

How to help when you're worried about someone's mental health



What this fact sheet covers:

- Recognising if someone may be struggling with their mental health
- Initiating conversation
- Providing support
- What to do if someone is suicidal
- Online tools and resources

It can be hard to know how to support someone who has a mental health issue or whose wellbeing you're concerned about. Friends, family, and colleagues are a crucial and necessary support mechanism for someone going through a difficult time.

Recognising if someone may be struggling with their mental health

Does someone you know seem different to how they usually are, or have you noticed a change in their behaviour? This could be an indication of a mental issue.

These signs can include:

- Becoming quiet or withdrawn
- Not looking after themselves, such as not showering or wearing unwashed clothes
- Noticing changes in their sleeping patterns (oversleeping or sleeping less than usual)
- Avoiding social interactions
- Becoming agitated or irritable
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope
- Having low energy and motivation
- Worrying excessively and procrastinating doing tasks

People may not always reveal their upsetting thoughts or feelings. Starting a conversation with someone whom you're concerned about can help them open up, share their worries with you, and seek further support if necessary.

Initiating conversation

Talking to someone about their mental health isn't always easy, but it could help them get better. Here are some key points to help you start a conversation:

- Choose a good time and place to talk where you are both comfortable and relaxed.
- Mention the change in behaviour you've noticed and add something positive, e.g. 'I've noticed that you've been.... You're usually so...'
- Encourage the person to talk by using open-ended questions, e.g. 'What's on your mind?' If the person is reluctant to talk, ask more questions, don't give up.
- Listen actively, giving the person time to talk without interrupting or giving advice. Avoid the temptation to fill the silences.



- Reflect back some of the things you've heard to show you understand.
- Encourage them to talk to their GP or another health professional if they need help.

Providing support

Supporting someone who may be struggling with their mental health can help them cope and aid their recovery.

There are many physical and emotional ways you can supporting someone including:

- Making an appointment with their GP or other health professional for them and/or accompanying them to their appointment
- Regularly staying in touch and asking how they are going, especially if they live alone
- Scheduling fun activities you can do together
- Encouraging healthy habits such as exercise, getting enough sleep, and eating healthy food
- Discouraging them from self-medicating with alcohol or drugs
- Helping them connect with their friends and/or activity groups
- Encouraging and supporting them in developing a daily routine
- Offering practical support such as cooking a meal with them or organising things for them
- Providing them with information or helpful tools to support their mental health

Don't:

- Use criticism or guilt as a means to get them to tell you what is wrong or make them change their behaviour
- Act in an intrusive manner or become over-involved as this can often lead to resentment

- Expect them to open up immediately and tell you what is upsetting them

Do:

- Be mindful of your own worries and anxiety when supporting someone else
- Use positive statements and praise to encourage them to change their behaviour
- Demonstrate and discuss positive coping behaviours

It is also important to remember that it is not your role to provide health professional advice or crisis support.

If you're concerned about someone's safety or wellbeing contact a doctor, Lifeline, or emergency services.

Part of caring for others is caring for yourself too. Supporting someone who experiences mental illness can be physically and emotionally challenging at times, so ensure you're looking after your own wellbeing.

What to do if someone is suicidal

If you are acutely concerned for someone's safety, stay with them and seek help immediately.

In an emergency:

- Call 000 and stay with the person until an ambulance arrives, or
- Take the person to a hospital Emergency department

Alternatively, call lifeline on 13 11 14 or call another family member, friend, or doctor.



Online tools and resources

Black Dog Institute Online Clinic

A free mental health assessment tool

<https://onlineclinic.blackdoginstitute.org.au>

Beyond Blue

Information, online forums, and support advice

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

Lifeline

24-hour telephone counselling, information and referral service.

Phone: 13 11 14

MyCompass

A personalised self-help tool for mental health

<https://www.mycompass.org.au>

Reach Out

Online youth mental health service

<https://au.reachout.com>

This Way Up

Online learning programs, education and research

<https://thiswayup.org.au>

Health Direct

A directory of health professionals including GPs and psychologists in your area

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services>

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Written by:

A/Professor Vijaya Manicavasagar,
Clinical Psychologist at the Black Dog Institute and
Conjoint Professor UNSW School of Psychiatry.

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