



Mental Health

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

- Leo Buscaglia

ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Mental illness can effect the way people think, feel and sometimes act. There are lots of different types of mental illness, with depression the most common mental health issue amongst teenagers and young adults.

Adolescence involves a period of significant change – physically, intellectually and psychologically. Added to this are big milestones such as completing high school and getting a job. People respond to change in different ways and for some it can be quite difficult and stressful.

Depression affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way they feel about themselves and the way they think about things. Depression is not the same as a passing mood, nor is it a sign of personal weakness. People with a depressive disorder cannot merely “pull themselves together” and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people with depression.

We can also strengthen our mental health by maintaining strong social supports and a healthy lifestyle, including regular physical activity.

If you are concerned about your mental health and wellbeing (or of someone you know), it's important to seek help.

Mental illness is often brought on by a combination of biological, psychological and/or environmental factors. For example:

- Genetics/heredity
- A hormonal imbalance
- A traumatic event – physically or psychologically
- Severe and prolonged stress following significant life disruption or changes, such as the death of a loved one
- Substance misuse

STATISTICS

- 1 in 5 Australians will experience a mental illness during their lifetime.
- Youth suicide is the third highest cause of death in amongst adolescents.
- 1 in 10 of those aged 18-25 may experience anxiety in a 12 month period.

- Youth Beyond Blue

<http://www.youthbeyondblue.com/>

- 1 in 4 young people between 16-25 years will experience mental health problems during adolescence..
- Anyone can develop a mental illness and no one is immune to mental health problems.
- Most people with mental illness recover well and are able to lead fulfilling lives in the community when they receive appropriate ongoing treatment and support.

- SANE Australia

<http://www.sane.org/sane-media>



A PERSONAL STORY

When Liam was younger he was really popular. He was good at sport and was even School Captain in Year 6, but once he started high school he started to go off track.

No one really seemed to understand what we were going through. People just don't understand schizophrenia. I remember someone telling me the illness was like a germ. All of Liam's friends' parents stopped them from having anything to do with him and we weren't invited to the street Christmas party anymore.

Sometimes it does all get a bit much but my best friend is always there for me. Mum and my boyfriend are also really supportive when I need to talk. I think it is important not to bottle everything up inside. I have also found it helpful to take time out.

Liam and I are closer than we have ever been. While he is not big on talking and sharing his feelings, it is the small things he does for others that reminds me, despite his illness, he really is a kind-hearted soul who would do almost anything for anyone.

- Amy (20)
An excerpt from Turning Points (2010) by the Schizophrenia Fellowship NSW
<http://www.sfnsw.org.au/About-SFNSW/Anniversary/default.aspx>

ACTIVITY 1

Investigate the common myths and facts of depression from the below website and other resources.

- What are the major forms of mental illness?
- What are the social stigmas surrounding mental illness and why do they exist?
- What could some of the repercussions of untreated mental illness be?
- What are some of the ways you can assist someone living with a mental illness, or who is isolated and experiencing challenges in your school or peer group?

Mental Health Association NSW
<http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au/be-informed/fact-sheet-menta-illness.html>



■ CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF DEPRESSION

Understanding the signs and reasons why people may experience a mental illness can be quite confusing. The causes leading to the development of a mental illness can be quite complex and often involves a combination of factors that are different for everyone.

The death of someone close or other difficult emotional experiences may increase a person's risk of depression. Sometimes the reason is not obvious, everything might just get on top of them, and in these situations it is often hard to see a solution from within the thick of it.

Mental illness can impact on a person's self esteem, relationships, education and employment. It can also lead some to be marginalised and isolated from the wider community. That's why it's important to support those living with a mental illness.

Being there to help people through the challenging aspects of their mental illness not only helps build their resilience to stay well, it can help them remain connected to their community and social networks.



■ SIGNS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH

- Withdrawing from friends
- Lack of enthusiasm or motivation
- Increased irritability
- Sleeping too much or not enough
- Loss of or increased appetite
- Loss of interest in previously liked activities
- Sudden outbursts of anger, aggression or crying
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Excessive use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Prolonged anxiety

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

LISTEN – If your friends say they're worried about you.

If your friend confides in you that they're struggling or unwell, it's okay not to know the answers.

The important thing is that you are supportive and encourage them to see someone who can help, such as a GP, teacher, or a parent.

TALK – If you're worried about your own mental health or someone you know, talk to your friends, a teacher or adult for advice and support. You could also call lifeline for confidential advice from a professional. It's important that you respect people's privacy but also recognise that people's safety and wellbeing is paramount.

www.lifeline.com.au



■ HOW VINNIES HELPS

The St Vincent de Paul Society helps people living with a mental illness. This includes programs such as **Compeer** and **Mate Helping Mate**.

The **Compeer** program is based on friendship, pairing people living with a mental illness with a Society volunteer.

The aim of the program is to re-establish the connection to vital community and social networks that help people work through and overcome the challenges they may be facing.

Participants catch up over coffee, lunch, a movie or might go for a walk.

Mate Helping Mate supports people in regional and rural communities. Farmers and their families get together and talk about the difficulties they're facing, how they feel and advice on where and how to get help. The group environment provides the perfect opportunity for participants to support each other and share their struggles with people often experiencing similar issues. They quickly realise they're not alone.

For help or information

See your GP or school counsellor

Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.com.au

Youth Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

www.youthbeyondblue.com

Black Dog Institute www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Kids Helpline www.kidshelpline.com.au 1800 55 1800

Headroom www.headroom.net.au

Reach Out www.reachout.com.au

Headspace www.headspace.org.au