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You Can Help

A Small Guide To Helping People In Crisis

By Beth Bretherton

What Is Mental Health?

Mental health includes our emotional, social and psychological well-being. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.

Mind Infoline—Mind provides confidential information on mental illness, alternative therapies and where to get help. They are open 9am—6pm Monday to Friday. Their number is 0300 123 3393

Elefriends—Run by Mind, Elefriends is an online supportive community that enables people to be themselves. Their website is <http://elefriends.org.uk/>

The Sanctuary—Run in Claire House, Wigan, The Sanctuary offers a crisis support line and is a safe and supportive place. They are open in the day from 6am—8 pm and through the night at 8pm—6am. Their number is 0300 003 7029.

What Help and Support Can I Recommend?

There are a range of services you can advise to support someone's mental health and wellbeing.

These are:

Samaritans—A confidential, non-judgemental emotional support for people experiences distress/despair. You can phone, e-mail, talk face to face or even write a letter. Their telephone is free, 24 hours a day and is 116 123.

ChildLine—ChildLine offers a private, confidential service to children and young people. It's free to contact a ChildLine counsellor and the telephone number is 0800 1111

Some Facts About Mental Health

Mental Health problems are reported to effect 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 10 children.

Suicide is the biggest killer of men up to the age of 49 and a recent study showed there are 6,000 suicides in the UK each year because of poor Mental Health.

It's more likely for women to be effected and 1 in 5 women report they have experienced mental illness compared to the England average of 1 in 8 for men.

Most mental health problems develop in childhood or when a person is a young adult. 3/4 of the problems people struggle with are established by the age of 24.

What Emotional Support Can I Offer?

If someone tells you they are struggling with difficult thoughts and feelings, it's common to feel like you don't know what to do/say. But you don't need any special training to show someone you care. Often just being there for someone and doing small things can be really helpful. For example:

Listen. Giving someone space to talk and listening to how they're feeling can be really helpful. If they're finding it hard, let them know that you're there for them when they feel ready to talk.

Offer reassurance. Seeking help can feel lonely and sometimes scary. You can reassure someone by letting them know that they are not alone and you will be there to help.

(Five Steps To Wellbeing Continued)

- 3) **Take Notice:** Take notice of the seasons changing or a nice smell of food. Enjoy the moment with mindfulness. Reflecting on the moment will help you appreciate what matters to you.
- 4) **Learn:** Try something new. You could learn a language or a new skill. Set yourself small challenges that will be worthwhile.
- 5) **Give:** Thanking a stranger or doing something nice for a friend are small acts but research shows that doing an act of kindness can massively improve your wellbeing. Helping the local community can be incredibly rewarding.

Five Steps To Wellbeing

From the research developed by the New Economics Foundation, evidence suggested that a small improvement in wellbeing can help reduce mental health problems. Even if you have not received specialised training, as a family member/friend you can still advise these steps to improve someone's emotional wellbeing. These are:

- 1) **Connect:** Try and connect with family or friends, colleagues or a neighbour. Build connections that will support you and enrich your everyday life.
- 2) **Be Active:** Go for a walk or a run. Exercising makes you feel good and finding an activity you enjoy can be very beneficial.

Try to stay calm. It can be upsetting to hear that someone you care about is distressed or going through a bad time but try to remember that they need you.

Try not to make assumptions. Your own experiences might be useful to your friend/family member, but try not to assume that you already know what they're going through or what could help. Let them vent uninterrupted.

Keep social contact. Part of the emotional support you offer could be to keep things as normal as possible. This could be involving your friend/family member in social events or regularly checking up on them to see how they are coping. Anything to remind them that you care.

What Practical Support Can I Offer?

There are lots of practical things you can do to support someone who is ready to seek help. For example:

Look for information that might be helpful. You could research what you can do or look for certain ways you could help someone. Try and think about what would work for them.

Help to write down lists of questions that the person you're supporting wants to ask their doctor. You could help the person write any symptoms that worry them, write any recent changes or upsetting events they could have experienced. As well as make a list of medical information and any tablets the person might take.

Help to organise paperwork. This might be making sure that your friend/family member has somewhere safe to keep their notes, prescriptions and records of appointments.

Go to appointments with them. Even just being there in the waiting room can help someone feel reassured. Just make sure they're okay with you going.

Ask them if there are any specific practical tasks you could help with. These could include:

- Offering them a lift somewhere.
- Arranging childcare for them.
- Taking over a chore or household task.
- Researching medication/anti-depressants the doctor has prescribed.