



AUSTRALIAWIDE
FIRST AID

Mental Health Support

eBook

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Warning

This is an education publication covering medical and mental conditions, injuries, and treatments. It includes images or information that may be sensitive to some people.

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Acknowledgement and Disclaimer

Australia Wide First Aid would like to acknowledge those with lived experience of mental ill-health, and those who love and care for others experiencing these difficulties.

Information covered in this Mental Health Support E-manual and course is not a substitute for professional mental health advice.

The course is not a therapy or support course, it is an education and information course like our regular CPR/First Aid courses.

Mental Health

The term 'mental health' has a vast array of interpretations, often accompanied by a few buzz words. This can make it seem false, unimportant, or even like a fad.

The truth is that mental health is far more critical than some think. Mental health is just as significant as physical health, though it is more often overlooked. As stated by the World Health Organisation:

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.

It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.

Mental health is a basic human right.

It is intricately intertwined with physical health and behaviour, is an intrinsic component of overall health, and encompasses more than just the absence of illness.

Mental health exists on a spectrum or continuum. Each person experiences life differently, even the same events differently, and will move through life with different difficulties and distresses. This means that the reality of each person's mental health is different.

Mental health issues can be caused by several different things. It could be due to our genes, our upbringing, our environment, or even our lifestyle choices. It's important to remember that mental health issues are not our fault, and we cannot always control them.

Mental health issues are usually able to be resolved with support from family and friends, or by making some lifestyle changes. However, if mental health issues are not dealt with, they can lead to mental illness. Depression and anxiety usually start as mental health issues and if left untreated can progress to mental illnesses such as clinical depression and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

Mental Health vs Mental Wellbeing

The terms mental health and mental wellbeing are related but distinct, and they refer to different aspects of our psychological state.

Mental health refers to the overall state of a person's psychological and emotional condition. It includes how we think, feel, and behave in relation to daily life. It encompasses a broad spectrum, from well-being to mental illness. A person can have poor mental health (e.g., experiencing anxiety, depression) without necessarily having a diagnosed mental illness.

It focuses on coping with stress and adversity; maintaining cognitive functioning; and managing emotions and behaviours.

Mental health can change over time and in response to circumstances, much like physical health. For example, someone may experience poor mental health after a traumatic event or due to high stress but recover with support.

Mental wellbeing refers to a person's overall sense of psychological and emotional positivity and life

satisfaction. It is about how well someone feels mentally and emotionally, encompassing happiness, life fulfillment, and a sense of purpose.

Mental wellbeing focuses on the *positive* side of mental health and the promotion of factors that help people thrive. It goes beyond the absence of mental illness to include feeling good about life and functioning well on a day-to-day basis. It encompasses positive relationships and social connections; purpose and meaning in life; and emotional balance and resilience. Mental wellbeing emphasises actively cultivating positive emotions, self-awareness, and personal growth, which can lead to better mental health in the long run.

Aspect	Mental Health	Mental Wellbeing
State	Overall psychological and emotional state	Positive state of emotional and psychological health
Range	Includes poor mental health and mental illness	Focuses on positive aspects (thriving, satisfaction)
Indicators	How well we manage emotions, thoughts, behaviours	How fulfilled, happy, and resilient we feel
Reactive/Proactive	Can be reactive (e.g., illness, stress)	Proactive (building positive mental habits)
Goals	Maintaining mental stability or recovery	Promoting flourishing, resilience, and fulfillment

Example:

- Mental Health: Someone may be experiencing anxiety or stress and need strategies to cope and function well in their daily life.
- Mental Wellbeing: The same person may actively work on improving their mental wellbeing by engaging in activities that make them feel purposeful, connected, and fulfilled.

In short, mental health can be seen as a broader concept that includes the spectrum from illness to well-being, while mental wellbeing is about optimising and maintaining a positive mental and emotional state.

Mental Health Stigmas

Mental health stigma can be defined as negative attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours directed at people who have mental disorders.

Stigma exists for mental health issues due to a lack of understanding.

The media often portrays people with mental disorders as dangerous, violent or unstable. A lack of education and understanding compounds these falsehoods. This can lead to feelings of fear, disgust, distrust, disdain, and even superiority, and can fuel discrimination.

Some of the most common misconceptions about mental health are:

1. The belief that mental disorders are not real medical conditions. This can lead to people thinking that those who have mental disorders are simply weak or crazy, or that they are 'just doing it for attention'.
2. The belief that mental disorders are caused by personal failings. This can lead to people thinking that those with mental disorders are lazy, weird or attention-seeking.

3. The belief that mental disorders are untreatable. This can lead to people thinking that there is no point in seeking help for mental disorders.
4. The belief that people with mental disorders are dangerous, unpredictable and violent. This can make people very wary of interacting with them.
5. The belief that mental disorders are contagious. This can lead to people avoiding those with mental disorders, as they believe they may catch the disorder themselves.

Mental health stigma can have several negative impacts on those who live with mental disorders:

- It can lead to people avoiding seeking help for mental disorders. This is because they may be worried about being labelled as weak, crazy or attention-seeking. As a result, mental disorders may go untreated and can become worse.
- It can lead to people with mental disorders feeling isolated and alone. This is because they may be afraid to tell people about their mental disorder for fear of being discriminated against or rejected.
- It can lead to workplace discrimination. This is because employers may be hesitant to hire someone with a mental disorder, as they may believe that they will be less productive or more likely to take time off work.
- It can lead to housing discrimination. This is because landlords may be hesitant to rent properties to those with mental disorders, as they may believe that they will be more likely to damage the property or not pay rent on time.

It is important to educate people about what mental disorders are, how common they are, and that they are treatable. This includes extending the conversations beyond depression and anxiety to include the full spectrum of mental health. It also includes using terminology correctly, within the scope of their medical definitions. It can be dismissive and belittling to those with lived experience when others use terms facetiously or grossly inaccurately. For example, saying you have OCD because you like to keep your home tidy is a gross simplification and misrepresentation of the true scope of an OCD diagnosis, which for many is a functionally disabling condition.

Combatting Mental Health Stigmas

There are several ways to combat mental health stigma. Education is key. The more people know about mental disorders, the less stigma there will be.

The [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI) offers some suggestions about what we can do as individuals to help reduce the stigma of mental illness:

- Talk openly about mental health, such as sharing on social media.
- Educate yourself and others – respond to misperceptions or negative comments by sharing facts and experiences.
- Be conscious of language – remind people that words matter.
- Encourage equality between physical and mental illness – draw comparisons to how they would treat someone with cancer or diabetes.
- Show compassion for those with mental illness.
- Normalise mental health treatment, just like other health care treatment.
- Let the media know when they are using stigmatising language or presenting stories of mental illness in a stigmatising way.
- Don't harbour self-stigma.

Showing compassion and understanding towards those with mental disorders can go a long way in combatting mental health stigma. This includes things like listening without judgement, being patient, and offering support.

Mental Health Issues and Mental Illness

Mental health issues and mental illness or disorders are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference between the two.

Mental health issues are any kind of problem with how we think, feel or behave. This can be anything from feeling down or anxious to having a mental health condition like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

Mental illness or disorder, on the other hand, is a mental health condition that is diagnosed by a mental health professional.

It is important to note that good mental health is not always just the absence of mental disorders. Those with mental health disorders are likely to have lower mental well-being than those without, but this is not always the case.

Mental health issues and disorders can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or background. Understanding different mental health challenges, their symptoms, and when to seek help is essential for improving well-being and accessing the right treatment.

Mental health disorders vary in their symptoms and severity, but recognising the signs early and seeking help can greatly improve outcomes. With the right treatment—whether through therapy, medication, or lifestyle changes—individuals can manage their conditions and lead fulfilling lives. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health, reaching out to a healthcare provider is the first step toward recovery.

Common Mental Health Issues and Disorders

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that affects how a person feels, thinks, and handles daily activities. It's more than just feeling sad or going through a rough patch—depression is a persistent condition that can lead to significant impairment.

Signs and Symptoms

- Persistent sadness or a low mood.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed.
- Fatigue or lack of energy.
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.
- Changes in appetite or weight.
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, or guilt.
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or remembering things.
- Physical symptoms like headaches or digestive issues with no apparent cause.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

When to Seek Help

If these symptoms last for more than two weeks or interfere with daily life, it's important to seek professional help. If someone is experiencing thoughts of suicide, immediate intervention is crucial.

Treatment Options

- **Psychotherapy:** Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy are effective for treating depression.
- **Medications:** Antidepressants such as SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) or SNRIs (Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors).
- **Lifestyle Changes:** Regular exercise, improved diet, and better sleep can complement treatment.
- **Support Networks:** Support from family, friends, or support groups can provide encouragement and reduce feelings of isolation.

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are characterised by excessive fear or worry that affects a person's daily life. They can manifest in different forms, such as generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, or specific phobias.

Signs and Symptoms

- Constant worry or fear, even about routine events.
- Restlessness or feeling on edge.
- Irritability or a sense of dread.
- Rapid heartbeat, sweating, or shortness of breath (especially during a panic attack).
- Difficulty sleeping or staying asleep.
- Muscle tension, headaches, or digestive issues.

When to Seek Help

If anxiety interferes with everyday tasks or leads to avoidance of activities, it's time to seek professional help. Panic attacks or intense phobias are also reasons to consult a mental health professional.

Treatment Options

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** A structured therapy that helps individuals challenge and change unhelpful thought patterns.
- **Medications:** Anti-anxiety medications such as benzodiazepines or antidepressants (for long-term management).
- **Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques:** Practices like deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can reduce anxiety symptoms.
- **Lifestyle Modifications:** Regular physical activity and limiting caffeine and alcohol can be beneficial.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder characterised by extreme mood swings, including periods of mania (high energy, elation) and depression (low mood, fatigue). These mood shifts can be dramatic and unpredictable.

Signs and Symptoms

Manic Episodes:

- Increased energy and activity levels.
- Euphoric or irritable mood.
- Reduced need for sleep.
- Racing thoughts and rapid speech.
- Impulsive or reckless behaviour (e.g., overspending, risky activities).

Depressive Episodes:

- Similar to symptoms of depression, including fatigue, sadness, and loss of interest.
- Difficulty concentrating and feelings of hopelessness.

When to Seek Help

If someone is experiencing extreme mood swings, especially if manic episodes lead to risky behaviour or if depressive episodes last more than two weeks, seeking medical attention is necessary.

Treatment Options

- **Mood Stabilisers:** Medications such as lithium or antipsychotics help manage manic episodes.
- **Psychotherapy:** Talk therapy (CBT or interpersonal therapy) can help individuals manage mood fluctuations and stress.
- **Lifestyle Management:** Maintaining a regular routine, with attention to sleep, exercise, and avoiding triggers (such as alcohol) is crucial.
- **Family Support:** Education for both the individual and their family helps in understanding and managing the disorder.

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

Borderline Personality Disorder is a mental health disorder that affects how a person thinks and feels about themselves and others. It leads to problems with self-image, difficulty managing emotions and behaviour, and unstable relationships.

Signs and Symptoms

- Intense fear of abandonment and efforts to avoid real or imagined separation.
- Unstable relationships, alternating between extremes of idealisation and devaluation.
- Rapid mood swings or intense emotions, often lasting hours rather than days.
- Impulsive behaviours, such as reckless driving, substance abuse, or binge eating.
- Chronic feelings of emptiness or boredom.
- Self-harming behaviours or suicidal thoughts.
- Difficulty managing anger or experiencing intense feelings of rage.

When to Seek Help

If someone experiences intense emotional instability, self-harm, or a persistent fear of abandonment that interferes with relationships or functioning, seeking therapy is essential.

