
Understanding and Caring for Yourself or Your Loved Ones who have Mental Health Issues

One in every five Australians experience a mental illness every year. The rate of mental illness is climbing since COVID, due to the worry about contracting the virus itself, movement restrictions, isolation, loss of employment and social interaction, and the increasing cost-of-living. These rates mean that when you are in a group at school, at work, at the meeting, or just hanging out with friends, in every group of five people, there is a likely chance of someone in the group has or is suffering with some form of mental health illness.

Bible record of mental health disorders

The Bible records some mental illnesses, as it mentions for us that David was troubled and battled deep despair. David writes of his anguish, loneliness, fear, and his struggle of his guilt over his sin. He also grieved over the loss of his sons. Elijah was discouraged, weary, and afraid. It is reported he sat down and prayed, defeated, and worn. Jonah was angry and wanted to run away. Job suffered through great loss, devastation, and physical illness, in Job 3:11 he asks God "Why did I not perish at birth", and in Job 10:1 "I loathe my very life". Then there was Moses who grieved over the sin of his people. He had feelings of anger and betrayal from his own people and was about ready to quit. Jeremiah wrestled with great loneliness, feelings of defeat and insecurity, and he wrestled with despair and a great sense of failure. Jeremiah 20:14 records Jeremiah cursing the day he was born. It is recorded that even our Lord Jesus Christ himself was deeply anguished over what lay before him.

What do mental health illnesses look like?

We can suffer a different range of mental health issues which can affect how we feel (our emotions and life satisfaction) and how we function (relationship with others, personal control, purpose in life and independence). People with mental health illnesses can hide how they are feeling, so we need to look out for signs of any changes in our brethren and sisters and check in on each other regularly.

There has been a large stigma attached to mental illness, which is why some do not seek help, or tell someone about their feelings and emotions. The best way to help this stigma is to educate yourself about mental health. There is so much information about each symptom of mental health illnesses available. Also, you will learn and understand symptoms if you are just around or helping someone out with difficulties.

Signs and symptoms of mental health disorders

Feelings

- Sad, teary, anxious
 - Irritable, guilty
 - Hopeless
 - Self-doubt
 - Exhaustion
 - Loneliness or isolation
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- Worried or afraid
 - Tense or on edge
 - Nervous or scared.
 - Overwhelmed
 - Agitated or angry
 - Difficulties handling emotions.

Thoughts

- Life is too hard.
- I can't cope.
- I can't focus.
- I am useless or no good.
- Everything is wrong.
- There is no way out of this.
- It's not going to get better.
- I've got nothing to look forward to

Behaviours

- Less motivation and energy
- Unable to find enjoyment in things.
- Lack of sleep
- Changes in appetite.
- Lack of concentration and memory problems
- Changes in personality

What to do if we are suffering or grieving

As brethren and sisters, we are blessed, as we are not alone as we have God who gives comfort in our affliction. He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, as it says in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God". God knows that we will be fearful and need comforting, which is why He encourages us not to be fearful, as He will uphold us, allowing us to stand firm. Isaiah 41:10 "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand".

Even with our relationship with our God and having our Heavenly Father on our side, it doesn't mean that we will not need to seek professional health from a health care provider, as we still suffer from the effects of mortality which includes mental illness. You need to seek help, just like you would for a broken bone or an infection. Medications may be needed, just as you would take medication for diabetes or high blood pressure. Mental Health is an illness, not a characteristic of whether you are strong or weak. As an example, you don't get blood pressure problems if you have a weak personality. Remember you are not alone, and there is help available.

If you are experiencing any of the feelings, thoughts, or symptoms of depression or sadness – **TALK TO SOMEONE**, it can be a family member, a friend, a trusted brother or sister, your doctor,

or a Helpline. It's very normal to experience a mental health condition, just as normal as the flu or a muscle injury, for which you would seek medical help. When you talk to someone about your situation it will help you think more clearly, plus a problem shared is a problem halved. Seeking help is a sign of strength and courage and should be seen as a positive step, as we cannot solve **our** problems with the same thinking we used when **we** created them. Do not ever think your mental health isn't 'bad enough' as there is no wrong time to seek help and there are so many benefits when you seek help.

Benefits of seeking help – to help you be the best version of yourself.

- Helps identify unhealthy patterns and underlying issues.
- Helps to improve emotional and social wellness.
- Helps you to set goals and learn coping skills.
- Increases your happiness and wellbeing.

Make seeking help a priority, as you need to take care of yourself first so you can take care of others, and to be the best version of yourself. Two good examples are if a tree refuses water and sunlight for itself, it cannot bear fruit for others. The other example is when you hop on a plane the safety instructions are that you need to put your oxygen mask on yourself first before helping children or others who may need assistance in an emergency.

