IMR (Illness Management and Recovery) as a Toolkit for Managing Life

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Basics of IMR

- Providing information, strategies, and skills to help people manage psychiatric symptoms, achieve their personal goals, and lead rewarding, fulfilling lives

Basics of IMR, continued

- Based on the Stress-Vulnerability Model
  - There are things one can do to manage biological vulnerability
  - There are things one can do to manage stress

Universality of the Stress-Vulnerability Model

- Many human conditions are also subject to stress and biological vulnerability
- Medical illnesses are a prime example of this
  - Cardiac conditions
  - Hypertension
  - Respiratory disorders
  - Gastrointestinal disorders

Many physical disorders benefit from an IMR-Type Approach, slide 1

- Having a recovery and resiliency focus
- Learning practical facts about the disorder, how to recognize symptoms
- Learning how to cope with stress
- Building social support
- Using medications effectively

Many physical disorders benefit from an IMR-Type Approach, slide 2

- Developing coping strategies for symptoms
- Leading a healthy lifestyle
- Making a relapse prevention plan (or plan for staying well)
- Learning about the medical system and how to get your needs met from it

Now Let's Talk about Psychiatric Symptoms

- The experience of distressing psychological states, such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis, are universal, and a part of everyone's life
- These experiences are only considered to be psychiatric symptoms when they are severe enough and last long enough to interfere significantly with life functions

IMR Provides Tools for Living Life to the Fullest

- Pursuing personal goals
- Developing close relationships
- Coping with distressing psychological states
- Leading a healthy lifestyle
- Maintaining wellness in the face of life's challenges

Some of the Most Important Tools in IMR are Directly Related to Stress

- The Stress-Vulnerability Model
- Coping with Stress
- Building Social Support
- Coping with Problems and Symptoms

For This Presentation

- We recognize that there are two translations of IMR into Norwegian

- Because there are different numbering systems in the first translation ("IMR, 3rd Edition") and the second translation ("Enhanced-IMR"), we will refer to the titles of IMR modules, not the numbers assigned to the module

For Each Stress-Related IMR Module We Will:

- Briefly review the content
- Identify common challenges in teaching the module
- Suggest some solutions to these challenges

The Stress-Vulnerability Module

- Provides an overarching view of the biological and stress factors that contribute to psychiatric symptoms and influence their course over time
- Provides an educational foundation for informed decision-making
- Reduces blame and shame
- Instills hope for a brighter future based on more effective management of the disorder

Principles of Mental Illness Management Based on the Stress-Vulnerability Model
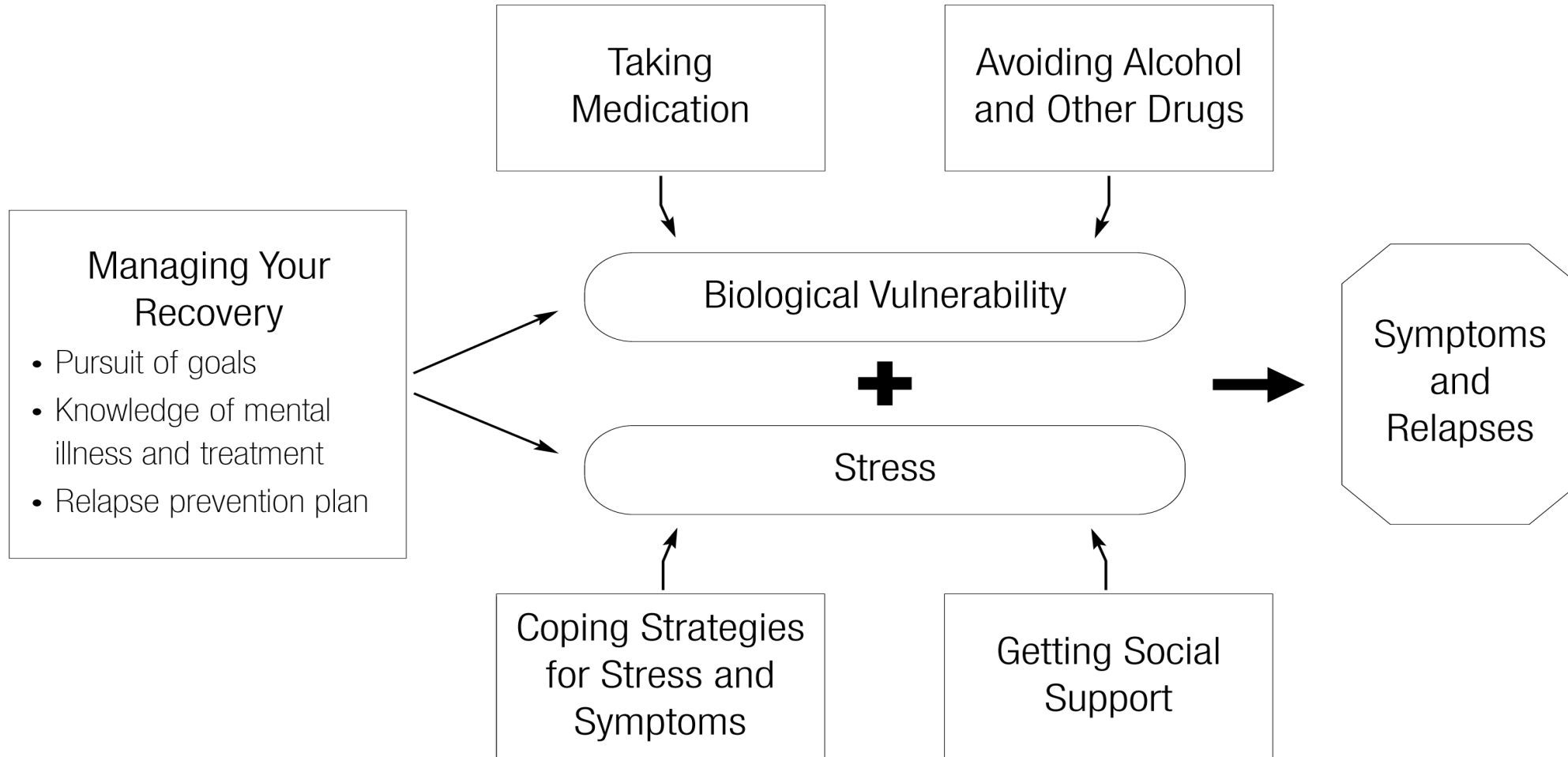
Potential Challenges in Teaching Stress-Vulnerability Module