Treatment Options

- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT): A type of cognitive-behavioural therapy specifically developed for BPD that teaches emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and interpersonal effectiveness.
- Psychotherapy: Long-term talk therapy (such as CBT or psychodynamic therapy) to address identity issues and develop healthier coping mechanisms.
- Medications: Mood stabilisers, antidepressants, or antipsychotic medications may be used to manage mood swings or impulsive behaviours.
- Supportive Relationships: Encouraging positive social connections and peer support can help with managing emotional regulation.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, war, or violent incident.

Signs and Symptoms

- Flashbacks or reliving the traumatic event.
- Nightmares or intrusive memories.
- Hypervigilance or being easily startled.
- Avoidance of places, people, or activities that remind the person of the trauma.
- Emotional numbness or feeling detached from others.
- Difficulty concentrating, irritability, or angry outbursts.

When to Seek Help

If someone has difficulty moving past a traumatic event and their symptoms last for more than a month, it's important to seek professional help. Immediate help is also needed if the person is experiencing suicidal thoughts or severe emotional distress.

Treatment Options

- Trauma-Focused Therapy: Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE), or Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) are effective for treating PTSD.
- Medications: Antidepressants, particularly SSRIs, are commonly prescribed to reduce symptoms.
- Support Groups: Connecting with others who have experienced trauma can offer emotional support and understanding.
- Stress Management Techniques: Practices like yoga, meditation, or deep breathing can help alleviate symptoms.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is characterised by persistent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviours or mental acts (compulsions) performed to reduce anxiety associated with the obsessions.

Signs and Symptoms

- Obsessive thoughts, such as fear of contamination, fear of harm, or intrusive thoughts.
- Compulsions, like excessive cleaning, checking, counting, or organising.

- Temporary relief from anxiety after performing compulsions, followed by the return of obsessions.
- Significant impact on daily life due to time-consuming rituals or distress.

When to Seek Help

If obsessive thoughts or compulsive behaviours interfere with daily functioning or relationships, seeking professional help is critical.

Treatment Options

- Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP): A type of cognitive-behavioural therapy that helps individuals gradually confront their fears and reduce compulsive behaviours.
- Medications: SSRIs are often prescribed to manage OCD symptoms.
- Support and Self-Help: Joining support groups or learning self-management strategies can help reduce symptoms and improve quality of life.

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD)

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder is characterised by a chronic preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and control. Unlike OCD, people with OCPD may not recognise their behaviour as problematic and often see it as necessary for success.

Signs and Symptoms

- Preoccupation with rules, details, lists, and schedules to the point that the major goal of an activity is lost.
- Perfectionism that interferes with task completion (e.g., inability to complete a project because it doesn't meet exacting standards).
- Excessive devotion to work at the expense of leisure and friendships.
- Inflexibility about morality, ethics, or values.
- Reluctance to delegate tasks or work with others unless they submit to doing things exactly their way.
- Rigid and stubborn behaviour, especially about personal habits or beliefs.

When to Seek Help

If perfectionism or control-oriented behaviours create significant stress or disrupt work, relationships, or personal life, professional support may be beneficial.

Treatment Options

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Helps individuals challenge and change rigid thought patterns and reduce perfectionistic tendencies.
- Medications: SSRIs may help reduce symptoms of anxiety or depression that often accompany OCPD.
- Relaxation Techniques: Learning to cope with uncertainty and embracing flexibility in daily tasks can ease the need for control.
- Mindfulness and Stress Reduction: Techniques such as meditation can help reduce the need for rigid control and focus on the present moment.

Substance Use Disorders

Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) occur when the recurrent use of alcohol or drugs causes significant impairment, including health problems, disability, and failure to meet responsibilities at work, school, or home. These disorders range from mild to severe, with addiction being the most severe form.

Common Substances Involved

- Alcohol
- Nicotine
- Cannabis
- Stimulants (e.g., cocaine, amphetamines)
- Opioids (e.g., heroin, prescription painkillers)
- Sedatives and Tranquilisers (e.g., benzodiazepines)

Signs and Symptoms

- **Increased Tolerance:** Needing more of the substance to achieve the desired effect.
- **Loss of Control:** Being unable to stop or cut down on substance use, despite efforts to quit.
- **Neglecting Responsibilities:** Failing to fulfill obligations at work, school, or home due to substance use.
- **Risky Behaviour:** Using substances in physically dangerous situations, such as driving while intoxicated.
- **Physical Dependence:** Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when not using the substance, such as shaking, nausea, sweating, or anxiety.
- **Cravings:** Intense urges or cravings for the substance.
- **Social Problems:** Relationships may deteriorate due to substance use, and the individual may withdraw from social activities or lose interest in hobbies.

When to Seek Help

If someone is using substances in ways that harm their physical or mental health, lead to risky behaviours, or impair their ability to function in daily life, they should seek professional help. Early intervention is key to preventing addiction and other severe consequences.

Treatment Options

- **Detoxification:** A medically supervised process that helps safely manage withdrawal symptoms.
- **Behavioural Therapy:** Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), contingency management, and motivational interviewing are effective approaches that address underlying behaviours and beliefs related to substance use.
- **Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT):** For certain addictions, medications like methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone can help reduce cravings and withdrawal symptoms.
- **Support Groups:** Participation in groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) provides social support and accountability.
- **Inpatient or Outpatient Rehab:** Depending on the severity, treatment may involve structured programs where individuals can focus on recovery in a supportive environment.

- Relapse Prevention: Ongoing therapy and support are often necessary to prevent relapse and maintain long-term recovery.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a serious mental disorder characterised by distorted thinking, perceptions, emotions, and behaviour. People with schizophrenia may experience psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations or delusions.

Signs and Symptoms

- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there).
- Delusions (strong beliefs that are not based on reality).
- Disorganised thinking and speech.
- Lack of motivation, withdrawal from social activities.
- Difficulty functioning in daily life.

When to Seek Help

Schizophrenia typically develops in early adulthood and requires immediate intervention once psychotic symptoms are noticed.

Treatment Options

- Antipsychotic Medications: These help manage hallucinations and delusions.
- Psychotherapy: CBT and social skills training help individuals manage symptoms and improve functioning.
- Family Therapy: Involving the family in treatment helps improve understanding and support.
- Long-Term Care: Supportive services such as housing, vocational training, and rehabilitation may be necessary for ongoing care.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder commonly diagnosed in childhood but can continue into adulthood. It affects attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity, and often impairs performance in academic, work, or social settings.

Signs and Symptoms

Inattention:

- Difficulty focusing on tasks or following instructions.
- Frequent forgetfulness and losing items.
- Avoiding tasks that require sustained mental effort.

Hyperactivity and Impulsivity:

- Inability to sit still or constant fidgeting.
- Excessive talking and interrupting others.
- Impulsiveness in decision-making or risk-taking behaviour.

When to Seek Help

If symptoms persist for six months or more and interfere with daily functioning at school, work, or in social settings, seeking a diagnosis and treatment is important.

Treatment Options

- Behavioural Therapy: Helps individuals learn organisational skills, time management, and impulse control.
- Medications: Stimulants (like methylphenidate and amphetamines) or non-stimulant medications can help improve focus and reduce hyperactivity.
- Lifestyle Adjustments: Creating structured routines, using reminders, and minimising distractions can support daily functioning.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders are serious mental health conditions characterised by unhealthy relationships with food, body image, and weight. Common types include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating disorder.

Signs and Symptoms

Anorexia Nervosa:

- Extreme restriction of food intake, leading to significant weight loss.
- Intense fear of gaining weight and distorted body image.
- Preoccupation with calories, dieting, and body shape.

Bulimia Nervosa:

- Episodes of binge eating followed by purging (vomiting, excessive exercise, or laxative use).
- Feelings of shame or loss of control during binges.
- Tooth decay, dehydration, and electrolyte imbalances due to frequent purging.

Binge-Eating Disorder:

- Regular episodes of eating large quantities of food in a short time.
- Eating in secret, feeling out of control during binges.
- Guilt, distress, and shame after binge episodes.

When to Seek Help

If eating behaviours interfere with physical health or emotional well-being, or if someone is showing signs of excessive food restriction or purging, professional help is necessary. Eating disorders can be life-threatening if untreated.

Treatment Options

- Psychotherapy: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and family-based therapy are often effective in addressing underlying emotional issues.
- Nutritional Counselling: Registered dietitians can provide guidance on healthy eating habits and restore balanced nutrition.
- Medical Monitoring: Regular check-ups are necessary to address physical health issues related to malnutrition or other complications.
- Medications: In some cases, antidepressants or medications targeting anxiety or OCD can be used to manage symptoms.

Panic Disorder

Panic disorder is characterised by recurrent, unexpected panic attacks—sudden periods of intense fear or discomfort that peak within minutes. These attacks can happen without warning and often cause significant anxiety about having more attacks.

Signs and Symptoms

- Sudden onset of fear or discomfort, usually peaking within 10 minutes.
- Physical symptoms like heart palpitations, sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, or chest pain.
- Fear of losing control, "going crazy," or dying during an attack.
- Persistent concern about having future panic attacks.
- Avoidance of situations that may trigger panic attacks.

When to Seek Help

If panic attacks occur frequently, cause significant distress, or lead to avoidance of places or activities, it's important to seek help from a mental health professional.

Treatment Options

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT): Particularly effective for panic disorder, CBT helps individuals learn to challenge irrational fears and reduce the physical and psychological symptoms of panic.
- Medications: Anti-anxiety medications such as benzodiazepines or antidepressants like SSRIs can help manage symptoms.
- Exposure Therapy: Gradual exposure to feared situations or physical sensations helps reduce the fear associated with panic attacks.
- Relaxation Techniques: Breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness can help prevent or reduce the severity of panic attacks.

Burnout

Burnout is a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged and excessive stress, particularly in the workplace. It often results from feeling overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands.

Signs and Symptoms

- Emotional Exhaustion: Feeling drained and unable to cope, experiencing a lack of energy to face daily tasks.
- Detachment: Becoming increasingly cynical or negative about work or responsibilities. Feeling emotionally detached from your job or the people around you.
- Reduced Performance: A noticeable decline in productivity, concentration, and ability to complete tasks.
- Physical Symptoms: Frequent headaches, stomach problems, or other physical signs of stress. Sleep disturbances are also common.
- Loss of Motivation: The individual may lose enthusiasm for work or daily responsibilities, no longer finding meaning or satisfaction in tasks they once enjoyed.

When to Seek Help

If feelings of exhaustion, frustration, or detachment from work persist for extended periods and impact your mental, physical, and social well-being, it's important to address burnout before it worsens. Untreated burnout can lead to depression, anxiety, or even physical illness.

Treatment Options

- **Rest and Recuperation:** Taking time off from work to recharge is essential in combating burnout.
- **Workplace Changes:** Adjusting workload, setting clearer boundaries, or talking to supervisors about job demands can help reduce stress.
- **Therapy:** Talking to a mental health professional can help individuals process their feelings and develop strategies to prevent future burnout.
- **Self-Care:** Engaging in activities that promote relaxation, such as exercise, hobbies, and socialising, can improve mood and energy levels.
- **Building Resilience:** Learning stress-management techniques, practicing mindfulness, and developing a healthy work-life balance are key to preventing burnout.

Recognising Mental Health Issues and Disorders in Others

Identifying mental health issues in others can be challenging because many people might hide their struggles or may not recognise that they are experiencing a disorder.

However, there are specific signs and behaviours to look out for, which can indicate that someone may be dealing with a mental health issue.

It is extremely important to remember that even if you do recognise the signs and symptoms of a mental health issue or disorder in another person, you *are not* qualified to provide them with a diagnosis. You can approach them to aid and help, but that is all.

