MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID AUSTRALIA

How to help:
Tips from Mental Health First Aid

HOW DO I KNOW IF SOMEONE IS EXPERIENCING A MENTAL ILLNESS?

Only a trained professional can diagnose someone with a mental illness.

However, if you notice changes such as those listed below, you should consider mental health problems being a possible reason for these changes and plan to have a conversation with the person.

WHEN SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED?

If there is a major change in a person's normal way of thinking, feeling or behaving.	If these changes affect the person's ability to function at work, home or socially.	If the changes do not go away quickly or last longer than expected.

HOW SHOULD I APPROACH SOMEONE?

Give the person opportunities to talk. It can be helpful to let the person choose when to open up. However, if they do not initiate conversation about how they are feeling, you should say something to them. Speak openly and honestly about your concerns.

Choose a suitable time to talk. Find a space you both feel comfortable, where there will be no interruptions, and when you are both sober and in a calm frame of mind.

Use 'I' statements such as 'I have noticed....and feel concerned' rather than 'you' statements.

Let the person know you are concerned about them and are willing to help.

FRIEND DOCTOR CO-WORKER

If the person doesn't feel comfortable talking to you, encourage them to discuss how they are feeling with someone else.

HOW CAN I BE SUPPORTIVE?

- **Treat the person with respect and dignity**
- **Be a good listener**
- **Give the person hope for recovery**
- **If the person would like information, make sure the resources you provide are accurate and appropriate to their situation.**

WHAT DOESN'T HELP?

- **Telling them to 'snap out of it' or 'get over it'**
- **Being hostile, sarcastic or speaking in a patronising tone of voice**
- **Being over-involved, over-protective or trying to solve the person's problems**
- **Nagging**
- **Trivialising or belittling the person's experience**

## SHOULD I ENCOURAGE THE PERSON TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP?

Ask the person if they need help to manage how they are feeling.

Familiarise yourself with the services available locally and online.

If they feel they do need help, discuss the options they have for seeking help and encourage them to use those options.

Encouraging them to see their GP is a good place to start.

WHAT IF THE PERSON DOESN'T WANT HELP?
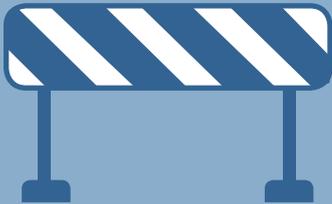
- You should find out if there are any specific reasons why they do not want to seek help as they may be based on mistaken beliefs. You may be able help the person overcome their worry about seeking help.

- If the person still doesn't want help after you've explored their reasons, let them know that if they change their mind in the future they can contact you.

- You must respect the person's right not to seek help unless you believe they are at risk of harming themselves or others.

WHAT IF THE PERSON IS SUICIDAL?

- Suicide can be prevented. Most suicidal people do not want to die. They simply do not want to live with the pain.

- Take suicidal thoughts and behaviours seriously.

- It is important that you know the warning signs and risk factors for suicide, and the reasons why a person might have thoughts of suicide.

HELPING A PERSON WHO IS SUICIDAL IS COMPLEX, HOWEVER THERE ARE THREE KEY ACTIONS TO HELPING A PERSON WHO IS SUICIDAL

1.
If you think someone may be suicidal, ask them directly.

2.
If they say yes, do not leave them alone.

3.
Link them with professional help.

WHERE DO I FIND IMMEDIATE ASSISTANCE?

LIFELINE
13 11 14

Confidential telephone crisis support service available 24/7 from a landline, payphone or mobile.

SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE
1300 659 467

The Suicide Call Back Service provides free nationwide professional telephone and online counselling for anyone affected by suicide.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP - ENROL IN AN MHFA COURSE
WWW.MHFA.COM.AU

This factsheet has been put together to provide you with some basic advice from our suite of mental health first aid guidelines, so you can take supportive action and help someone you are concerned about.