) in the drinks. Drinking also lowers your blood sugar level.

It can also make you feel down. Aspirin or paracetamol will help the headache. You need food too. As soon as you can face it, eat something – cereal and milk, fruit (bananas and citrus fruits are good) and egg on toast will all help to replace the vitamins and minerals you lose when you drink alcohol.

12.4. If you are a parent

Why young people drink?

Young people drink for a number of reasons:

- To be like adults
- To have fun and to test their limits
- Because their friends do
- Because their families do
- To cope with difficult things or to perhaps forget something that has happened to them

Young people are at much more risk of the effects of being very drunk and alcohol poisoning. Often their bodies are not used to dealing with alcohol. Alcohol poisoning can kill. So can the combination of alcohol and other drugs like heroin and methadone.

When young people drink there is a high chance that an accident will happen.

Some young people combine alcohol and sex. If they are having sex for the first time they may be nervous. They may drink a lot of alcohol to help them feel more confident.

Drinking can affect the sex drive and boys may not be able to keep an erection. If the sex is without a condom, it can also lead to sexually transmitted disease and unwanted pregnancies.

There is often a link between alcohol and crime. Young people are more likely to commit public order offences, like fighting, when drunk.

Many young people see drinking and getting drunk as normal and something that is expected as part of growing up. The place where a young person drinks and who else is drinking is important. Drinking may still be new to young people. They may not know about all the risks.

If a young person knows all the risks they can make better decisions about drinking.

12.5. Things you can do as a parent if you are worried

If you are worried about your child's drinking and think that they are drinking too much then there are a number of things that you can start to do.

- The most important thing is not to lose the plot and immediately get into arguments and fights. It can be hard not to react but try and talk about it with the young person. If you are feeling worried, anxious, or cross try to calm down before you start talking with them.
- Get some decent advice from your local alcohol service – there is often lots of information available.
- Think about where the young person is drinking. Is it at home? At the local park? Round at a friend's? Parents often don't know where their kids are when they are out – do you?
- Who are they drinking with?
- What are they drinking? Do you know? Have you noticed drink going missing from the house? Has money gone missing?

- Begin to try and understand your child's drinking and the reasons behind it. Why are they drinking the amount that they are? Is it just to have a good time?

Remember these are small steps. If you are concerned then get in touch with someone or talk to your offender manager.

13. When problem drinking affects your family

13.1. Introduction

A lot of us drink regularly. Some of us drink only on special occasions. For the majority of drinkers alcohol is used as part of normal social behaviour.

Some people have difficulty controlling their drinking and the harmful effects are more serious than a hangover once in while (see chapter 10 on problem drinking).

Unfortunately, the effects of problem drinking are not restricted to just you.

Few of us live alone all the time.

We have friends, or families, who can also be affected by our problem drinking.

13.2. Some common issues that you may recognise

- You might have financial worries - from the cost of buying alcohol to the impact problem drinking has on your job security and employability.
- Physical abuse which may follow a drinking binge.
- Problem drinkers may become unpredictable, irritable or verbally abusive.
- Resentment as the problem drinker appears to put drinking over other activities. This may put pressure on other family members who may feel as though they are always left to pick up the pieces.
- Feelings of anger are also common as families, especially children, struggle to understand why the drinker is not doing something about the problem.
- Families may also feel ashamed or embarrassed and may withdraw from social contact or try to cover up the problem. Children may feel that they cannot bring friends home and may become isolated or bullied. They may begin to struggle at school.
- Family members may feel as though they have caused the problem. The problem drinker may blame others as a way of explaining or excusing their behaviour.

- Problem drinking often affects other relationships and the drinker may push away family, friends or extended family members.

13.3. Things to remember for the problem drinker

- You are important and so are your feelings. However, you are also responsible for your behaviour - don't blame the drink.
- Don't isolate yourself from friends and family. You may need their help and support.
- If someone has said that they are worried about your drinking try to listen to what they are saying. Many people who get help for alcohol problems say they decided to do so after their friends or families told them they were worried.
- If you have decided that you are drinking too much, and if it feels right for you, it may be an idea to tell a member of your family or a close friend who can support you to make changes to your drinking habits. Remember for you it has to feel right to do that!
- If you are in contact with an alcohol service, try to make sure that your family or friends know about it and understand what that means. Also, try to tell them how they can help you.
- Changing the way you drink means you may change the way in which you deal with others. This may alter the way you and your family react to each other. You might be worried about a bad reaction but it may be a good reaction.

13.4. Things to remember for a family member or child

- Remember that you're an important person. You are entitled to your feelings, whatever they are! Try to remember also that no matter what is said to you the drinker is responsible for their drinking and only they can decide to do something about it.
- Try not to drink along with the problem drinker. This only supports their behaviour and may result in you developing a problem.
- Whenever possible, don't cover up for the drinker. By doing this you make it easy for the drinker to ignore their responsibilities and to carry on problem drinking.