Depression

- **Behavioural Changes:** The person may seem unusually sad, withdrawn, or irritable for a prolonged period.
- **Loss of Interest:** They may stop engaging in activities they once enjoyed, such as hobbies, socialising, or work-related tasks.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Noticeable weight loss or gain, fatigue, or complaints about chronic pain (e.g., headaches, stomach aches).
- **Speech:** The person may talk about feeling hopeless, worthless, or guilty. They might express a sense of failure or burden.
- **Changes in Sleep Patterns:** Observing that they either sleep too much or struggle to sleep at all.
- **Conversations About Death:** They might make statements about death, express suicidal thoughts, or talk about feeling that life isn't worth living.

Anxiety Disorders

- **Restlessness:** The person may seem constantly on edge, fidgety, or easily startled.

- Avoidance: They might avoid certain situations or activities that trigger their anxiety (e.g., social events, work meetings).
- Physical Symptoms: Notice signs like sweating, rapid breathing, shaking, or frequent headaches. They may frequently mention feeling tense or having stomach problems.
- Reassurance Seeking: Repeatedly asking for reassurance about things they worry about, even if those worries seem irrational.
- Irritability: The person might become easily irritated or frustrated over small things due to underlying anxiety.

Bipolar Disorder

- Mood Swings: Observe extreme shifts between energetic, euphoric, or irritable moods (mania) and episodes of depression. The changes can be dramatic and noticeable.
- Manic Behaviour: During manic phases, the person may display unusually high energy, talk rapidly, take excessive risks (e.g., spending sprees, impulsive decisions), and need little sleep.
- Depressive Phases: When in a depressive phase, they may appear lethargic, withdrawn, or deeply sad. They may stop attending social events or avoid work.
- Impulsivity: Watch for reckless behaviours, like driving dangerously, substance abuse, or engaging in risky business ventures.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Hypervigilance: The person may seem jumpy or overly alert to potential danger, even in safe situations.
- Avoidance: They might avoid talking about a traumatic event or avoid places, people, or activities that remind them of the trauma.
- Flashbacks: You may notice that they seem suddenly overwhelmed or distracted, as if they're reliving a past traumatic event.
- Emotional Numbness: They may appear emotionally detached or unable to connect with others, even in situations that would typically evoke a response.
- Irritability and Outbursts: Unexplained anger or irritability, especially if they seem unrelated to the current situation.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- Repetitive Behaviours: The person may repeatedly perform actions, such as excessive handwashing, checking locks or appliances, or organising objects to exacting standards.
- Obsessive Thoughts: You might notice they are frequently worried about specific issues, such as cleanliness, order, or harm, and these worries seem to consume a large portion of their time.
- Difficulty Completing Tasks: They might struggle to finish tasks because they feel compelled to perform certain rituals or actions repeatedly until they are "just right."
- Anxiety Over Routine Breaks: If their routine is disrupted, they may display visible distress or anxiety.

Schizophrenia

- **Hallucinations or Delusions:** The person may talk about seeing or hearing things that aren't there or express strange beliefs (e.g., they believe they are being watched, or they have special powers).
- **Disorganised Speech:** Their conversation may be difficult to follow, with thoughts jumping between unrelated topics.
- **Withdrawn Behaviour:** The person may seem detached from reality, lose interest in social interactions, and withdraw from work, family, or friends.
- **Lack of Self-Care:** A noticeable decline in personal hygiene, grooming, or maintaining their appearance.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- **Difficulty Focusing:** The person may have trouble paying attention in conversations, frequently lose focus, or seem distracted during tasks.
- **Impulsivity:** You might notice they interrupt others frequently, struggle to wait their turn, or make impulsive decisions without considering consequences.
- **Restlessness:** They may fidget, tap their feet, or appear physically unable to sit still, even in quiet situations.
- **Disorganisation:** They may frequently lose items, miss deadlines, or seem unable to manage their time effectively.

Eating Disorders

- **Preoccupation with Food or Body Image:** The person may constantly talk about dieting, food, calories, or weight, even in casual conversations.
- **Noticeable Weight Fluctuations:** There may be significant weight loss (in anorexia) or weight fluctuations (in bulimia or binge-eating disorder).
- **Avoiding Meals or Eating in Secret:** They might make excuses to skip meals or engage in binge eating in private, followed by guilt or shame.
- **Compensatory Behaviours:** Watch for signs of purging behaviours, such as frequent trips to the bathroom after meals, or excessive exercising.

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD)

- **Unstable Relationships:** The person may have intense, unstable relationships, with frequent breakups or shifts between idealising and devaluing people.
- **Fear of Abandonment:** They might express a fear of being left or abandoned and may act out in relationships to avoid perceived rejection.
- **Rapid Mood Swings:** Their emotions may shift quickly, from anger to sadness to euphoria, often in response to minor events.
- **Self-Harm or Risky Behaviours:** The person may engage in self-harming actions (e.g., cutting) or impulsive behaviours (e.g., substance abuse or reckless driving).

Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD)

- **Perfectionism:** The person may be overly focused on orderliness and perfection, leading to difficulty completing tasks or delegating work.

- **Rigidity:** They may seem inflexible in their views or rules, often imposing strict standards on themselves or others.
- **Work Over Social Life:** They might prioritise work or productivity over social relationships, leading to strained friendships or isolation.
- **Reluctance to Delegate:** They may refuse help from others, insisting that tasks be done "their way."

Panic Disorder

- **Panic Attacks:** The person may suddenly become overwhelmed by intense fear, showing signs like sweating, shaking, or breathing rapidly.
- **Avoidance:** They might avoid certain situations or places (e.g., crowded areas or public transport) due to a fear of having a panic attack.
- **Physical Complaints:** They may frequently mention experiencing chest pain, dizziness, or a racing heart, especially after a panic episode.
- **Constant Worry:** They might express fear about when their next panic attack will occur, leading to avoidance or tension.

Substance Use Disorders

- **Behavioural Changes:** The person may exhibit secretive behaviour, lie about their substance use, or seem irritable when questioned about it.
- **Physical Signs:** Bloodshot eyes, sudden weight changes, slurred speech, or lack of coordination may indicate substance use.
- **Neglecting Personal Care:** Declining personal hygiene, grooming, and general appearance may become noticeable.
- **Financial Problems:** They might have unexplained financial difficulties, borrow money frequently, or sell belongings to support their habit.
- **Social Isolation:** The person may withdraw from friends or family, avoid social gatherings, or spend more time alone or with new social groups.

Recognising mental health issues in others requires careful observation and understanding of their behaviour, mood, and communication. If you notice persistent changes in someone's mood, behaviour, or daily functioning that seem out of character, it may be time to offer support or encourage them to seek professional help. Being aware of the signs can make a significant difference in helping someone receive the care they need.

Mental Health Support

Mental Health Support involves recognising symptoms of mental health issues, providing initial help, and guiding individuals toward appropriate professional support if needed.

It is akin to traditional first aid, but it's focused on aiding individuals experiencing mental health challenges or crises.

Note that the purpose of mental health first aid is not to 'fix' the person, rather it is to provide help and support. The first step in this journey is to recognise and accept that every person's brain is different, and everyone experiences events differently. What might not seem like a big deal to you could in fact be catastrophic or terrifying to another person.

The second step is to recognise and accept that mental health difficulties are not 'by choice' or 'for attention'. Many are hard-wired into the way the brain works, many others are a symptom of chemical imbalances or other medical issues. The person experiencing a mental health challenge is not choosing to do so, and they may need help in progressing through the challenge and out the other side.

Mental health first aid is not dissimilar to traditional first aid, in that regular training keeps your skills and knowledge up to date and ready to use.

Providing support to someone experiencing distress can be taxing emotionally, mentally, and even physically. Learning to appropriate support strategies will allow you to help other people, and also help you to guard your own mental health during times of support.

Why is Mental Health Support Important?

According to the [National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing](#), just over 40% of people aged 16-85 have experienced a mental disorder at some point in their life.

It is extremely likely that someone you live with, work with, or have regular contact with falls into that category. You may even be there yourself. It is important to note that a person may be experiencing distress without a formally diagnosed mental health condition or mental health disorder.


Having the skills to provide mental health first aid enables you to better support yourself and those you care about.

- Mental health first aid enables early intervention, which can prevent crises from escalating. Just as administering first aid for a physical injury can prevent further harm, providing timely support for mental health issues can lead to better outcomes and recovery.
- By fostering open discussions and promoting understanding, mental health first aid helps reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. This encourages individuals to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination.
- Mental health first aid empowers individuals within communities to support one another's mental well-being. By equipping people with the necessary skills and knowledge, communities become better equipped to address mental health challenges collectively.
- In many settings, mental health resources may be limited or inaccessible. Mental health first

aid bridges this gap by providing immediate support and guidance to those in need, thereby improving access to care and resources.

A Guide to Providing Mental Health First Aid Using the CARE Approach


A GUIDE TO PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT USING
THE CARE APPROACH



Mental health struggles and crises can occur unexpectedly. The CARE framework offers an easy-to-remember guide for providing support:

C
CHECK AND CONSIDER: OBSERVE SIGNS AND EVALUATE RISKS

- Identify or evaluate signs including sadness, withdrawal, mood swings.
- Watch for risks like self-harm, suicidal ideation or attempt, hopelessness, or substance use.
- Call emergency services if there's an imminent risk of harm to the person or bystanders.



Mental health crises can occur unexpectedly, and knowing how to respond effectively can make a significant difference.

A
ASK AND ASSIST: ENGAGE, LISTEN, AND INITIAL SUPPORT


- Ask open-ended questions: "How are you feeling?"
- Listen empathetically and without interruption.
- Share that mental health issues are common & treatable.



The CARE framework is an easy-to-remember guide for offering support during a mental health crisis. It is also applicable if you think you might be seeing signs and symptoms of low mental health in a loved one, friend, or colleague. The process remains the same regardless of the severity of the situation.

R
REFER: LINK TO RESOURCES AND PROFESSIONAL HELP

- Encourage professional help, even for minor issues.
- Suggest psychologists, psychiatrists, or helplines.
- Assist with finding therapists or scheduling appointments.




E
ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT: ONGOING CONNECTION AND SELF-CARE

- Check in regularly through calls or messages.
- Discuss well-being to reduce isolation.
- Be patient; recovery takes time and consistency matters.
- Protect your own mental health by setting boundaries and seeking support.



FOLLOW THE CARE METHOD:
Check, Ask, Refer, Encourage. Provide immediate care, guide them to professional help, and ensure your well-being throughout the process.
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**AUSTRALIAWIDE
FIRST AID**

C – Check and Consider: Observe Signs and Evaluate Risks

The first step is to evaluate the situation and recognise any signs of mental health distress or crisis.

Look for changes in behaviour, mood, or energy levels. Some key indicators may include extreme sadness, withdrawal from friends and activities, changes in sleeping or eating habits, irritability, or sudden mood swings.

Consider whether the person is at risk of self-harm, suicide, or experiencing significant impacts on their personal life (e.g., relationships, work, or school). Some warning signs include:

- Talking about feeling hopeless or wanting to die.

- Increasing substance use.
- Risky behaviour or expressing feelings of being trapped or a burden to others.

If there is an imminent risk of harm (to themselves or others), call 000 immediately for emergency assistance.

A – Ask and Assist: Engage, Listen, and Initial Support

Once you have determined the person is in distress but not in immediate danger, provide compassionate initial assistance and support.

Start by asking how they are feeling. Use open-ended questions like, “How have you been feeling lately?” or “Is there anything on your mind that you'd like to talk about?”

Allow the person to express their thoughts and emotions without interrupting or offering solutions right away. Active listening involves empathy, maintaining eye contact, and refraining from criticism.

Offer basic information about mental health. You might explain that anxiety, depression, or other mental health disorders are common and treatable, and that seeking help is a positive step forward. Avoid diagnosing or giving unsolicited opinions—focus on supporting them.

