

Simple first steps... to help others suffering from stress

INTRODUCTION

There is no one perfect way of coping with stress. Stress is a fact of life and is different for different people. Being stressed can be a short-term feeling or can sometimes develop into a longer-term illness such as depression.

People who cope effectively with stress have a whole range of things they do once they start to feel stressed. They often use different responses for different situations, or at other times when other strategies haven't worked, they try new ideas.

It is important to recognise when to get professional help for yourself or someone else if stress becomes unmanageable or ongoing.

Seeing a friend or a family member slipping into a deeper depressed state isn't easy. Don't be afraid to talk to them and invite them to share with you what is making them feel low. Let them know you are concerned. If they don't want to talk about it, pass on your concern to someone who has the skills to intervene.

WAYS TO HELP

LISTENING

Listen carefully to the person, don't interrupt, use genuine supportive responses and always pledge confidentiality. Accept what they say even if it appears a little unusual. It can be helpful to them just to have you with them and listening. Accept silences without filling them with words and don't ask too many questions.

SHARE INFORMATION

Give options, not advice. Don't tell them what to think, do or feel. Gently tell them about useful resources and perhaps leave a list of local contacts which they may be able to use at a later date.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS

- Support them to take first steps in getting help such as going with them to a counsellor or GP.
- Try to encourage them to phone and make the appointment as this will help them to gain confidence, self-reliance and not depend on you.
- Suggest simple regular exercise such as taking short and regular walks.
- Help with babysitting, running an errand, or doing some gardening, or invite them for a meal.
- Encourage the person to keep a journal and draw images or write down how they are feeling.

BE AWARE OF YOUR LIMITATIONS

Don't take on the job of being a counsellor, psychologist, GP or psychiatrist if the person appears severely depressed or withdrawn.

If they talk about wanting to take their own life, don't ignore it. Take all threats and warnings or even hints of self-harm very seriously and don't make a promise to keep suicidal thoughts or plans secret. Talking about suicide or even attempting suicide is often a cry for help to end their pain rather than end their life. Someone feeling this way needs professional help.

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

Always look after yourself and keep yourself safe. Debrief with a trusted person but remember to maintain confidentiality. Accept that you cannot take away the other person's hurt. Your gift is giving your time and supporting them in the best way you can.

SOME HELPFUL RESOURCES

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT LINE Ph: 1800 201 123

LIFELINE provides free confidential personal counselling 24 hours 7 days a week. Ph: 13 11 14

KIDS HELP LINE is a national, free and confidential counselling service for young people aged 5–18 years. Ph: 1800 55 1800, www.kidshelp.com.au

BEYOND BLUE provides information on dealing with depression. www.beyondblue.org.au

MENSLINE

Mensline Australia supports men who are dealing with family and relationship difficulties, particularly surrounding family break-down or separation. All telephone counsellors are professionally trained and the service is available around Australia, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for the cost of a local call. Ph: 1300 789 978, www.menslineaus.org.au

SANE is a mental health information and help service. Ph: 1800 688 382, Monday to Friday 9.00 am–5.00 pm, www.sane.org

MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID WORKSHOPS

Mental Health First Aid workshops are run across NSW and can enhance your skills in this area (www.mhfa.com.au). They have an easy-to-remember ALGEE acronym (Kitchener and Jorm 2002) to assist helping those suffering with stress:

- Assess risk of suicide or harm.
- Listen non-judgmentally.
- Give reassurance and information.
- Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help.
- Encourage self-help strategies.

ROSE EDUCATION provides resources and training on suicide prevention. Ph: 02 9606 6853

COUNTRY CARE LINK is a confidential information and support service for country NSW which provides legal assistance and personal counselling. For country people coming to Sydney, Country Care Link can also arrange a volunteer to meet them and provide transport, make hospital visits and help find short-term accommodation. Ph: 1800 806 160, Monday to Friday 9.00 am–4.30 pm

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES provide counselling services such as grief and loss; relationship and family problems; domestic violence and sexual assault; drugs and alcohol; depression and suicide. Look under 'community health' in the white pages of your local phone book.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LINE is a 24 hour, 7 day a week service. Ph: 1800 656 463

ALCOHOL AND DRUG INFORMATION SERVICES (ADIS) provide information on counselling services. Ph: 1800 250 015 and ask for the ADIS in NSW.



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES



Office for Women
NSW Premier's Department

REFERENCE

Kitchener, BA and Jorm, AF 2002, *Mental Health First Aid Manual*, Centre for Mental Health Research, Canberra.

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (February 2007). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.