

How to help & assist others

How do I identify & assist others who may be struggling with their mental health & wellbeing? How can you tell if someone is struggling with their mental health?

It's not a like a physical illness or condition, which you might be able to see from the outside.

People often keep their internal struggles to themselves. This may be due to the stigma surrounding mental health, or it might be because they don't want to admit to anyone else (maybe even themselves) that they are struggling to cope.

The good news is there are many warning signs to look out that alert us that someone around us might be struggling. All it takes from us is a basic awareness of what these signs might look like that enable us to take action and help those we care about.

Signs someone might be struggling

The following are signs or risk factors that someone may be struggling with their mental health:

Situational Factors • The occurrence of stressful life events

- For example:
 - Relationship breakdown/divorce
 - Loss of job/unemployment
 - Grief or loss
 - Financial difficulties
 - Family or parenting difficulties
 - Health or medical concerns

Behaviour • Changes in usual behaviour

- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Not doing usual enjoyable activities
- Increase in alcohol or other drugs
- Unable to concentrate
- Engaging in high risk activities

Emotions • Noticeable changes in mood

- Coming across as sad, unhappy, miserable or upset
- More angry, irritable or aggressive than usual
- Lacking in usual confidence
- Feeling guilty, frustrated, overwhelmed or indecisive
- Feeling flat or having difficulty feeling positive emotions

Physical symptoms

- More tired than usual
- Sick or rundown
- Sleep disturbance (too much or not enough sleep, bad dreams)
- Change in appetite (increase or decrease)
- Change in weight (loss or gain)

What can you do?

If someone you know is showing some of the signs or symptoms above, it's important that you take action and actively show your support to them.

The following four steps are a useful guide on what you should do:

1. Ask

If you've noticed signs that someone may be struggling, then it's a good time to start the conversation with them about what you've seen or what your concerns are.

You will never make things worse simply by asking them how they are going.

2. Listen

If the person you are concerned about talks to you, listen to what they are saying without judgement.

It's also important not to interrupt with advice or solutions, sometimes people just want to be heard.

Try asking open ended questions and show that you've listened by repeating back what you've heard but in your own words and clarify that you've understood correctly.

3. Encourage action

You don't have to have all the answers, but it is important to encourage the person you're worried about to explore options that may be useful to them.

These options could include reconnecting with friends or family, doing something nice for themselves, or it could be to seek support and talk to a professional.

4. Check-in

It's important to keep in touch and follow up with the person you're concerned about. Make a plan to catch up in the near future or put it in your calendar to give them a call in a few days' time. Check in with how they're doing and see how they're managing their situation.

**Genuine care and support from family and friends
can make all the difference to those struggling
with their mental health**