

Mentalising

Understanding other people's behaviour and our own in terms of thoughts, feelings, wishes, and desires is a major developmental achievement that originates in the context of attachment relationships. This ability to understand mental states is called mentalisation. It allows us to make sense of ourself and others and thus gives us the capacity to regulate our emotional reactions. Temperamental differences and developmental experiences contribute to a person's capacity to mentalise. In some cases, this capacity is underdeveloped, and so emotional reactions are difficult to manage. For everyone, it can also vary with the interpersonal context and the level of emotional arousal, resulting in a temporary loss of the ability to reflect on minds when the *fight-flight* reaction is triggered.

There is good evidence that directly addressing mentalisation problems is helpful for problems arising from emotional dysregulation. This programme is a recent initiative to help people struggling with dysregulated emotions and less severe behavioural problems arising from emotional dysregulation (eg, minor self-harm, substance misuse, anger dyscontrol, relationship conflict, unstable emotions, etc.).

About this programme ...

Since 2009, the MindSight Programme has provided intensive treatment for people in Christchurch experiencing severe emotional dysregulation problems. As a secondary-level service, the programme works with people where the severity of emotional dysregulation has resulted in disrupted personality development – usually in the form of Borderline Personality Disorder involving damaging methods of self-management such as serious self-harm and repeated suicide attempts.

These problems do not arise overnight and it is recognised that early intervention may be useful before serious problems emerge. Clients of the MindSight Programme report that the psychoeducational group has been helpful in orienting them toward improved reflective capacity that helps them manage emotional reactions better.

The groups in this initiative are offered by Stepping Stones Trust with support from the MindSight Programme. The groups aim to offer useful information to prove a helpful intervention for people whose problems are not amenable to medication interventions alone, and do not require the 18-month MindSight programme.

Referrals can be made by GP's or counsellors. As the programme does not provide on-going clinical care, primary responsibility will remain with the referrer for the follow-up of any issues arising while in the course. The primary eligibility is adults with unstable emotional reactions with some of the symptoms of BPD (but not meeting diagnostic criteria for BPD) - particularly non-lethal forms of self-harm. Ongoing substance use, mood disorder or cognitive problems that could interfere with attendance would most likely exclude the referral.

For information or to refer, phone (03) 338 6390 or e-mail mindwise@stepstone.org.nz

Canterbury
District Health Board
Te Poari Hauora o Waitaha



MINDSIGHT
TREATMENT PROGRAMME FOR
BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

MindWise

LEARNING EMOTIONAL SELF-MANAGEMENT



stepping
stone trust

Te Roopu o te Taumata Kohatu

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH
RECOVERY SERVICES

"Our feelings are our most genuine paths to knowledge."

Audre Lorde

"Emotions make us human. Denying them makes us beasts."

Victoria Klein

"The heart has its own reasons that reason can't understand."

Voltaire

"In a very real sense we have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels"

Daniel Goleman

Our emotional responses are a vital source of knowledge for navigating personal relationships and understanding ourselves. Our ability to sense, understand and respond to emotions – in ourselves and in others – is a complex skill that takes a long time to develop. When disrupted, it's hard to know one's own mind, and difficult to understand the minds of others. The resulting confusion and misunderstanding can then result in distress that triggers even more emotion. This is often referred to as "emotional dysregulation" – that is, emotional reactions are either so strong that they disrupt a person's functioning, or the individual has difficulty managing (regulating) emotions.

Everyday life presents each of us with events and interactions (such as conflict in a relationship, personal criticism, loss, etc.) that are challenging and which provoke emotional reactions. A person with emotional dysregulation is prone to over-reacting (with anger, crying, self-blame, accusing other, etc.). The intensity of feeling may mean that the person sometimes resorts to emergency measures to try and cope with their distress through withdrawal, violence, substance use, self-harm; or are left feeling so unhappy that they wonder if life is worth living.

Problems with emotions can be part of depressive illness, PTSD, anxiety disorder. If so, treatment of the primary disorder usually helps. Often though, *problems with emotions* arise from variations in temperament and life-experience that impact on the development of one's personality and/or the learning of life skills. What is needed is direct help in strengthening the capacity to understand and express emotional messages informing and affecting a person's mental world.

This 12-week programme provides information and tools to grow the ability to understand and use the intelligence of our emotions – both in relation to oneself as well as in relation to understanding others. When a person can use and communicate emotional signals well, emotions are no longer overwhelming (dysregulated). The programme is primarily for people using self-harm as a way to cope with emotional distress.

The groups are provided by the Stepping Stone Trust and will be held at 125 Colombo St, Beckenham, with dates and times to be confirmed.

Those attending must be willing to complete a small number of questionnaires and agree to being part of the research evaluation.