R – Refer: Link to Resources and Encourage Professional Help

Mental health crises often require more than first aid. Encourage the individual to seek professional help, even if they are not in immediate danger and even if the situation seems not that significant.

You can suggest that the person reach out to a mental health professional such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or counsellor. You may also refer them to helplines like Lifeline or Beyond Blue, which offer immediate support.

If necessary, help the person research therapists or services and assist them with practical steps like scheduling appointments or attending with them if they are anxious.

Offer suggestions, but ensure the person feels in control of their own decisions. It's important to respect their autonomy and avoid being overly forceful, as this can cause them to retreat further.

E – Encourage and Support: Ongoing Connection and Self-Care

Offering support doesn't stop after the initial conversation. Continue to check in and ensure the person feels cared for.

Reach out to see how they are doing, whether via text, phone calls, or meeting in person. These small gestures can provide immense emotional support.

Mental health recovery takes time. Regular conversations about their well-being can help them feel less isolated and remind them that you care.

Supporting someone in a mental health crisis can be emotionally draining. It's important to take care of your own mental health. Set boundaries if necessary, and don't hesitate to step back if you feel overwhelmed. Prioritise your well-being to continue offering effective support.

By following the CARE method—Check and Consider, Ask and Assist, Refer, Encourage and Support—you can provide meaningful mental health first aid to someone in crisis. Your role is to offer immediate care and guide them toward the professional help they need, all while remembering to care for yourself as well.

A GUIDE TO PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID USING THE CARE APPROACH



Mental health crises can occur unexpectedly. The CARE framework offers an easy-to-remember guide for providing support:

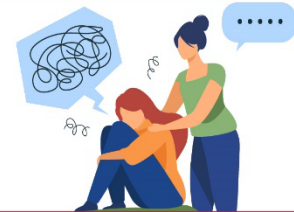
C CHECK FOR DANGER: RECOGNIZING SYMPTOMS & ASSESSING RISKS

- Identify or evaluate signs including sadness, withdrawal, mood swings.
- Watch for risks like self-harm, suicidal ideation or attempt, hopelessness, or substance use.
- Call emergency services if there's an imminent risk of harm to the person or bystanders.



A ASK AND ASSIST: ENGAGING, LISTENING, AND INITIAL SUPPORT

- Ask open-ended questions: "How are you feeling?"
- Listen empathetically and without interruption.
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- Encourage professional help, even for minor issues.
- Suggest psychologists, psychiatrists, or helplines.
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- Check in regularly through calls or messages.
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- Be patient; recovery takes time and consistency matters.
- Protect your own mental health by setting boundaries and seeking support.



FOLLOW THE CARE METHOD:

Check, Ask, Refer, Encourage. Provide immediate care, guide them to professional help, and ensure your well-being throughout the process.

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*This page is supplied as an appendix for you to print full-size.

How to Approach Someone When You're Concerned

Approaching someone about their mental health is a daunting thing. It must be done with care and attention.

If they are experiencing an acute mental crisis, the approach will be far different to a more generalised concern.

In either situation, use the CARE method, adjusting the speed and intensity of each step as required.

Acute Mental Health Crisis

Mental health crises can emerge suddenly and may pose immediate risks to the well-being of the individual or those around them. Knowing the signs of an acute mental health crisis and how to respond can make a critical difference.

Recognising Signs of an Acute Mental Health Crisis

An acute mental health crisis can include situations where someone's mental state puts them at immediate risk of harm. The following signs may indicate a crisis:

Behavioural Indicators

- **Aggressive or Erratic Behaviour:** Uncharacteristic displays of anger, sudden outbursts, or violent behaviour.
- **Isolation or Complete Withdrawal:** Refusing to communicate, engage, or respond to others.
- **Reckless Actions:** Dangerous actions, such as uncharacteristic substance use, driving unsafely, or excessive risk-taking.
- **Impulsive Behaviour:** Sudden decisions that seem irrational or impulsive, like quitting a job without cause, giving away possessions, or unexpected travel plans.

Verbal Signs

- **Expressions of Hopelessness:** Saying things like, "There's no way out," or "I just can't take it anymore."
- **Suicidal Statements:** Direct or indirect references to self-harm or suicide, like "I wish I didn't wake up tomorrow" or "You'd be better off without me."
- **Self-Deprecating Remarks:** Repeatedly saying they're a burden, worthless, or unlovable.

Emotional Signs

- **Panic or Intense Anxiety:** Sudden, overwhelming anxiety, shaking, or fear.
- **Profound Sadness or Emotional Numbness:** Uncontrolled crying or an apparent complete lack of emotion.
- **Physical and Cognitive Indicators**
- **Self-Harm:** Visible signs of self-injury, such as cuts, bruises, or scars.
- **Disorientation or Confusion:** Appearing lost, confused, or unable to communicate clearly.
- **Severe Sleep Disruptions:** Extreme insomnia or exhaustion from lack of sleep, which can affect mood and cognition.

How to Approach and Aid Using the CARE Method

Once you've identified potential signs of a mental health crisis, it's time to engage in the CARE approach: Check and Consider, Ask and Assist, Refer, and Encourage and Support.

C – Check and Consider: Observe Signs and Evaluate Risks

Start by assessing the level of risk to the person and those around them.

- Evaluate the Severity of the Situation: If the individual is expressing thoughts of self-harm, suicide, or poses a risk to others, this is an immediate crisis. Stay calm but be prepared to act quickly.
- Check for Imminent Danger: Listen for specific plans or indications they might harm themselves or others. If the person has a plan and means, it's critical to act swiftly.
- Immediate Action: If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm, call 000 for emergency assistance without delay. Stay with them if possible and maintain a calming presence until help arrives.
- Clear the Area: Have all non-necessary people leave the area. This is to increase safety of everyone involved, and create a more quiet, calm environment.

If the situation does require immediate emergency intervention, follow the directions provided by the 000 responder. While keeping yourself safe from harm, try to keep the other person safe from harm as well. This may involve carefully removing dangerous objects, redirecting other people away from the area, or asking other people to step in and help.

Remember, this course does not train you as a professional negotiator, nor a psychiatrist. You can only act within your own training, skills, knowledge, and limitations. Doing something risky increases the risk for everyone involved.

A – Ask and Assist: Engaging, Listening, and Initial Support

If the situation does not require immediate emergency intervention, provide calm, empathetic initial assistance.

- Ask: Gently ask questions like, "I'm concerned about you. Would you like to talk?" or "It seems like you're going through a lot. How can I help?"
- Do NOT Ask: Don't ask if they are 'OK' – this can be unintentionally inflammatory. Be more direct and specific, such as 'What do you need from me in this moment'.
- Listen Without Judgment: Allow them to talk without interrupting or offering immediate solutions. Sometimes, simply being heard can help them feel less alone and more grounded.
- Provide Reassurance and Facts: Acknowledge that what they're going through is difficult and reassure them that help is available. You could say, "It's okay to feel overwhelmed. Support is available."

R – Refer: Linking to Resources and Encouraging Professional Help

Guide the person to professional resources, as a mental health crisis often requires expert assistance.

- Suggest Contacting a Professional: Encourage them to reach out to a mental health professional such as a therapist, counsellor, or psychologist. If they're open, you might suggest they call a helpline or crisis service, like Lifeline or Beyond Blue.
- Offer Assistance: They may feel overwhelmed or unsure of where to start, so offer to help them find resources, call a number for them, or even accompany them to seek support.
- If They're Hesitant: Acknowledge their feelings and let them know that professionals are trained to help people through difficult times. It's important to avoid pushing them too hard if they're not ready—simply keep encouraging them.

E – Encourage and Support: Ongoing Connection and Self-Care

Once initial help has been offered, maintain supportive contact to reinforce the idea that they are

not alone.

- Follow Up and Check In: Periodically reach out to see how they're doing, ask if they need anything, and let them know you're available to talk.
- Provide Consistent Support: Small gestures, like sending a supportive message or inviting them for coffee, can help them feel cared for and less isolated.
- Set Boundaries to Protect Your Well-being: It's essential to monitor your own mental health when supporting someone in crisis. Know when to step back and, if necessary, encourage them to continue seeking professional help instead of relying solely on you.

By recognising signs of an acute mental health crisis and applying the CARE approach, you can provide critical support that could save a life. Remember that your role is not to fix the situation but to offer compassionate assistance and encourage them to seek professional help. Always prioritise both their safety and your own well-being throughout the process.

Mental Health Struggle

It can be difficult to see someone you care about struggle with their mental health, and even harder to know how to approach them.

Recognising mental health struggles in those around us and approaching them with empathy can make a significant difference.

Recognising Signs of Mental Health Struggles

Mental health struggles can manifest in many ways, and signs may vary depending on the person. Look out for these indicators, which could suggest someone may need support:

Behavioural Signs

- Isolation: Withdrawing from social interactions, avoiding family gatherings, or opting out of usual activities.
- Reliability Changes: Missed commitments, increased absenteeism at work, or becoming less responsive in communication.
- Risky Behaviour: Engaging in unsafe activities or substance misuse.
- Sudden Changes in Daily Habits: Alterations in eating, sleeping, or self-care routines.

Emotional Indicators

- Mood Swings: Noticeable shifts between happiness, sadness, anger, or irritability.
- Negative Self-Talk: Regular expressions of self-criticism, guilt, or self-doubt.
- Hopelessness: Saying things like, "Nothing I do matters," or "What's the point of trying?"

Physical and Cognitive Signs

- Changes in Energy: Unusual fatigue, sluggishness, or, conversely, restless energy.
- Difficulty Concentrating: Trouble focusing, forgetfulness, or showing signs of cognitive "fog."
- Appearance and Hygiene: Neglecting personal hygiene, dressing uncharacteristically dishevelled.

Professional and Social Performance Changes (for Colleagues)

- Decreased Quality of Work: Noticeable drop in productivity, missed deadlines, or more frequent mistakes.
- Withdrawal from Work Activities: Reduced participation in meetings or social events.

Approaching Them Using the CARE Method

Once you've observed signs of mental health struggles, it's essential to approach them thoughtfully using the CARE method: Check and Consider, Ask and Assist, Refer, and Encourage and Support.

C – Check and Consider: Observe Signs and Evaluate Risks

Start by evaluating whether the person is at risk of harm to themselves or others.

- Checking for signs of danger may be a bit ambiguous in a non-crisis. This step may take place over several days or weeks, as you initially notice something off and keep an eye on the person, looking out for continued signs of distress.
- Look for Immediate Red Flags: Listen for any mention of self-harm, suicidal thoughts, or expressions of despair that might indicate they're in crisis.
- Assess the Urgency of the Situation: If there is an immediate risk of harm, stay calm and be prepared to act. In urgent cases, calling 000 for help may be necessary.

A – Ask and Assist: Engaging, Listening, and Initial Support

If there isn't an immediate risk, reach out in a calm, supportive manner.

- Choose the Right Time and Place: Find a private, comfortable setting where you can talk without interruptions. Timing matters—approach them when they're not distracted or stressed.
- Express Observations Without Judgment: Use "I" statements to communicate what you've noticed in a non-critical way. This helps them feel seen and not judged.
 - Example: Instead of saying, "You've been acting really down," try, "I've noticed you seem a bit quieter than usual, and I just wanted to check in."
- Ask Open-Ended Questions and Listen Actively: Show interest in what they're experiencing by asking questions like:
 - "How have you been feeling lately?"
 - "Is there anything on your mind that you'd like to talk about?"
- Provide Reassurance: Let them know they're not alone and that it's okay to struggle. Avoid offering immediate solutions; instead, focus on being a supportive presence.

