



Supporting someone when they're not ok

Mental health conditions directly affect one in five Australians at some stage in their lives. It is even more common among young adults, affecting up to 25 per cent of this age group. Early warning signs differ from person to person, but common signs are when a person's behaviour changes (either suddenly or gradually), and he or she becomes unusually suspicious, anxious, depressed, irritable or angry. The person may experience mood swings, sleeplessness, loss of motivation and energy, changes in eating patterns, and memory loss. Family and friends will notice changes in a person's behaviour, often with a disruption to a person's work or study and to a person's energy levels and sociability.

Family and friends should not ignore signs and changes in mental health. Early treatment can lead to a better outcome. Encourage the person to see a doctor for an assessment. If a family member is affected, you should decide what level of support and care you are realistically able to provide. Developing a positive attitude will help you to provide better support for a friend or family member with a mental health issue. It will help if you:

- Find out as much as you can about mental health, treatment and what services are available in your area.
- Offer to assist the affected person to access the health services available to them, this may mean helping them make their doctor's appointment or reminding them of the appointment. Remember that

often someone experiencing poor mental health is so overwhelmed by what they are experiencing, they may find it difficult to face it alone.

- Recognise and accept that symptoms may come and go, and may vary in severity. Varying levels of support will be required at different times.
- Develop a sense of balance between your own needs and the needs of the person you are supporting. You can access EAP to assist you to respond to and support your family member, whilst looking after yourself. Many EAPs are also available to immediate family members – check with your HR team or on your EAP flyer to see if your family member can access support.

Often, the best support you can provide is to be there, without judgement but with a listening ear, a smile, or a hug. Keep in touch - one of the symptoms of mental health conditions is withdrawal and social isolation, so stay in contact by catching up, calling, emailing or texting regularly. Talk to them about daily life, not just about their mental health. Remind them that you care, knowing that small things can make a big difference, and remember that the road to recovery is not always linear and will almost always take time.

If you would like some more advice on how you can support someone with a mental health condition, call Converge International on 1300 687 327.

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