However, there are things you and your family can do to help.

13.5. What can you do if your partner is a problem drinker?

- Try if possible to face up to the problem as a family. Most children will be aware that something is wrong and with no information often get anxious and worried. Try and talk together – it may not be easy but try!
- Access information, help and support for yourself and your children.
- Refuse to let the drinker blame you or others for the problem.
- Encourage the problem drinker to seek help and support them to do this.
- Decide on your own limits and boundaries and put the needs of you and your children first. If the problem drinker refuses to change, you may need to make some hard decisions about whether or not to let them remain in your life.

This is not all you can do, but gives you ideas on how to take some first steps.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP!

There are people out there who understand what you're going through. Your offender manager can help guide you through accessing some further advice.

14. Alcohol and black and minority ethnic communities

14.1. Introduction

If you come from a black and minority ethnic group you may feel that some of the things you have to deal with in terms of your drinking are different from what other people have to deal with.

The most important thing is to try and talk with your offender manager about the issues that are mentioned in this pack.

Your offender manager should be able to sort out for you some of the information within this pack in your own language if you need it.

14.2. Getting help with your drinking

It is important to remember that there should be help and advice to deal with your worries. It is very difficult to get your head round the fact that you may be getting into problems with alcohol.

You might be:

- Worried about your health
- Worried about what your family thinks
- Worried that you are letting your family and community down
- Worried about your responsibilities to your family and community
- Worried that your family might be angry with you for getting into problems with your drinking
- Feeling upset or ashamed because your religion says drinking or taking drugs and alcohol is wrong

Your family may be worried about you and what they can do to help.

But remember:

- Even if you think you have a lot of problems, there are lots of ways that you can get help
- You are not a bad person

- Christianity, Islam and other religions tell us to help people if they are in trouble

14.3. What should I do?

As a first step try and talk to someone you trust. This person may be in your family or they may be a friend.

The most important thing is for you to feel right - can that person help you begin to understand some of the things going on for you?

It is always better to share a problem than to keep it a secret.

If you want try and talk to your GP or local doctor. You might feel that they know too many people in your community so getting advice and help may be tricky. Remember they are not allowed to talk to anyone about anything you tell them.

Another way to get help is to go to an alcohol service. Your offender manager may recommend this.

There are a lot of different services out there and a lot of them offer different things.

They may be able to offer:

- A confidential service
- Specific workers from your ethnic background
- Specific workers that talk in your language
- Advice and information in your native language
- Links into your social and community network
- Local knowledge about your community
- Groups that involve the family

A lot of the services available will not treat you as an 'addict'.

The most important thing for them will be to look at you as an individual and to focus on you and the issues you want to address about your drinking.

So it might be that you do not want a worker from your own ethnic group as you would be worried about what they think or who they know in your community.

If you want to involve your family or the people that care for you, services can often help with this.

An alcohol worker has special skills to help people who are getting into problems with their drinking. You and your offender manager can work out where best to go for advice and help.

15. Alcohol and mental health

15.1. Alcohol and your mental health

A lot of people who have drink problems also have mental health issues. You may already know this and are in contact with either a mental health service or an alcohol service.

You may be drinking a lot and seem to be feeling that other things are not right. You are getting really depressed a lot of the time, or over anxious or having really extreme mood swings.

This chapter is about looking at some of these issues and hopefully will point you towards things that may begin to make more sense for you.

It is important to remember that only a skilled and experienced doctor or psychiatrist can tell you if you have a lot of the things mentioned in this chapter. If you think you have some or all of the symptoms of things mentioned below the best option is to get advice from your:

- GP
- Local community mental health team
- Out-patient/department of local mental health unit/hospital or
- Local NHS community alcohol service

They will be able to offer help and advice regarding both your drinking and your mental health.

15.2. What is co-morbidity/dual diagnosis?

Often people who have a mental health problem and a problem with alcohol or drugs (or both) are said to have a 'co-morbidity' or 'dual diagnosis'. These terms mean the same thing.

There are large numbers of people with 'dual diagnosis' among prisoners and people who have been in prison.

15.3. Why is co-morbidity/dual diagnosis important?

If you have a mental health problem and you are drinking heavily you will tend to have more complex needs. It is important that those needs are addressed as:

- Your mental health can affect the level of your drinking
- Your drinking can affect your mental health
- It may make you feel more vulnerable
- It may create problems with any medication that you are taking

Mental health problems and heavy use of a drug like alcohol can blur the boundaries between what is real and not real. It may put you more at risk of getting into arguments and fights as people don't understand what you are going through. If you have mental health problems, it can be tempting to use alcohol to help you keep going and cope with life. The problem is that it is easy to slip into drinking regularly, using it like a medication. The benefits soon wear off, the drinking becomes part of a routine, and you have to keep drinking more to get the same effect.