- Person may find the model or the diagram confusing
- Person may say that they do not have a mental illness and see no point in understanding this model
- Person may have alternative explanation for what contributes to developing psychiatric disorders

Possible Strategies for Challenges in Teaching Stress-Vulnerability Module

- If diagram is confusing, block off part of it or make a simpler one, such as the following

Stress-Vulnerability Model

Biological vulnerability

➕

Stress

⟹

Symptoms
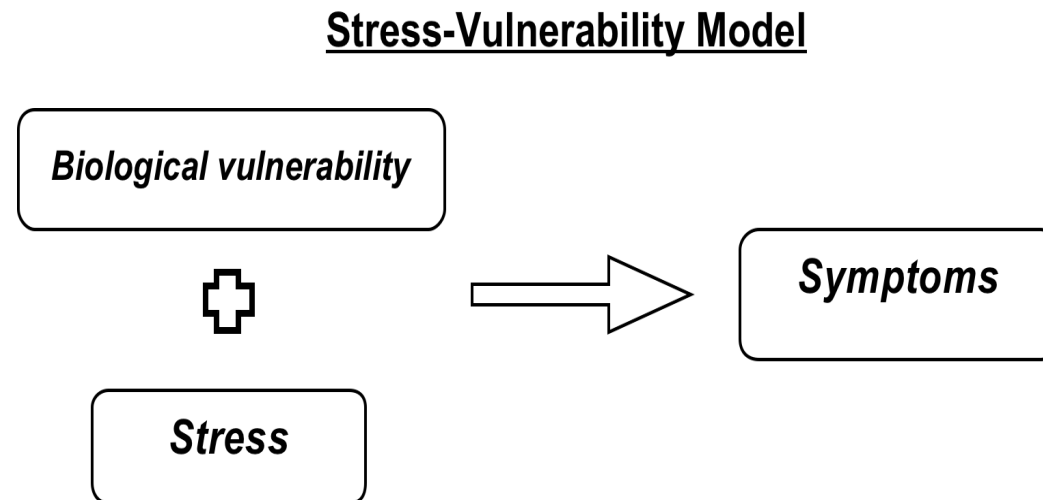
With Simpler Diagram, You Can Focus on:

- "There are things you can do for the biology factors…"
- "There are things you can do for the stress factors…"

Strategies for Stress-Vulnerability Module, continued

If person does not feel they have a mental illness:

- May still be receptive to talking about the value of reducing stress or coping more effectively with life problems

- May still be receptive to talking about the value of improving their biology (for example, healthy eating and exercise)

Strategies for Stress-Vulnerability Model, continued

If person have an alternative explanation or model for understanding factors that contribute to mental health symptoms

- Will often be interested in describing their explanation or model and may be receptive to talking about potential overlap with the stress-vulnerability model
- Will NOT respond well to complete dismissal of their explanation or model

The Coping with Stress Module

- Learning what causes stress
- Identifying signs of stress
- Preventing and coping with stress
- Using relaxation techniques
- Making a plan for preventing and coping with stress

Potential Challenges in Teaching the Coping with Stress Module

- Some individuals may think the goal is to avoid all stress

- In IMR 3 (2nd Norwegian translation) the three relaxation techniques are in one topic, which can be overwhelming to cover in one session

- Some individuals may hesitate to role play the coping strategies and prefer to just "talk about them"