R – Refer: Linking to Resources and Encouraging Professional Help

Encourage the person to consider reaching out for professional mental health support if needed.

- Suggest Professional Resources: Explain that mental health professionals, like therapists or counsellors, can provide guidance. Offer information on trusted resources such as Beyond Blue or Lifeline, which are available to help.
- Assist with Practical Steps: If they seem receptive, offer to help them find a professional or accompany them if they're nervous. You could also provide assistance in scheduling appointments or researching options.

- **Respect Their Autonomy:** Let them make the final choice and avoid pressuring them. Gently encourage without being forceful; they need to feel in control of their recovery.

E – Encourage and Support: Ongoing Connection and Self-Care

Continuing support after the initial conversation helps foster trust and reinforces that you're there for them over time.

- **Check In Regularly:** Periodically reach out and ask how they're doing. Small gestures, like a supportive message or an invitation to spend time together, can help them feel cared for.
- **Offer a Listening Ear:** Remind them that they can come to you anytime. Sometimes ongoing, open conversations help people process their feelings.
- **Take Care of Your Own Well-Being:** Supporting someone can be emotionally taxing. Be mindful of your own mental health, and know your limits. Set boundaries if necessary, and don't hesitate to seek support for yourself.

By recognising signs of mental health struggles and approaching with the CARE framework, you can create a safe space for family, friends, or colleagues to open up. Remember, your role is to provide support, not to “fix” the situation. By showing compassion and helping them access additional resources, you can be a positive influence on their mental health journey.

Ways to Ask for Help

We all face moments of emotional turbulence and stress. Just as we would reach out for physical first aid in times of injury or illness, it's essential to recognise the importance of seeking mental health support when needed. Your friends and family can be valuable allies in this regard. No matter how big or how small your concerns may be, seeking help can lessen the impact.

Professional help can be even more beneficial, but also can be more difficult to get started. Social stigmas around mental health often prevent those in need from seeking professional assistance. The cost of such services can also be prohibitive.

Recognise the Need

Before you can ask for help, you need to be able to recognise when you need it.

Mental health concerns can manifest in various ways, including:

- Feelings of sadness
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Rage
- Nervousness
- Withdrawal
- Lack of interest in things that previously brought joy
- Headaches
- Trouble sleeping
- Dramatic appetite change
- Less ability to think or function clearly
- Apathy

Acknowledge your emotions and trust your instincts; if something doesn't feel right, it's okay to seek help.

Self-Reflection

Take some time to reflect on what you're experiencing. As difficult as it is, try to witness your thoughts, feelings, and actions without judgement.

Acknowledge the changes in yourself, but don't shame yourself for them.

Try to identify the specific thoughts, feelings, or situations that are causing distress.

Understanding your feelings better can help you articulate your needs to your friends and family.

Choose the Right Time and Place

Selecting the right time and setting for this conversation is essential.

Find a quiet, comfortable, and private space where you won't be interrupted.

Avoid discussing sensitive topics in the midst of a heated argument or when you or your loved ones are already stressed.

Remember that it is ok for the other person to refuse to help in the moment. Respect their time, energy, and own mental health. If they cannot help you immediately when you ask, try not to get too disappointed or angry. Instead, see if you can arrange a time that better suits you both.

If the other person responds by saying that they themselves have been feeling overwhelmed or down lately, perhaps you could reciprocate help. Listen and support each other, without trying to one-up each other or dominate the situation.

Be Open and Honest

When reaching out for mental health support, honesty is the best policy.

Express your feelings and concerns openly and honestly.

You can say something like, "I've been feeling really overwhelmed lately, and I could use some support."

Vague statements can be frustrating for the other person, and aren't likely to get you the support you want and need. This can be difficult to achieve if you haven't adequately identified your own thoughts and feelings.

Use "I" Statements

Frame your requests using "I" statements, which can make the conversation less confrontational and more about your feelings.

For example, say, "I've been struggling with my anxiety," instead of "You make me anxious."

Be Specific

Clearly communicate what you need from your friends or family.

Whether it's a listening ear, emotional support, or practical assistance, let them know how they can help.

You can choose whether you want to receive advice or if you want help 'fixing' a situation. Sometimes you just need someone to listen, not to fix.

Specific requests are easier for loved ones to respond to effectively.

Share Resources

Let your friends and family know that you're actively seeking help for your mental health.

Share information about therapists, counsellors, support groups, or helplines that you're considering.

This shows that you are taking steps to address your concerns and allows them to support you in this process.

Take on board suggestions of resources that they may have. You never know what they themselves are going through, and what resources they've sought out that you may not know about.

Be Patient

Remember that your loved ones may not fully understand what you're going through or know how to respond immediately.

Be patient and give them time to process your request for mental health support.

Encourage open communication and ask if they have any questions or concerns.

Offer Reassurance

Assure your loved ones that you value their support and that your request is not a burden.

Let them know that you appreciate their willingness to help you during this challenging time.

Follow Up

After the initial conversation, it's essential to follow up with your friends and family.

Share your progress and let them know how their support has been beneficial.

Continue to keep the lines of communication open, and don't hesitate to seek professional help if necessary.

Asking for mental health support from friends and family is an essential aspect of self-care. Remember that reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

By approaching the conversation with honesty, openness, and a willingness to communicate, you can build a strong support system that aids in your mental health journey.

Ways to Listen When Someone is Asking for Help

When someone opens up to you about their mental health, it's a profound sign of trust. Responding thoughtfully can provide much-needed relief and encouragement. Here's a guide to being a supportive listener and offering effective help.

Create a Comfortable Space

Choose a quiet, private environment. If possible, talk in a setting where the person feels comfortable and safe, away from interruptions.

Approach the conversation calmly and show through your body language that you're fully present. Simple gestures like nodding and maintaining a gentle tone can make a huge difference.

Listen Actively and Non-Judgmentally

Let the person share as much or as little as they're comfortable with. Refrain from interrupting or jumping in with questions. Now is also not the time to discuss your own problems or experiences.

Show you're listening by occasionally repeating or paraphrasing what they say, like, "It sounds like you've been feeling really overwhelmed."

Acknowledge their experience by saying things like, "That sounds really difficult," or "I can see why you'd feel that way." Avoid minimising their emotions, even if they seem unusual to you. All emotions are valid, theirs and yours, and it is important to let them express their emotions without concern of how you might react.

It is hardwired into our brains to be judgemental to a certain degree, but it is not appropriate to express any judgements that may come across your mind during your conversation. This is what it means to listen non-judgmentally. While those thoughts may occur, do not let them show on your face, through your body language, or in your words. Keep them to yourself.

Avoid Offering Immediate Solutions or Advice

It can be tempting to suggest solutions or relate stories from your own experience, but your role is to listen and support, not to solve. Providing unsolicited advice can sometimes make people feel misunderstood or dismissed.

If they're comfortable talking more, ask gentle questions like:

- "What's been on your mind?"
- "What do you feel has been the hardest part for you?"

It's helpful to give them space to reflect. Sometimes, silence can help them gather their thoughts. Don't feel pressured to fill every gap—your quiet presence is supportive.

Encourage Them to Seek Professional Help if Appropriate

If the person seems open to it, encourage them to consider reaching out to a mental health professional.

Mention that talking to a counsellor, psychologist, or therapist could provide specialised support. You could say something like, “Many people find that talking to a professional can really help; is that something you might consider?”

If they seem overwhelmed, offer to help them find resources, look up therapists, or even accompany them to an appointment if they’re comfortable. But let them decide how and when to seek help. Respect their decision even if they aren’t ready to take the next step right away.

Offer Ongoing Support

Check in regularly. Send a message or call occasionally to see how they’re doing. Even small gestures, like sending a kind text, can reinforce your support.

Be available to listen again if they want to talk. Creating an ongoing dialogue can help them feel less isolated and more supported in their journey.

While offering ongoing support is important, so too is taking care of your own wellbeing. Supporting someone else can be emotionally draining. Make sure you’re taking care of your own mental health, setting boundaries if necessary, and seeking support if you need it.

Know When to Escalate for Immediate Help

If the person expresses thoughts of self-harm or suicide, or if you feel they may be at risk, act promptly:

- **Stay with Them:** Ensure they’re not left alone, and express concern calmly and directly.
- **Encourage Immediate Help:** Call 000 if there is an immediate risk, or contact a crisis service for guidance.

When someone approaches you about their mental health, being a compassionate listener and a consistent source of support can be profoundly helpful. Remember, you don’t need all the answers—your presence and willingness to listen with empathy can be an immense comfort.

Risks of Incorrect Mental Health Crisis Intervention

In moments of mental health crises, offering support to those in distress is crucial. However, the way support is provided can impact the person's well-being and the outcome of the crisis. Incorrect support can exacerbate the situation, potentially leading to further distress and harm.

Escalating the Crisis

Misunderstanding or misinterpreting the needs of someone in a mental health crisis can mistakenly escalate the situation. For example, responding with dismissiveness, invalidation, or minimising the person's feelings may exacerbate their distress and intensify the crisis.

Similarly, you should never attempt to force immediate solutions or interventions without understanding the underlying causes. This can lead to further agitation and worsen feelings of helplessness.

Reinforcing Stigma

Incorrect support may reinforce stigmas surrounding mental illness. Responses that are judgmental, dismissive, or based on stereotypes can perpetuate negative attitudes toward mental health issues.

This could contribute to feelings of shame, isolation, and self-blame in the person experiencing the crisis. Which, in turn, can make it more difficult for individuals to seek help and support in the future. It may also cause them to withdraw, or even turn to alcohol or drug abuse.

A common example of this would be suggesting that someone is 'just doing it for attention', or wrongly using a mental health condition to explain behaviours.

Risk of Misdiagnosis or Inappropriate Treatment

It is important to remember that unless you are a trained mental health medical professional, you are not qualified to make any diagnosis or treatment plan.

Inaccurate assessments of the person's need and condition during a mental health crisis can result in inappropriate treatment. Offering advice or interventions without proper understanding of the underlying issues can lead to ineffective or harmful outcomes.

Additionally, misinterpreting symptoms of mental illness as solely behavioural or character flaws can delay or prevent access to appropriate mental health care.

Encouraging the person to speak with their healthcare provider about accessing appropriate support is crucial.

Exacerbating Trauma

Responses that invalidate or minimise the person's experiences may retraumatise them, especially if

the crisis is linked to past trauma. Dismissive or insensitive reactions can reinforce feelings of powerlessness, shame, and fear, exacerbating existing trauma symptoms and complicating the recovery process.

Damage to Trust and Relationships

Incorrect support during a mental health crisis can damage trust and strain relationships between the person in distress and their support network.

Responses that are thought to be dismissive, judgmental, or unsupportive may erode trust and discourage them from seeking help or confiding in others in the future.

This can lead to increased feelings of isolation and exacerbate the person's sense of despair.

Examples of Incorrectly Attempting to Support Someone Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis

When supporting someone in a mental health crisis, the approach taken can either help de-escalate the situation or inadvertently make it worse. Here are some examples of common mistakes people make when attempting to offer support:

Dismissive Responses

Example: Telling someone "It's not that big of a deal" or "You're overreacting."

Impact: This minimises the person's feelings and can increase their sense of isolation and despair. It implies that their emotions and experiences are invalid, which can lead to further distress.

Offering Unsolicited Advice

Example: Saying "Just think positive" or "You should exercise more, it will solve your problems."

Impact: These statements can be perceived as oversimplifying complex mental health issues. They suggest that the person's struggles are easily fixable, which can make the person feel misunderstood and unsupported.

Making Judgments or Stereotypical Comments

Example: Suggesting "You're just seeking attention" or "People with your condition are always so dramatic."

Impact: Such comments reinforce stigma and can cause the person to feel ashamed or guilty about their condition. This can deter them from seeking help in the future.