15.4. Depression

A lot of heavy drinkers have clinical depression - this is a serious disorder. If a doctor has diagnosed you with depression, you may have feelings of extreme sadness that can last for a long time. These feelings are severe enough to interfere with your daily life, and can last for weeks or months rather than days.

This sort of depression is common and often goes unrecognised. Anyone can get depressed – at any age and from any background. But you are more likely to have depression if other people in your family had it. It affects people in many different ways.

If you are severely depressed you often lose interest in things that you used to enjoy. Depression interferes with your work, social and family life. There are many other symptoms, which can be physical, mental, and social.

These include:

- Low/'blue' moods
- Feeling bad about yourself
- Feeling weepy and crying
- Being irritable with other people
- Not wanting to do anything, including seeing your friends and family
- Not enjoying anything very much
- Having trouble making decisions
- Thinking about hurting yourself, including self harming, suicide, or hurting other people

If you are depressed you might also:

- Move and speak more slowly
- Lose (or sometimes put on) weight
- Have trouble going to the toilet
- Have unexplained aches and pains
- Have no energy/no interest in sex
- (If you are a woman) have changes in your monthly cycle/periods

Most people cope with their depression themselves at home but, if you are drinking a lot, it might be better to get help from your doctor. There is evidence that, although many heavy drinkers feel depressed when they are drinking, most heavy drinkers will feel better within a few weeks of reducing or stopping. So, it is usually best to tackle the alcohol first, and then consider dealing with the depression if it has not lifted after a few weeks.

You will probably feel fitter and less depressed after a few alcohol-free weeks. Friends and family may find you easier to get on with. If your feelings of depression lift, this strongly suggests that they were caused by the drinking.

If the depression is still with you after four weeks of not drinking, talk to your GP about further help. It may be useful to talk about your feelings, particularly

if your depression seems linked to relationship problems, unemployment, divorce, bereavement or some other loss.

If the depression does not lift and is particularly severe, your GP may recommend further treatment or medication.

Treatment for both alcohol problems and depression can be very successful. It helps to regularly see someone you can trust, either your own doctor, counsellor or a specialist psychiatrist. Changing our habits and style of life is always a challenge and takes time to achieve.

15.5. Bipolar disorder/manic depression

Bipolar disorder used to be called manic depression. It is where you swing from one extreme to another – from very high moods, when you feel very happy and full of energy, with ideas and plans (mania) to very low times when you feel depressed and even suicidal (depression). Each of these moods can last for several weeks. For example:

- Low – feelings of intense depression and despair – ‘depressive’.
- High – feelings of elation - 'manic'.
- Mixed – for example, depressed mood with the restlessness and over activity of a manic episode.

People usually go through both depressive and manic periods, but some will have only manic periods. Medication may be a help but you will need to talk to your doctor about what can be done and possible side effects.

15.6. Anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human feeling. We all experience it when faced with situations we find threatening or difficult, or we are worried or respond to fear.

Normally, both fear and anxiety can be helpful - in avoiding dangerous situations, making us alert and giving us the motivation to deal with problems.

However, if they become too strong or go on for too long, these feelings can stop us from doing the things we want to and can make our lives miserable.

Anxiety is worrying all the time, which can stop you from getting on with your life and normal daily routine. You may worry about a lot of different things at once and feel anxious even when there is no particular reason to worry. You can't stop or control these feelings. Sometimes they lead to panic attacks, when you may feel as if you are having a heart attack.

Severe anxiety also makes it difficult to:

- Relax
- Sleep
- Concentrate

You may also feel restless, irritable, and tired all the time.

There are also physical signs of anxiety such as:

- Severe headaches
- Pains in your joints
- Feeling breathless
- Palpitations (when you can feel your heart beating too fast)
- Tightness or pain in your chest
- Irregular heartbeat
- Dry mouth, sweating, flushing
- Feeling sick, pains in your stomach, and diarrhoea

It is sometimes hard for doctors to recognise that you have serious depression or anxiety, especially if you only go to see them about your physical symptoms like headaches or feeling tired. Try to describe all of your feelings to the doctor. It sometimes helps to bring a friend or someone from your family with you.

There are some very good treatments for this disorder. You can also benefit from 'alternative therapies' such as relaxation and Yoga classes, aromatherapy, massage, etc.

Cutting down on your drinking will often help with your mental health problems. Eating healthier food and taking regular exercise, such as walking, can also help.

Phobias

A **phobia** is a fear of certain situations or things that are not dangerous and which most people do not find a problem.