Ask yourself what advice you would give a family member or friend if they were in the same situation. If you don't know where to go to seek help, ask your GP or other health professionals.

Through our whole journey with mental health, we must trust in the Lord with all our heart, and lean not on our own understanding - Proverbs 3:5. We need to learn to trust the journey even if we do not understand it, as sometimes it's the journey that teaches us a lot about our destination. We also need to learn to cast our cares on the Lord, as He will sustain us - Psalm 55:22. In this verse David is pointing out that God will sustain him even through his struggles. For each of us, we can face the storms of this life and find peace when we keep our eyes on God.

We also can find comfort in the strong belief that God is present in every situation, and always available for His children. He knows our limits; He will not tempt beyond our limits because He is our creator. Deuteronomy 31:6. We need to find comfort that our God is always with us, and He encourages us not to be fearful, as He will uphold us, and hold out His righteous right hand, allowing us to stand firm, Isaiah 41:10.

What the Bible says about helping others

We need to check in on our brethren and sisters, to see how they are coping. We need to be Godly, and our God shows us He cares, He shows compassion, He offers mercy, He brings hope, He instils purpose, and He gives victory. We also need to follow in Jesus' footsteps and his instructions. Jesus demonstrated compassion, was giving, he also touched the leper and healed the sick. Jesus instructs us to help others, John 15:12, "My commandment is this: Love each other as I have loved you." In Luke Jesus says Give, and you will receive, and in Proverbs 11:25, it says a generous person will prosper, whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.

In Hebrews 10:24-25 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 we are told to encourage one another and build each other up. Encouraging and inspiring our brethren and sisters is an important part of loving

them as yourself. The apostle Paul encourages us to follow Jesus' example by showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

How to help others with mental health illnesses

As brethren and sisters, we must remember those who:

- Are not coping.
- Avoid ecclesial activities.
- Suffer from anxiety.
- Have lost a loved one.
- Are struggling financially.
- Have had a tough year.
- Don't feel safe at home.
- Are spending holidays alone.
- Have challenging family relationships.
- Are unwell.
- Are experiencing stress.

Ways to assist someone that is suffering, grieving, lonely, or unwell

- Pray for them - we need to pray for them to overcome their illness and pray for them to have the strength and be given the comfort to face their journey.
 - Pray for yourself and others to be able to offer the help they need, or be shown what help they need to assist them.
 - Listen without judgement, let the person express themselves and feel heard.
 - Show empathy, and demonstrate understanding and show compassion. This is to acknowledge their pain, show that you care. Encourage them, by showing them you are supporting them, and show gratitude that the person has opened up to you. Remember even though you may have been in a similar circumstance, every situation has different factors, and everyone has different feelings. Do not say you know exactly what they are going through or feeling, but that you understand that they may be suffering due to their situation. Empathy means you have understood the person is feeling hurt or in pain.
 - Educate yourself, by learning about mental health difficulties and warning signs.
 - Encourage them, offer your support and understanding that it must be hard, and encourage them to take small steps, remember even small steps in the right direction is success and recovery; acknowledge each small step as encouragement.
 - Be supportive, you can show that you support them by checking in on them with a quick visit, a text, a card, offering to do their laundry or mow the lawn. Including them in activities. Actions speak louder than words.
 - Be patient, mental health problems don't necessarily resolve quickly. Also, do not take their behaviour too personally as people are depressed or unwell they tend to push people away.
 - Don't give up on them, follow up with them. Don't be put off if they don't respond, they may not know how to respond on the that day. Check in a few days later. Offer them support and let them know you care. Contact only needs to be brief.
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- We all need to take time out of our busy schedules each week for someone else, this could be a quick pop in and see how they are going, or a phone call, picking something up from the shop for them, doing something for them.

Please don't forget that we have the internet at our fingertips these days. Use it for good, if you are unsure what to say to a person, in Google just type in briefly describing the situation, or if there are no words for the situation, send a screen shot of a nice image, e.g. a bunch of flowers. If you are unsure of symptoms, just look them up on the internet and read about them - find a reputable service that can help. We even have an app they we can ask it to write a message to someone feeling unwell. We can also use our phones for good, by making a phone call or sending a nice message or image to brighten up someone's day, and let them know we are thinking of them.

We long for that day when, God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. **Even so, come, Lord Jesus.**

Christadelphian Help-Line - 08 8270 4115

Beyond Blue - beyondblue.org.au

Black Dog Institute - blackdoginstitute.org.au

Blue Knot Foundation - blueknot.org.au

COPE – Parental Support - cope.org.au

Dementia Support - dementia.com.au

Multicultural Support - embracementalhealth.org.au

Torture and Trauma - fasstt.org.au

GriefLine - griefline.org.au

Headspace - headspace.org.au

Kids Helpline - kidshelpline.com.au

Lifeline - lifeline.org.au

MensLine – mensline.org.au

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