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Mental Health in Condos

It's All Too Easy to Call Them "Crazy"

We Need to be Mindful Not to Dismiss Individuals Struggling With Mental Illness



As insensitive as it may be, it is all too easy for a Condominium Manager or Board to dismiss a difficult Resident as "crazy". For Managers, it may not feel like there is any other way for them to cope with the challenges of being a service provider to an individual with mental illness in their home environment. Managers and Boards

alike need to be mindful not to dismiss individuals struggling with mental illness and to do their best to work through any associated challenges. We're all members of the same community, and communities should rise up to support each other instead of dismissing someone because they don't act the same way as you.

The truth is, persons suffering from mental illness might not cause regular challenges and might not even give off the appearance of being "crazy". Persons shouting obscenities, wearing tin foil, and handing out conspiracy theory reading material are more likely the exception and not the rule.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, one in every five Canadians will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives. Mental illness is a broad description; it can include depression, anxiety, and, in severe cases, psychosis. It can affect males and females, young and old, and is found in every ethno-cultural and socio-economic group.

Knowing that it could one day be you or your loved ones suffering from mental illness, it's a lot more difficult to throw around the "crazy" label, isn't it?

With so many possible variables, where do you begin to recognize a potential problem and take steps to provide assistance or resolution of conflict when mental health concerns are a factor? Instead of just calling someone "crazy", recognize what the problem might actually be and have some empathy. Human decency can go a long way in being a source of support for some-

ILLUSTRATION BY JAMIE BENNETT

one in a mental health crisis. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but let's look at some examples.

Trust No-One

Is this Resident familiar to you? The conspiracy theorist who believes entry to their unit is always for some nefarious purpose? That everyone is out to harm them? This person unfortunately is a barrier to the operation of their Condominium community. They restrict necessary access and can make their neighbours feel uncomfortable or even targeted.

A Manager that I work with gave me an excellent example of how to work through this. Take a second to LISTEN. In having a real conversation with this Resident, the Manager was able to identify that they had a mental health issue and believed that no matter where they went, someone was following them. The person spent hours watching peepholes, avoiding cameras, and felt trapped in their home because of their fear of the outside world.

Not only did a trusting relationship form between the Resident and Manager, the

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Manager was able to prompt this individual to seek the help and support that they needed. Using phrases like "sometimes I feel scared too" and "when I feel this way I like to talk to someone I trust" maybe helped the Resident feel like they weren't alone in their thoughts. Suddenly, access to the unit was not an issue as long as the Manager was present. The Resident started talking to the Manager instead of eyeing neighbours through the peephole. She felt comfortable leaving her home to visit the office; improving her quality of life. A great outcome for a challenging situation.

Temper Temper

Do you have a Resident that yells at you (a lot)? Gets angry and punches holes in the walls? Damages other equipment? Encountering this person can be a scary experience for the Manager, Building Staff, and other Residents. How do you resolve the concerns without putting a target on your back?

First, if you believe that there is risk of violence make sure you take it seriously. Drywall can be patched but personal safety is much more important. Some victims will avoid talking to Police as they believe this will escalate the risk instead of making things better. Certainly, contacting the Police (or any other authorities) may escalate the matter more quickly but there is no guarantee the issue won't escalate on its own.

If there is no imminent risk of violence but there is a pattern of aggressive behaviour and damage caused, the Manager (with the support of the Board of Directors) should seek assistance from the Corporation's legal counsel. In some cases, it may also be appropriate to speak with the individual's



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family members, but tread carefully and ensure that confidentiality is maintained.

A Shoulder to Cry On

Do you notice someone sitting in the lobby crying? Have police visited the building for welfare checks because of suicide concerns?

Depression causing severe sadness is a real issue in Canada. According to Crisis Services Canada about 4,000 people die by suicide each year, and for every death there are an estimated 20-25 attempts. Does this Resident display any of these other warning signs?

- Increased substance use (e.g. alcohol or drugs);
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness (perhaps no sense of purpose in life);
- Anxiety, agitation, or uncontrolled anger;
- Unable to sleep or sleeping all of the time;
- Feelings of being trapped – like there's no way out;

- Withdrawal from friends, family, and society;
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking; or
- Dramatic mood changes.


If the Resident displays any of the warning signs above, you could consider taking a moment to check in and let them know you care. There may be family members you could reach out to as well, however, as noted above, be mindful of confidentiality.

Defies Explanation

What about those Residents that you can't even describe? The stories no one would believe if you told them? The Resident exposing themselves at the pool, using common areas as a toilet, throwing things from their balcony at passing pedestrians, or sleeping in their locker.

In these cases, you will need to further investigate this person's history to understand if there is a serious mental health concern and if family is involved

in their life. In cases of very serious mental health issues, individuals will often receive assistance from a health care organization that can assist. Confidentiality is much less of a concern here as the signs of mental illness are obvious and the individual needs support which cannot be offered by the Condominium Corporation.

If you do ever need to contact Police about this Resident, make sure to identify the mental health concerns so that they can be ready to respond. Toronto Police Services has a Mobile Crisis Intervention Team specially trained to assist in these types of situations, but they can't respond appropriately if they aren't aware of a mental health crisis. 

Resources

The Center for Addiction and Mental Health
<https://www.camh.ca/>

Crisis Services Canada
<http://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/>

Toronto Police Mobile Crisis Intervention Teams
<http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/community/mcit.php>

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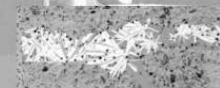
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