A person with a phobia has really strong feelings of anxiety. But these only arise from time to time in the particular situations that frighten them. At other times they don't feel anxious. For example, if you have a phobia of dogs, you will feel OK if there are no dogs around, or if you can't face social situations, you will feel calm when there are no people around.

A phobia can lead you to avoid situations in which you know you will be anxious, but this will actually make the phobia worse as time goes on. It can also mean that your life becomes controlled by the things you have to do to avoid the situation you fear.

Sometimes it is obvious what is causing anxiety. When the problem disappears, so does the anxiety. However, there are some events that are so upsetting and threatening that the anxiety they cause can go on long after the event. These are usually life threatening situations like car crashes, train crashes or fires. The people involved can feel nervous and anxious for months or years after the event, even if they have been physically unharmed. This is called **post-traumatic stress disorder**.

If we are put under a lot of pressure, we may feel anxious and fearful for much of the time. We usually cope with these feelings because we know what is causing them and we know when the situation will end.

If you have an anxiety and phobia you may not talk about these feelings, even with family or close friends. Even so, it is usually obvious that things are not right. You may:

- Tend to look pale and tense
- Be easily startled by normal sounds such as a door-bell ringing or a car's horn
- Be irritable, which can cause arguments that others don't understand

There are a number of things that you can start to do if you have a problem with anxiety and phobias.

- **Talking about the problem** - This can help when the anxiety comes from recent setbacks, like a spouse leaving, a child becoming ill or losing a job. Try someone who you trust, whose opinions you respect, and who are good listeners.
- **Self-help groups** are a good way of getting in touch with people with similar problems. They will be able to understand what you are going through and suggest helpful ways of coping.
- **Learning to relax** – It can be a great help to learn a special way of relaxing to help us control our anxiety and tension (many professionals can help you with relaxation techniques).
- **Medication** can play a part in the treatment of some people with anxiety or phobias.

If this is not enough, there are several different kinds of professionals who may be able to help - the family doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, nurse or mental health worker.

15.7. Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is where you see, hear, and feel things that aren't really there (hallucinations) or have beliefs and thoughts that most people would think are not true (delusions).

Schizophrenia often starts suddenly, and may go on to become a long term problem. People with schizophrenia are not usually dangerous to other people. Most people who have the illness are more likely to hurt themselves than others.

Sometimes when people stop drinking they have withdrawal symptoms that seem like schizophrenia, such as hallucinations and delusions. If you are drinking very heavily, it is always more sensible to get medical help to withdraw.

"Schizophrenia" is often connected to violence and this is often wrong. Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that affects around 1 in every 100 people.

What are the signs?

Hallucinations

A hallucination happens when you hear, smell, feel or see something - but there isn't anything (or anybody) actually there. In schizophrenia, the commonest hallucination is hearing voices. People with other mental disorders, such as severe depression, may also hear voices that talk directly to them. In depression, these voices are critical and repeat the same word or phrase over and over again.

Some people hear voices which do not interfere with their daily life. They may be pleasant, or not very loud, or only happen from time to time. These do not usually need any kind of treatment. Visions and hallucinations of smell, taste or being touched can also happen, but these are less common.

Delusions

A delusion is a belief that is very strong, although it seems to be based on a misunderstanding of situations or events.

While you have no doubts, other people will see your belief as mistaken or strange.

You may develop a delusional idea as a way of explaining hallucinations that you are having. You may begin to:

- Get more and more paranoid so that you feel persecuted or harassed
- Start to see special meanings in ordinary, day-to-day events and believe that they are specially connected to you
- Get more muddled in your thinking making it harder to concentrate
- Drift from idea to idea without any obvious connection between them
- Feel that you are being controlled

Using street drugs and alcohol can make matters worse for people who already have schizophrenia. Some people use street drugs and alcohol to cope with their symptoms. There is evidence to suggest that the frequent use of cannabis by young people may increase the risk of developing schizophrenia in as an adult.

Doing something about it

Research suggests that the longer schizophrenia is left untreated, the greater its impact on your life. The sooner it is identified and treated, the better the outlook.

You may well not need to go into hospital, although you will need to see a psychiatrist and a community mental health team. Assessment and treatment can now be done at home by community teams. Even if you do have to go into hospital, it will usually be for only a few weeks. Afterwards, any help or treatment can continue at home.

Medication can help the most disturbing symptoms of the illness. However, it does not provide a complete answer. It is usually an important first step which makes it possible for other kinds of help to work.

Support from families and friends, psychological treatment and services such as supported housing, day care and employment schemes are vitally important.

Support from a community mental health team (CMHT)

Your offender manager can refer you to a mental health worker from your local community mental health team. Community Psychiatric Nurses can give you time to talk, and can help sort out problems with medication.