Possible Strategies for Challenges in Teaching the Coping with Stress Module

If person thinks that the goal is to avoid all stress:

- Review that we <u>all</u> have stress in our lives; impossible to avoid, unless we avoid life itself

- Elicit discussion of how many of our goals potentially involve some stress (e.g., work, school, close relationships)

- The idea is to learn how to cope more effectively with stress so that we can move forward to accomplish the things that will give us enjoyment and satisfaction and meaning

Strategies for Stress Module, cont'd

If you are using IMR 3 and the 3 relaxation exercises are all in one topic:

- Spread out the relaxation exercises ("Relaxed Breathing," "Muscle Relaxation," and "Imagining a Peaceful Scene")

- Put one relaxation exercise in each of the first three topics of the handout, including a home assignment to try them out

- In the last session, review all three and ask individuals to choose the one or ones that they most want to continue with; discussion is guided by their personal experience

Strategies for Stress Module, cont'd

If individuals hesitate to role play strategies

- Be aware that how clinicians present role plays is often problematic

- Explain rationale for actively practicing strategies

- Do the role plays with them, emphasizing that it is purely practice

- Elicit how relaxed the person feels before and after role playing to increase their understanding of the value of practicing

The Building Social Support Module

- Connecting with people
- Having enjoyable conversations
- Understanding other people
- Developing closer relationships

Rationale for Social Support Module

- Having supportive relationships can help people reduce stress, get help in monitoring their symptoms, reduce self-stigma, develop a relapse prevention plan, and make informed decisions
- Equally important is that supportive relationships can enrich people's lives, sense of belonging, and sense of purpose
- Also important is that supportive relationships can help people achieve a wide range of recovery goals

Potential Challenges in Teaching the Social Support Module

- Individuals may be hesitant to role play
- Individuals may have a small number of people in their lives to practice skills with
- This module is enough to identify some basic social skills needs and to identify some steps people can take to improve their social skills, but may not be sufficient to help people make sufficient changes in their social relationships

Possible Strategies for Social Support Module

If individuals are hesitant to role play

- As in the Coping with Stress module, be aware that how clinicians present role plays is often problematic

- Make role plays very matter of fact: "OK, let's practice," or "Now I'm going to show how I might use the skill, then you'll give me some feedback on how I follow the steps, then you'll have a chance to practice," or "let's give it a try"

- Make role plays fun, use "props," encourage laughter and sense of enjoyment, get up and move around

- Get input from individuals to make the role plays realistic and to have relevance in their lives

Strategies for Social Support Module, continued

If individuals have few people in their lives

- Start small, with encouraging brief, small-scale interactions with people they have regular contact with (e.g., grocery store clerk, librarian, bus driver)
- If clients have access to staff members , encourage practicing with them (prepare staff)
- When individuals are ready, help them evaluate making contact with people they used to know

Strategies for Social Support Module, continued

If this module is not enough to foster significant change

- Be aware that research shows longer interventions with more repetition are often needed

- Integrate active skills training and role plays in all IMR modules (e.g., talking to your doctor, sharing your relapse plan, advocating for yourself)

- Consider offering a thorough social skills training group (see Bellack, et al, *Social Skills Training for Psychiatric Disorders*)

The Coping with Problems and Symptoms Module

Covers:

- Identifying common symptoms that bother people, such as problems with depression, anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia, sleep, negative symptoms, anger and concentration

- Learning specific coping strategies, such as positive self-talk, exercise, talking to a supportive person, using relaxation techniques, distraction, and behavioral activation

Potential Challenges to Teaching the Coping with Problems and Symptoms Module

- This module can be unwieldy
- Like the modules on Building Social Support and Coping with Stress, this module homes in on skills training and is based on longer, more extensive interventions that focus on just one subject (e.g., groups for Social Skills Training, or for Stress Reduction or for Coping with Voices)

Possible Strategies for Teaching the Coping with Problems and Symptoms Module

If the module feels unwieldy

- Try highlighting a number of key strategies that have a broad application, such as Positive Self Talk, Exercise, and Behavioral Activation

- Help individuals apply these strategies to the specific symptoms that bother them

- Aim for teaching one or two strategies extensively that individuals that individuals can see themselves using, rather than lots of strategies which will overwhelm them

Strategies for Coping with Problems and Symptoms Module, continued

If this module is not enough to foster significant change

- Encourage more practice and prompting outside of sessions by enlisting staff members or family members

- Consider offering additional, longer groups focused on specific coping strategies, such as Coping with Voices, Coping with Stress, Getting Daily Exercise, Developing Hobbies, or Skills for Getting Active (Behavioral Activation)

In Closing

- IMR can be conceptualized as a toolkit for managing life

- The IMR modules directly related to stress can have an important effect on individuals leading the kind of life they want

- There are several strategies for addressing common challenges in teaching the stress-related modules

- Some individuals may benefit from longer interventions to increase their social skills and to cope with specific symptoms