Invalidating Their Experiences

Example: Responding with "You have nothing to be sad about, your life is great" or "Other people have it worse."

Impact: This type of response invalidates the person's feelings and experiences. It can lead to increased feelings of guilt, shame, and further emotional distress.

Attempting to Force Solutions

Example: Insisting "You need to see a therapist right now" or "Take these medications, they'll help."

Impact: Forcing solutions without understanding the person's readiness or willingness to accept help can increase their anxiety and resistance. It may also lead to feelings of helplessness and loss of control.

Ignoring the Person's Need for Space

Example: Constantly checking in with "Are you okay now?" or "You need to talk to me about this."

Impact: While it's important to show concern, being overly persistent can feel intrusive and overwhelming. This can push the person away, making them less likely to open up.

Reacting with Fear or Panic

Example: Saying "I don't know how to help you" or visibly panicking in front of them.

Impact: Displaying panic or fear can heighten the person's anxiety and sense of crisis. It can make the person feel like their situation is hopeless and that they are a burden.

Using Threats or Ultimatums

Example: Threatening "If you don't calm down, I will call the police" or "If you don't get help, I can't be around you."

Impact: Threats and ultimatums can escalate the situation and lead to a breakdown in trust. The person may feel coerced and more distressed, making them less likely to seek help willingly.

When and How to Seek Professional Help

Mental health challenges are common and can affect anyone at any time. Recognising when to seek professional help and understanding the options available can make a significant difference in recovery and overall well-being.

When to Seek Help

It's advisable to seek professional mental health help if you experience any of the following:

- **Persistent Symptoms:** When symptoms such as low mood, anxiety, irritability, or emotional distress last more than two weeks.
 - **Impact on Daily Life:** If mental health concerns are affecting work, relationships, sleep, or ability to complete daily tasks.
 - **Difficulty Coping:** Feeling overwhelmed by stress, sadness, or worry, especially if it interferes with your ability to enjoy life.
 - **Thoughts of Self-Harm or Suicide:** If you have thoughts of self-harm or suicide, it's critical to seek immediate help.
 - **Substance Abuse:** If you are using alcohol or drugs to cope with stress, sadness, or other emotions, support can be beneficial.
 - **Worsening Symptoms:** If symptoms like irritability, mood swings, or intrusive thoughts are getting worse over time.
 - **Others Express Concern:** If friends, family, or coworkers notice changes in your behaviour and express concern, it may be time to consult a professional.
-

How to Seek Professional Mental Health Help

Australia offers a variety of mental health services, both public and private, to help individuals manage and improve their mental health.

General Practitioner (GP)

Your first point of contact for mental health concerns should be your GP. They can assess your needs, provide initial advice, and refer you to mental health specialists if necessary. Your GP can also create a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which provides access to Medicare rebates for up to 10 sessions with a psychologist each year.

How to Access: Book an appointment with your GP and discuss your mental health concerns openly. Many will offer specific mental health appointments that have a longer timeframe, to allow you to explore and discuss at length, rather than trying to rush through a standard short appointment time.

Cost: Many GPs offer bulk-billing services, so check with your clinic beforehand.

Psychologists

Psychologists provide therapy and support for a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, and behavioural issues. Therapy options may include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), mindfulness, or other evidence-based approaches.

How to Access: After consulting with a GP, you may receive a referral to a psychologist. You can also book appointments directly with a psychologist, though Medicare rebates may require a referral.

Cost: A Medicare rebate is available for up to 10 sessions per year with a Mental Health Treatment Plan. Out-of-pocket costs vary based on the psychologist and location.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are medical doctors specialising in mental health, and they can diagnose and treat complex mental health conditions, including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and severe depression. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication and often work alongside psychologists to provide comprehensive treatment.

How to Access: A referral from a GP is required to see a psychiatrist.

Cost: Medicare rebates are available for psychiatric consultations, though there may be a gap payment depending on the specialist.

Public Mental Health Services

Public mental health services are available through community mental health clinics and hospitals. These services are funded by the state and are accessible to those with severe or complex mental health needs. Services include crisis support, counselling, psychiatric assessments, and case management.

How to Access: Contact your local health district or mental health intake line for your area.

Cost: Most public mental health services are free.

Online and Phone-Based Services

Several online and telephone mental health support services are available 24/7, providing immediate support and guidance.

- Lifeline: Provides crisis support and suicide prevention. Phone: 13 11 14.
- Beyond Blue: Offers support for anxiety, depression, and suicide prevention. Phone: 1300 22 4636.
- Kids Helpline: Free, private, and confidential support for young people aged 5-25. Phone: 1800 55 1800.
- eHeadspace: Provides online and phone support for young people aged 12-25.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Many workplaces offer EAPs, which provide free, confidential mental health support to employees and their families. EAPs often include short-term counselling and can connect employees with external mental health professionals.

How to Access: Speak to your HR department or refer to company policies to understand your EAP options.

Emergency and Crisis Support

If you or someone you know is in a mental health crisis, there are options for immediate support.

- **Emergency Services:** Call 000 if you or someone else is in immediate danger or at risk of harm.
- **Mental Health Crisis Lines:** Many states have dedicated crisis lines (e.g., the NSW Mental Health Line: 1800 011 511) that provide urgent support and intervention.
- **Hospital Emergency Departments:** Hospitals are equipped to handle mental health emergencies and can provide assessments and referrals to relevant services.

How to Choose a Mental Health Professional

Selecting the right mental health professional can impact your experience and outcome. Here are some factors to consider:

- **Specialisation:** Some professionals specialise in specific areas (e.g., trauma, anxiety, children's mental health), so seek someone who aligns with your needs.
- **Approach to Treatment:** Different practitioners may use different therapeutic approaches (e.g., CBT, DBT, EMDR). Research the method or ask the practitioner about their approach.
- **Comfort Level:** It's essential to feel comfortable and supported by your mental health professional. If the relationship doesn't feel right, don't hesitate to seek someone new.

Tips for Seeking Help

- **Open Communication:** Be honest with your GP or mental health professional about your symptoms, concerns, and goals.
- **Self-Care:** Practice self-care and coping strategies (e.g., regular exercise, mindfulness) alongside professional support.
- **Encourage Early Intervention:** Encourage friends and family to seek help early if you notice signs of mental distress in them.

Stay Informed: Learn about your options, including public vs. private services, and what your health insurance may cover.

Workplace Mental Health

Unfortunately, many people do not take the time to focus on their mental health until they are facing a crisis. This is especially true in the workplace, where the demands of the job can leave little time or energy for anything else.

Factors that Contribute to Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

There are a number of factors that can contribute to mental health issues in the workplace. These include:

- **Stressful working conditions:** Working long hours, tight deadlines, and high levels of responsibility can all lead to stress.
 - **Poor communication:** If there is a lack of communication between employees and management, it can lead to feelings of isolation and anxiety.
 - **Lack of support:** A lack of support from colleagues or superiors can make it difficult to cope with the demands of the job.
 - **Bullying:** Unfortunately, bullying is still a problem in many workplaces. This can include things like verbal abuse, intimidation, and social exclusion.
 - **Job insecurity:** The fear of losing one's job can be a major source of stress.
 - **Poor work/life balance:** When work demands start to take over our personal lives, it can lead to a range of mental and physical health problems.
 - **Poor physical working conditions:** This can include exposure to noise and vibration, poor lighting, ergonomic problems or hazardous materials.
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The Top 5 Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

There are a number of mental health issues that can occur in the workplace. These include:

1. **Stress:** Stress is a normal response to pressure or demands. It can become a problem when it's constant, intense and interferes with our ability to cope.
 2. **Anxiety:** Anxiety is a feeling of unease, worry or fear. It can be mild or severe and can affect our ability to function normally.
 3. **Depression:** Depression is more than just feeling down or sad. It's a serious mental illness that affects our mood, thoughts, body and behaviour.
 4. **Burnout:** Burnout is a state of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion
 5. **Substance abuse:** Substance abuse is the harmful or hazardous use of substances, such as alcohol, drugs or cigarettes. It can lead to physical and mental health problems, and can affect our ability to function normally.
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Impact of Mental Health Issues

What is less well known, however, is the impact that mental health can have on the workplace. Mental health problems can lead to absenteeism, presenteeism (when employees are physically present but not working to their full potential), and increased accidents and errors. All of these can have a significant impact on a business, both in terms of productivity and bottom line.

Absenteeism

Employees who are dealing with mental health issues are more likely to take time off work. This can result in lost productivity and increased costs for the company. Absenteeism is estimated to cost businesses of up to \$10.9 billion per year. "Calling in sick" is often used as a cover for mental health

issues, as many people feel too ashamed or embarrassed to admit that they are struggling.

Presenteeism

Mental health problems can also lead to presenteeism, which is when employees are physically present but not working to their full potential. This can be due to a number of factors, including fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and anxiety. Presenteeism is estimated to cost businesses \$15.1 billion per year.

Accidents and errors

Mental health problems can also lead to an increase in accidents and errors. This is often due to a lack of concentration or focus, as well as anxiety and stress.

Productivity

When employees are struggling with their mental health, it can lead to reduced productivity. This, in turn, can have a negative impact on the bottom line. In fact, it is estimated that they cost the Australian economy \$17.5 billion each year in lost productivity.

Workplace accidents

Mental health problems can lead to a decrease in concentration and focus, which can increase the risk of workplace accidents.

Workplace injuries

Mental health problems can also lead to an increase in workplace injuries. This is often due to a lack of focus and concentration, as well as anxiety and stress.

Violence

Mental health problems can also lead to an increased risk of violence in the workplace. This is often due to a lack of impulse control, as well as anxiety and stress.

Psychological injuries

Mental health problems can also lead to psychological injuries, such as anxiety and depression. These injuries can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to work and function in everyday life. Often mental health issues in the workplace are a direct health and safety issue or cause a workplace health and safety issue.

Building Mental Strength at Work

There are a number of things that can be done to build mental strength in the workplace.

- Promote a healthy work/life balance: Employees should be encouraged to take breaks when they need them and to use their vacation days.
- Encourage open communication: Employees should feel comfortable talking to their supervisors about their mental health.
- Provide support: There should be a system in place to provide support for employees who are struggling with their mental health. This could include employee assistance programs, counselling, and psychiatric services.
- Educate employees: Employees should be educated about mental health and how it can impact their work.

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, these are some general tips that can help to promote mental health in the workplace.

The Effects of Remote Work on Mental Health

Technology has made it possible for more and more people to work remotely, either from home or from other locations outside of the traditional office setting. This can have a number of benefits, including increased flexibility and productivity. However, there are also some potential downsides to working remotely, one of which is the impact on mental health.

Ways Remote Work Can Affect Mental Health

There are a number of ways in which working remotely can impact mental health.

- Potential for isolation and loneliness. When you're not physically present in an office, it can be difficult to build and maintain social connections. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, which can in turn contribute to depression and anxiety.
- Increased stress and anxiety. The lack of structure and support that can come with working remotely can lead to increased stress levels. This can be compounded by worries about job security, as well as the feeling that you are always 'on call' and available to work.
- Difficulty disconnecting from work. When your office is in your home, it can be difficult to switch off from work at the end of the day. This can lead to burnout and further exacerbate stress levels.
- Poor sleep quality. Remote workers often report higher levels of fatigue and poorer sleep quality than those who work in a traditional office setting. This can be due to a number of factors, including working longer hours, staring at screens for prolonged periods of time, and having difficulty disconnecting from work at the end of the day.

