

*SuperFriend*

# PEER SUPPORT BOOKLET



Super *friend*<sup>™</sup>



# THIS BOOKLET

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*This booklet was created to provide basic information to people in workplaces who are interested in learning about supporting other work colleagues in need.*

*This resource provides a number of practical suggestions for listening to and supporting work colleagues. It is not intended to transform the reader into a personal counsellor or into someone who can give advice or solve problems. Rather the suggestions build on the communication skills you already possess in relating to others, and offers suggestions as to the best way of supporting work colleagues.*



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# MENTAL ILLNESS

*Commonly experienced mental illnesses include depression and anxiety. Understanding the risks and recognising the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety can help you to recognise them in yourself and others. The important thing to remember is that effective treatments are available and with the right care, most people recover.*

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- ▶ *Over one million people in Australia live with depression.*
  - ▶ *Over two million have an anxiety disorder.*
  - ▶ *With the right treatment most people recover.*
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## **Men**

Whilst women are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, men are less likely to talk about it and this increases the risk of their depression or anxiety going unrecognised and untreated.

Depression is also a high risk factor for suicide. Over the past five years, there has been approximately 2,400 deaths by suicide in Australia every year, with men accounting for 75% of these deaths. Suicide is the leading cause of death for men between the ages of 15 and 44, significantly exceeding the national road toll.

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- ▶ *On average, 1 in 8 men will have depression and 1 in 5 men will experience anxiety at some stage of their lives.*
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## **Women**

Good mental health is essential to the overall health of both men and women, but women experience some mental illnesses at higher rates than men. Depression and anxiety can happen at any time, but we know women are more likely to experience these conditions during pregnancy and the year following the birth of their baby.

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- ▶ *1 in 5 women in Australia will experience depression and 1 in 3 women will experience anxiety during their lifetime.*
  - ▶ *Depression affects up to 1 in 10 women while they are pregnant and almost 1 in 7 women during the first year after the birth.*
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## **Young People**

Depression and anxiety are among the most common mental illnesses experienced by young people.

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- ▶ *Around 1 in 4 Australians aged 16–24 experience a mental illness.*
  - ▶ *Over 80% of males and nearly 70% of females with these conditions (aged 16–24 years) do not access any services or get the professional help they need. Often, the symptoms aren't recognised or they are simply ignored as "just a part of growing up."*
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# REDUCING MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

There are high levels of stigma associated with depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses. The World Health Organisation defines stigma as “a mark of shame, disgrace or disapproval which results in an individual being rejected, discriminated against, and excluded from participating in a number of different areas of society.” A major factor contributing to stigma is the limited understanding many people have of mental illness. Stigma has a significant and negative impact on people, and is a barrier to people’s willingness to seek both professional and informal help.

Mental illness impacts a wide range of people in our community and it is important to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. This can be achieved through providing non-judgemental support to those in need and a willingness to communicate about mental illness.

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- ▶ *It’s important to remember that depression and anxiety are illnesses, not weaknesses, and effective treatments are available.*
  - ▶ *Taking action may not be as hard as you think.*
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# TODAY'S WORKPLACES

Workplaces play an important and increasingly significant part in our lives. We spend many hours in the company of colleagues and members of the public. Our experiences in workplaces grow and shape us as people, and they influence the ways in which we see ourselves and our relationships with others.

Under the increasing pressure of modern life we are spending more time in the workplace than any previous generation. Even though technology promised to give us greater leisure time, we are now more captive to technology and the need for immediacy in how we work. Financial pressure and uncertainty is mounting and it is now more common for households to be dual incomes, placing additional pressure on other responsibilities outside of the workplace.



# HOW CAN I HELP? WHAT CAN I DO?

There are a number of important things that you can do when it is clear there is something troubling a colleague. These include:

## RECOGNISE YOUR LIMITS

Ask yourself “am I willing to have this conversation with this person?”

You should decide what level of support and care you are realistically able to provide. Explain to your work colleague that you may only be able to provide a listening ear, but you will also be able to let them know about other types of support that are available.

## STOP

Stop what you are doing and give them your full attention. If you are busy and can't give them your time at that moment suggest an alternative time that is convenient for both of you. Make sure you keep it.

## LISTEN

Find a space where you will not be disturbed and you can give them your full attention. Resist the temptation to ask lots of questions or interrupt, let them tell their story at their own pace and in their own way. Ask questions later if you feel they are important, but take the time to listen carefully and properly.

## BODY LANGUAGE

Be aware of your body language. To show you are listening, face the person and give them your full attention.

## RESERVE JUDGEMENT

Listen without making judgements about what they are saying. Resist the temptation to jump in with solutions, however don't agree with them about something you are not comfortable with. In some instances you may have to provide them with a gentle 'reality check'.

## CLARIFY

Check that you have fully understood what they are saying and seek clarification on the things you aren't clear on.

## BREAK ISSUES DOWN

You can assist the person by helping them recognise where they can start to take action, by identifying the most immediate issues or ones that will provide some early relief.

## OFFER SUPPORT, NOT SOLUTIONS

It is not your job to solve their problems, but you may know of someone who has faced similar challenges, or resources they can access that can assist them.

