

The World Health Organisation (2003) suggests five rules to assist health professionals understand how to identify and manage mental illness in refugees and 10 questions to follow for effective interview.

Rule 1

Learn the names your culture uses for emotional distress and mental illness.

Rule 2

List the common symptoms of mental illness in your community.

Rule 3

Always try to make a home visit.

Rule 4

Use simple terms that are easy to understand when asking refugee patients about a possible mental illness.

Rule 5

In the first meeting with persons, you want to help, tell them that you will not tell anyone anything they say or anything about them without their permission. (Explain any exceptions)

Interview a person effectively: *Interviewing to identify the causes of mental illness*

1. Try to interview the person alone in a quiet place away from the noise of a crowded health centre. Remember, no one should overhear the person's conversation with you.
2. After the first interview, the person will know that you will keep what he or she says private. Now you can interview the person's family and friends, either with the patient or separately. Ask them to tell you what they think is wrong with the person. Ask what treatment the person has received. Has the treatment worked?
3. Find out the folk diagnosis or name used by the community to describe the person's problems. Remember, what the family or community think is wrong with the person may not be correct.
4. Before the interview, prepare a list of questions to ask the person who is seeking your help. If you follow this list, you will not miss important information.
5. Ask specific questions such as "Do you have nightmares?" Avoid general requests like "Tell me about your difficulties".
6. If the person is able to answer you clearly in the first interview, ask whether he or she has experienced torture or other hurtful and terrifying events.
7. Do not ask a woman if she has been raped, even if you suspect that she has. Once the woman trusts you, and believes you will keep the information secret, she will mention it.
8. Find out exactly what the person expects of you. Always ask, "What do you think I can do to help you?"
9. If you suspect a physical cause for the symptoms and you cannot identify it, refer the person to a doctor or nurse.
10. Always try to offer some hope of relief from suffering - but never do this unless you mean it.