Warning Signs of Mental Health with Remote Work

There are a number of warning signs that may indicate that someone is struggling with their mental health while working remotely. If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the following, it's important to seek help from a qualified mental health professional:

- Feeling isolated and lonely.
- Increased stress and anxiety levels.
- Difficulty disconnecting from work.
- Poor sleep quality.
- Feeling overwhelmed by work.
- Procrastinating more than usual.
- Difficulty concentrating on work tasks
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Withdrawing from social activities
- Changes in appetite or weight

What Can Be Done to Support Mental Health for Remote Workers?

As a manager, it's important to be aware of the potential mental health risks associated with remote work. If you notice that one of your employees is struggling, there are a number of things you can do to support them.

- Check in regularly. Make sure to check in with your remote workers on a regular basis, and ask how they're doing both mentally and emotionally. This will help you to identify any early warning signs of trouble.
- Encourage social connection. One way to help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation is to encourage your employees to connect with one another online or in person. You can also provide opportunities for them to get together in person if possible.
- Promote work-life balance. It's important for remote workers to have boundaries between

their work lives and personal lives. Help them find ways to relax and de-stress outside of work, such as by taking breaks, going for walks, or reading before bedtime.

- Offer flexible working arrangements. Some people may find it harder to disconnect from work when they have more flexibility with their hours. If this is the case, consider offering alternative working arrangements until the employee feels more able to disconnect fully at the end of the day.
- Seek professional help. If you're concerned about an employee's mental health, encourage them to seek help from a qualified professional. This can be done through their Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if they have one, or by providing them with a list of recommended counsellors or therapists in their area.

Tips for Improving Mental Health

In addition to the measures that can be taken by employers, there are also a number of things that remote workers can do to improve their mental health.

- Make time for social interaction. If you're working remotely, it's important to make time for social interaction. This could involve meeting up with friends or colleagues for coffee or lunch, going for a walk with a friend, or joining a club or hobby group.
- Set boundaries between work and home life. It's important to set boundaries between work and home life when you're working remotely. This might involve setting regular working hours and sticking to them, making sure you take breaks during the day, and not working evenings and weekends if possible.
- Take breaks during the day. It's important to take breaks during the day, even if you're working from home. Get up and move around regularly, take a few minutes to stretch or do some relaxation exercises, and make sure you take a lunch break.
- Get outside each day. Spending time outdoors has been shown to have a number of benefits for mental health, so it's important to get outside each day, even if it's just for a short walk around the block.
- Keep a healthy lifestyle. Eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and getting enough sleep are all important for maintaining good mental health. If you're working remotely, it's important to make sure you're taking care of yourself physically as well as mentally.
- Seek professional help if needed. If you're struggling to cope with the demands of working remotely, it's important to seek professional help. A qualified mental health professional can provide support and guidance on how to manage stress and anxiety, and can offer coping strategies for dealing with difficult situations.
- Schedule regular check-ins with your manager or supervisor to discuss workload, expectations, and any concerns you may have. This will help to keep stress levels in check and ensure that you're on track with your work.
- Make time for hobbies and interests outside of work. This will help you to disconnect from work at the end of the day and maintain a healthy balance between your professional and personal life.

Legal Responsibilities of Mental Health in Australian Workplaces

Australian workplaces have legal obligations to protect the mental health and well-being of their employees. These duties are outlined in various laws and regulations aimed at ensuring safe, healthy work environments for all.

Duty of Care

Under the Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act, employers have a duty of care to ensure the health and safety of their employees, which includes mental health. This duty of care requires employers

to:

- Identify and assess potential psychological hazards in the workplace, such as high workloads, poor communication, bullying, and job insecurity.
- Implement measures to mitigate risks related to mental health, including offering support resources and adjusting workloads when necessary.
- Regularly review and improve policies and practices to ensure a safe environment for employees.
- Employers are also encouraged to foster a workplace culture that promotes mental health awareness and minimizes stigma around mental health issues.

Anti-Discrimination Laws

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), along with various state-based anti-discrimination laws, prohibits discrimination against individuals based on mental health conditions. In practice, this means:

- Employers must not discriminate against employees or job applicants with mental health conditions in recruitment, training, promotion, or dismissal.
- Reasonable adjustments must be made to accommodate employees with mental health conditions, such as flexible working arrangements or additional breaks, as long as these do not impose an unjustifiable hardship on the business.
- Failure to make reasonable adjustments may result in discrimination claims and potential legal consequences.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The Privacy Act 1988 mandates that employers respect employees' confidentiality regarding mental health conditions. Employers must:

- Only collect mental health information with an employee's consent and keep it confidential unless there is a legitimate need to disclose it (e.g., to make reasonable adjustments or protect the safety of others).
- Ensure that any information about an employee's mental health is handled in a secure and sensitive manner and only shared with authorized individuals when necessary.
- Breaching employee confidentiality can lead to serious legal repercussions and damage workplace trust.

Providing a Safe Return-to-Work Process

Under the WHS Act, employers must provide a safe return-to-work process for employees recovering from a mental health condition. This may include:

- Collaborating with the employee, their healthcare provider, and any relevant rehabilitation services to create a suitable return-to-work plan.
- Implementing gradual reintroduction to tasks and responsibilities, along with support to ease the transition.
- Monitoring the employee's progress and adjusting the plan as needed to accommodate their mental health.
- Employers who fail to provide a safe return-to-work process may risk injury claims and potential legal action.

Bullying, Harassment, and Psychosocial Risks

Workplace bullying, harassment, and exposure to psychosocial risks (like excessive work pressure or lack of support) are significant factors affecting mental health. Under WHS regulations, employers must:

- Implement policies and training to prevent bullying, harassment, and other psychosocial hazards.
- Address complaints promptly, impartially, and confidentially, ensuring that employees feel safe reporting issues.
- Take steps to eliminate or minimize these risks, which may involve adjustments to workplace culture, workload distribution, and employee support.

Mental Health Support and Education

While not mandated by law, it's considered best practice for employers to promote mental health awareness and provide access to support services, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), mental health resources, and training for both employees and managers on mental health topics.

- Educating managers on mental health can equip them to recognize signs of distress in employees and offer timely support.
- Offering resources like EAPs or mental health hotlines shows employees that support is available and may encourage them to seek help before issues escalate.

Creating a Supportive Workplace Environment

Fostering mental well-being in the workplace goes beyond just offering resources—it requires building a culture that promotes support, understanding, and resilience. This guide provides a framework for creating and maintaining a mentally healthy workplace through supportive policies, leadership involvement, wellness initiatives, resources, training, and ongoing improvement.

Mental Health Policy Framework

Developing a Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy

- A workplace mental health policy provides clear guidelines on expectations, resources, and responsibilities regarding mental health. It should outline goals for supporting mental well-being, anti-discrimination measures, and procedures for addressing mental health concerns in a supportive manner.
- The policy should include steps to prevent workplace bullying, manage workload, and promote a safe work environment. Input from employees is valuable to ensure that the policy reflects their needs and perspectives.

Clear Communication of Support Resources

- Ensure that employees are aware of the mental health resources available to them, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), support hotlines, and mental health days.
- Communicate these resources during onboarding, through regular emails, and by displaying information in common areas or the employee portal.

Leadership's Role in Mental Health

How Managers Can Support Employees

- Managers play a critical role in fostering a supportive environment. They should model healthy behaviours, such as taking breaks and maintaining work-life balance, to set an example for their teams.
- Regular check-ins with employees to discuss workload and stress levels can help prevent burnout. Managers should actively listen and encourage employees to reach out if they're feeling overwhelmed or stressed.

Leadership Styles that Promote Wellbeing

- Transformational Leadership: Leaders who inspire, motivate, and empathize tend to foster a more positive environment, as they build trust and demonstrate commitment to their

employees' well-being.

- Servant Leadership: Leaders who prioritize the needs of their team members and offer support, flexibility, and assistance tend to create a healthier work culture where employees feel valued and safe.

Promoting Open Dialogue

Techniques to Encourage Employees to Discuss Mental Health

- Encourage open dialogue by hosting discussions on mental health topics, either in group settings or one-on-one, to destigmatize mental health conversations.
- Leadership and HR should model openness by discussing the importance of mental health openly and encouraging employees to share challenges or stressors they may face.

Managing Confidentiality and Sensitivity

- Confidentiality is crucial in mental health discussions. Employees should feel assured that any shared information will be handled privately and only disclosed when necessary to support the employee's well-being.
- HR and managers must be trained on privacy laws and best practices for handling sensitive information to build trust and support a safe environment.

Strategies for Promoting Mental Wellbeing

Workplace Wellness Programs

Physical and Mental Health Initiatives

- Offer wellness programs such as subsidized gym memberships, yoga or meditation sessions, and mental health workshops. These initiatives can improve overall morale and encourage employees to adopt healthy habits.
- Digital health and wellness tools, like mindfulness apps, can be included as additional support.

Importance of Work-Life Balance and Flexible Working Arrangements

- Promote work-life balance by implementing flexible working hours, hybrid work options, and mental health leave policies. Giving employees control over their schedules can reduce stress and improve satisfaction.

Stress Management Techniques

Mindfulness and Relaxation Exercises

- Encourage employees to engage in relaxation exercises, like breathing techniques and mindfulness practices, which can be integrated into the workday through short breaks.
- Providing spaces for quiet reflection or offering guided mindfulness sessions can further promote mental well-being.

Encouraging Regular Breaks and Workload Management

- Breaks are essential for managing stress. Encourage employees to step away from their desks, especially during intense projects, and consider organizing regular team activities to reduce stress collectively.
- Manage workloads by setting realistic goals and prioritizing tasks to avoid burnout.

Peer Support Programs

Mentoring and Buddy Systems

- Pair employees with mentors or buddies who can offer guidance and support. Peer support

can be especially helpful for new employees adjusting to the workplace culture or those facing challenging projects.

Building a Culture of Peer Support

- Encourage employees to support one another by normalizing check-ins, promoting inclusivity, and fostering an open environment where colleagues can discuss mental health without fear of judgment.

Providing Support and Resources

How to Have Conversations About Mental Health

Guidelines for Managers and Colleagues on Approaching Sensitive Topics

- Encourage managers and colleagues to approach discussions with empathy and a non-judgmental attitude. Simple questions like, “How are you doing?” or “Is there anything you need?” can help initiate a supportive conversation.
- Avoid offering unsolicited advice or solutions and instead focus on listening to the employee’s concerns.

Active Listening and Empathetic Communication Techniques

- Practice active listening by maintaining eye contact, nodding, and asking open-ended questions. Acknowledge the employee’s feelings, validating their experience without rushing to fix it.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)

Overview of EAP Services and How Employees Can Access Them

- EAPs provide confidential support for employees and their families, including counselling, legal advice, and financial guidance. These services are typically free to employees and accessible via phone or online.
- Make sure employees understand the range of services available and how to access them.

Importance of External Professional Support

- External resources like EAPs are beneficial for providing unbiased, professional support. Encourage employees to use EAPs proactively, not just during crises.

Crisis Management

Responding to Mental Health Emergencies

- In situations involving suicidal thoughts, panic attacks, or severe distress, have a crisis response plan in place. This should include contacting emergency services and referring the individual to appropriate professionals.
- Referring to Professional Mental Health Services
- Train managers to recognize signs of crisis and provide support through referrals to mental health professionals, such as psychologists, counsellors, or support hotlines.

Training and Capacity Building

Mental Health First Aid Training

- Mental health first aid equips employees with skills to identify and respond to signs of mental health issues. This training can improve workplace awareness and empower employees to assist colleagues in need.

- Train employees on when and how to intervene, as well as ways to provide support without overwhelming themselves. Confidence in these skills fosters a safer and more resilient work environment.

Workshops and Seminars

Stress Management and Resilience-Building Workshops

- Offer workshops focused on stress management, resilience, and coping skills. These can provide practical tools to handle workplace demands.

