

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

SUPPORT THROUGH CONVERSATION

Support from friends, family, work colleagues and health professionals all play a significant role in assisting a loved one experiencing a mental health issue.

Having an open and supportive conversation and asking how a loved one is going is the first step to providing support. Tips for this conversation are:

- Have the conversation in a safe, stress free environment when both of you have time.
- Reflect to the person what you have noticed about their emotions and behaviour and ask how they are going. Use “I” statements, such as “I’m worried...” or “I’ve noticed...”.
- Validate what the person tells you, go at their pace and respect what they tell you - don’t try to correct the person’s perspective, tell them how they should feel or instruct them what to do.



- Gently suggest that they might feel better by getting some help.
- Encourage and explore with the person what options are available to them for help and support. Some first points of contact for help are their GP or other mental health professionals.
- If the person is already getting help, ask them how you might be able to support them.

TYPES OF SUPPORT

If you can see a loved one is struggling with their mental health:

- Encourage them to maintain good selfcare with exercise, sleep, and eating well.
- Invite them to social events and encourage other people in their lives to do so.
- Be available when they want to talk.
- To reduce the sense of feeling overwhelmed, encourage them to create routines such as regular times for eating, sleeping and doing different activities. Break larger tasks into smaller ones which seem more achievable.



Depending on the circumstances and if the loved one is agreeable to seeking help, other practical assistance you can provide includes:

- Finding someone that the person would feel comfortable talking to.
- Taking them to the appointment on the day.
- Accompanying them during the appointment.



If a loved one behaves aggressively, which may be a sign of distress or substance abuse, seek assistance promptly from health services. If they are persistently aggressive, it is important for your own wellbeing and theirs that you report this to their treating health professionals, and if you think necessary call the police.

If you think a loved one is suicidal, do not hesitate to talk to them about it and follow the tips about how to have an open and supportive conversation:

- Encourage them to seek help and provide them with information on mental health support groups and suicide prevention.
- Help them develop a safety plan involving trusted close friends or family that can keep them safe in times of emergency.
- If possible, remove the risks (e.g. access to medication, knives, car keys) which they have indicated they might use.



LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Regardless of what support you provide to a loved one with mental health issues, it is important to involve them as much as possible in any decisions regarding the help they seek.

It is common for a person supporting a loved one to themselves experience stress, fatigue and even depression or anxiety. It is important that you maintain your own wellbeing by:

- Maintaining your own social supports and have people you can talk to yourself. Access mental health services for yourself as needed.
- Getting the necessary 8 hours of sleep, exercise regularly, eat healthily and avoid overindulging in alcohol, cigarettes and recreational drugs.
- Keeping up the activities you enjoy such as hobbies or start something you have always wanted to do.
- Seeking services which support carers of loved ones with mental health issues.