Communication Skills for Managing Sensitive Mental Health Issues

- Training on empathetic communication can help managers and colleagues feel more prepared to discuss mental health and support each other effectively.

Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

Evaluating Workplace Mental Health Initiatives

Metrics for Assessing Mental Health Programs

- Use surveys, absenteeism rates, and employee feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of mental health programs. Regularly tracking these metrics can reveal trends and areas for improvement.
- Regular Review of Policies and Programs
- Schedule annual reviews of mental health policies and programs to keep them relevant and effective. Engage employee feedback to ensure the initiatives align with their needs.

Feedback Mechanisms

Encouraging Employee Feedback on Mental Health Initiatives

- Provide anonymous avenues for employees to share feedback, such as online surveys or suggestion boxes, so they can voice concerns without fear.

Adapting Strategies Based on Feedback

- Use feedback to adjust and improve mental health strategies, ensuring they meet employee needs and adapt to any changing workplace dynamics.

Promoting mental health in the workplace requires commitment, empathy, and proactive support. By implementing policies, providing resources, fostering open communication, and investing in training, employers can create a work environment that not only supports mental well-being but also encourages employees to thrive professionally and personally.

Mental Health Resources

There are many different organisations that provide support and education for people with mental illness and their families and carers throughout Australia. The below list is not comprehensive, there may be other organisations out there who are not listed here.

You can call [Head to Health](#) on 1800 595 212 for advice and to get connected to local mental health services. Check the [operating times](#). The [Head to Health](#) website provides information on how to navigate the mental health system, live well and find help.

There are [Medicare Mental Health Centres](#) available in each State and Territory. These are walk-in, free centres staffed by a team of highly qualified mental health professionals and people with lived experience of mental health. They will listen and work with you to provide you with the care you need on the spot. Support through the centres is free. You do not need a Medicare card, appointment or a GP referral. They may also make an appointment for you to visit again, or refer to you to other services for ongoing assistance.

Online mental health programs include:

- [headspace](#) (for people aged 12 to 25 and their families) — call 1800 650 890 or chat online
- [Beyond Blue](#) (anyone feeling depressed or anxious) — call 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- [Black Dog Institute](#) (anyone affected by mood disorders) — online help
- [SANE Australia](#) (people living with a mental illness) — call 1800 187 263 or chat online
- [This Way Up](#) (anyone with stress, anxiety and depression) — online courses
- [MindSpot](#) (people with anxiety and depression) — call 1800 61 44 34 or complete an online screening assessment.

Help for carers:

If you care for someone with a mental health condition, find support at the [Carer Gateway website](#).

For people who need support with depression, anxiety or suicidal thoughts:

- [Lifeline](#) provides 24-hour crisis counselling, support groups and suicide prevention services. Call **13 11 14**, [text 0477 13 11 14](#) or [chat online](#).
- [Suicide Call Back Service](#) provides 24/7 support if you or someone you know is feeling suicidal. Call **1300 659 467**.
- [Beyond Blue](#) aims to increase awareness of depression and anxiety and reduce stigma. If you or a loved one need help, you can call **1300 22 4636**, 24 hours/7 days a week or [chat online](#).
- [MindSpot](#) is a free telephone and online service for people with anxiety, stress, low mood or depression. It provides online assessment and treatment for anxiety and depression. MindSpot is not an emergency or instant response service. Call **1800 61 44 34**.
- [Head to Health](#) gives advice and will connect you to local mental health services. Call **1800 595 212**.
- [MensLine Australia](#) is a professional telephone and online counselling service offering support to Australian men. Call **1300 78 99 78**, 24 hours/7 or [chat online](#).
- [Black Dog Institute](#) contains information and resources for mood disorders, including depression and bipolar disorder.
- [Life in Mind](#) provides information and resources on suicide prevention.
- [Mental Health Online](#) provides online resources and services to help people 18 years and older experiencing mental health difficulties including anxiety, panic attacks and depression.
- [Mood Gym](#) is an online self-help program designed for people aged 15-25 years old to help prevent and manage depression and anxiety.

- [myCompass](#) is an interactive self-help service for people with mild to moderate stress, anxiety, and depression.
- [StandBy](#) is a face to face or phone support for individuals affected by suicide.
- [The Way Back Support Service](#) is a support service for people who have recently attempted suicide.

If you're feeling lonely:

- [FriendLine](#) supports anyone who's feeling lonely, needs to reconnect or just wants a chat. You can call them 7 days a week on **1800 424 287**, or chat online with one of their trained volunteers. All conversations with FriendLine are anonymous.
- [Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme \(ACVVS\)](#) arranges volunteer visits to older people to provide friendship and companionship.

For young people who need mental health support, and their parents or carers:

- [Kids Helpline](#) is Australia's only free 24/7 confidential and private counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 – 25. Call **1800 55 1800**.
- [headspace](#) provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 – 25 and their families and friends. Call **1800 650 890**, or [chat online](#).
- [Bite Back](#) provides an online wellbeing and reliance program for people aged 13 - 16 years old.
- [CanTeen](#) provides online, email and phone counselling and forums for people aged 12-24 years living with the impact of cancer.

For people with complex mental health issues:

- [SANE Australia](#) provides support to anyone in Australia affected by complex mental health issues, as well as their friends, family members and health professionals. Call **1800 187 263** or [chat online](#).
- [Blue Knot Foundation Helpline](#) is the National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma. It provides support, education and resources for the families and communities of adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse. Call **1300 657 380**.
- [Australian Dementia Network \(ADNeT\)](#) is a network for dementia prevention, treatment, and care.
- [Dementia Support Australia](#) provides a 24/7 service supporting healthcare professionals and family members who are caring for a person living with dementia.
- [Blue Knot Foundation](#) the helpline has trauma-informed counsellors to support adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse, their partners, family and friends, health professionals and workplaces.
- [National Dementia Helpline](#) is a free phone and information support service for people with dementia and memory loss, and for their carers, families, and friends.
- [Children of Parents with a Mental Illness \(COPMI\)](#) provides information and resources for children, young people, parents and their family and friends about parenting with a mental illness.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- [13YARN](#) provides 24/7 free and confidential crisis support. Call **13 92 76**.
- [Thirrili](#) provides support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the aftermath of suicide or other fatal critical incidents. Call **1800 805 801**, 24 hours/7 days a week.
- [Beyond Blue - Aboriginal information resources](#) provides helpful information and resources, including flyers and videos, for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- [Butterfly Foundation - Every Body is Deadly](#) contains resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have eating and body image concerns.

- [I-ASIST and safeYARN](#) provide Indigenous Suicide Intervention Skills Training.
- [Link-Up](#) provides social, emotional and wellbeing support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people separated from their families.
- [National Indigenous Postvention Service](#) provides 24/7 emotional and practical support to families impacted by a loss from suicide or other traumatic event.

For LGBTIQ+ people:

- [QLife](#) provides nationwide telephone and web-based services for peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues including sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships. Call **1800 184 527**.
- [ACON](#) provides information and support for people who identify as LGBTQIA+ on a range of health issues.
- [Here](#) is a LGBTQIA+ suicide prevention digital hub established by ACON in partnership with NSW Health.
- [Rainbow Families](#) provides parenting support and resources for members of the LGBTQIA+ community.

For pregnant people and new parents:

- [PANDA \(Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia\)](#) supports families across Australia affected by anxiety and depression during pregnancy and in the first year of parenthood. Call **1300 726 306**.
- [ForWhen](#) connects new and expecting parents or carers to perinatal and infant mental health services and supports in their local area. Call **1300 24 23 22**.
- [Gidget Foundation](#) provides mental health support for expectant and new parents. Call **1300 851 758**.
- [SMS4dads](#) is a text message advice and support service for new fathers.
- [COPE](#) provides high quality, practical information to help you work through all the emotional challenges of becoming and being a parent.
- [Mum Mood Booster](#) is an online treatment program for mothers with postnatal depression.
- [Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Services](#) is a free mental health service supporting pregnant women and families to manage complex mental illness.

For veterans and their loved ones:

- [Open Arms](#) provides 24/7 free and confidential counselling to anyone who has served at least one day in the ADF, their partners and families. Call **1800 011 046**.

For people needing support with eating disorders, and body image related issues:

- [Butterfly National Helpline](#) is available for anyone in Australia concerned about eating disorders or body image issues, either for themselves or someone they care about. Call **1800 33 4673**.
- [InsideOut Institute](#) conducts research on the treatment and prevention of eating disorders.

For people needing support with neurodivergences:

- [Amaze-Autism Connect](#) is a free, national autism helpline, providing independent and expert information over the phone, via email and webchat.
- [aspect \(autism spectrum AUSTRALIA\)](#) provides a specialised schools program for people on the autism spectrum and additional services including information and advice, diagnostic assessments, behaviour support, parent and family support, and adult programs.

For people needing support with grief:

- [Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#) provides information and resources for people

who are grieving.

For people struggling with substance abuse:

- [Alcohol and Drug Counselling Online](#) is a free and confidential online 24/7 support for people affected by alcohol or drug use.
- [Alcohol and other drugs information service \(ADIS\)](#) provides phone counselling, support, referrals, and information for people affected by alcohol or other drugs.
- [Opioid Treatment Line](#) is a telephone helpline providing opiate pharmacotherapy information (including methadone and buprenorphine), referrals, advice, and a forum for pharmacotherapy concerns.

Other resources:

- [Embrace Multicultural Mental Health](#) provides mental health resources and personal stories translated in more than 30 languages.
- [Emerging Minds](#) provides resources for families and professionals who are supporting infants, children, and adolescents with their mental health concerns.
- [Healthy Mind Online Tool for Thoughts and Feelings - Black Dog Institute](#) is an easy read web tool to help people with intellectual disability to recognise and regulate their thoughts and feelings.
- [Intellectual Disability Mental Health Connect](#) helps people with an intellectual disability to find support for their mental health.
- [No to Violence](#) provides telephone counselling, information and referrals for men who have anger, relationship, or parenting issues. The service helps women and other family members who are experiencing violence or controlling behaviour by men.
- [Transcultural Mental Health Centre](#) provides mental health information and help accessing community support services for multicultural communities.

Mental health services by state and territory:

Get a detailed overview of mental health services in each state:

- [Australian Capital Territory](#)
- [New South Wales](#)
- [Northern Territory](#)
- [Queensland](#)
- [South Australia](#)
- [Tasmania](#)
- [Victoria](#)
- [Western Australia](#)

END MANUAL

A GUIDE TO PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT USING THE CARE APPROACH



Mental health struggles and crises can occur unexpectedly. The CARE framework offers an easy-to-remember guide for providing support:

C

CHECK AND CONSIDER: OBSERVE SIGNS AND EVALUATE RISKS

- Identify or evaluate signs including sadness, withdrawal, mood swings.
- Watch for risks like self-harm, suicidal ideation or attempt, hopelessness, or substance use.
- Call emergency services if there's an imminent risk of harm to the person or bystanders.



A

ASK AND ASSIST: ENGAGE, LISTEN, AND INITIAL SUPPORT

- Ask open-ended questions: "How are you feeling?"
- Listen empathetically and without interruption.
- Share that mental health issues are common & treatable.



R

REFER: LINK TO RESOURCES AND PROFESSIONAL HELP

- Encourage professional help, even for minor issues.
- Suggest psychologists, psychiatrists, or helplines.
- Assist with finding therapists or scheduling appointments.



E

ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT: ONGOING CONNECTION AND SELF-CARE

- Check in regularly through calls or messages.
- Discuss well-being to reduce isolation.
- Be patient; recovery takes time and consistency matters.
- Protect your own mental health by setting boundaries and seeking support.



FOLLOW THE CARE METHOD:

Check, Ask, Refer, Encourage. Provide immediate care, guide them to professional help, and ensure your well-being throughout the process.

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