## KEEP ISSUES SEPARATE

Keep the issue you are discussing separate from other issues in the workplace (unless their concern is a workplace issue) and resist the temptation to talk about your own concerns and troubles in response.

## FOLLOW UP

Let them know that you are available if they want to talk further. Finish the conversation by checking that they are clear about what has been spoken about and what is the next step for them.

# WHY ARE CONNECTIONS IN WORKPLACES IMPORTANT?

Spending more time in the workplace also means that our relationships at work feature more in our lives. Our colleagues often become part of an informal extended family just by being around us for such great proportions of time. Being together in the same space for longer, we learn more about our colleagues and we all play a greater part in each others' lives.

The greater the positive connections and relationships within a workplace, the healthier people feel. Strengthening and enhancing positive and supportive connections in the workplace are now viewed as vital in a balanced and healthy life, no matter your age or experience in the workforce. Workplaces are a complex series of networks and connections between people, often based on choice and preference, but in many cases forced through necessity. We generally seek out others in the workplace with whom we feel more comfortable and let them see more of our 'real' selves. Invariably our colleagues experience us at our strongest, and occasionally, at our most vulnerable.

# IS MY WORKMATE OK?

We can become very good at noticing changes in our colleagues and we can often be the first to notice that something is different. Our intuition that something 'is not right' with a workmate or that their way of acting or dealing with others has changed, is often accurate. At other times our colleagues reach out to us. They may seek our advice or simply share with us things that are changing or are different in their lives. Sometimes we are proactive, we notice that someone seems preoccupied or different and more than just taking a passing interest in their welfare, we can ask them how they really are and listen to what they have to say.

We know that a healthy workplace is one that enables and encourages people to take an active interest in the wellbeing of colleagues, regardless of the nature of their usual working relationships and organisational hierarchy. Actively taking an interest, without attempting to solve a colleague's problems, can make a critical difference for that person.



# WHEN A WORKMATE WANTS TO TALK...

Just listening to another person is an incredibly powerful means of assisting them. Being listened to can reduce the feeling of isolation we can carry around when we are troubled. Many times the simple act of telling a story brings about a change and a shift in a workmate, allowing them to see their concerns from a different perspective.

Listening to someone talk about their problems does not make those problems your responsibility; it just means you are showing you care. Even if it is someone you don't know very well, there are ways you can approach them that may open up a conversation and assist them in finding the professional help and support that they need.

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- ▶ *When you notice a workmate is troubled or preoccupied with something, it can sometimes be very challenging to start a conversation.*
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It's possible that the person you are concerned about might not feel like talking in the first place, in which case it is good to acknowledge that you understand, and you are available if they want to talk at a later date.

You could also offer to provide details for services they can contact if they wish to talk to someone else. Perhaps you could also recommend they talk to someone else, perhaps a friend, relative, or another colleague they know and trust and who might be able to offer further support.

# GET HELP EARLY

Don't ignore warning signs of mental illness in those around you. The sooner the person receives treatment, the better the outcome is likely to be. It will help if you:

- ▶ Reduce stigma of mental illness by talking in a non-judgemental manner.
- ▶ Encourage the person to see a general practitioner (GP) or other professional for an assessment.
- ▶ If the person you are speaking to needs a counsellor to talk to immediately, let them know available support services.

## REMEMBER

It is important to look after yourself while supporting your colleague. If you feel stressed or anxious after talking to your colleague, you too can seek help or support by contacting some of the professional services listed on the following pages:

# WHO CAN HELP?

## *Support 24/7*

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### **SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE**

 **1300 659 467**

Provides nationwide, professional telephone and online counselling for anyone affected by suicide including people concerned about a friend, family member or colleague, and can provide support in a crisis. The Suicide Call Back Service can provide up to six further telephone counselling sessions with the same counsellor, scheduled at times best suited to your needs.

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### **LIFELINE**

 **131 114**

Provides access to crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health support services.

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### **MENSLINE AUSTRALIA**

 **1300 789 978**

A national telephone and online support, information and referral service for men with family and relationship concerns. The service is available from anywhere in Australia and is staffed by professional counsellors, experienced in men's issues.

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### **BEYONDBLUE INFORMATION LINE**

 **1300 224 636**

beyondblue Information Line is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related disorders in Australia.

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### **POLICE/AMBULANCE/FIRE**

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In an emergency phone 000 immediately.

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### ***Community Agencies***

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- ▶ Local Community Health Centre
- ▶ Centrelink

### ***Individual Practitioners***

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- ▶ Local General Practitioner
- ▶ Psychologists  
*To find a psychologist in your area, please visit the Australian Psychological Society website: <http://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist/>*
- ▶ Social workers
- ▶ Counsellors
- ▶ Psychiatrists

### ***Employee Assistance Program (EAP)***

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Many workplaces offer an Employee Assistance Program to their employees to support their well-being in the workplace and in their personal lives. This is a free and confidential counselling service. Check with your workplace for details.

# SUPERFRIEND

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SuperFriend is a national mental health promotion foundation. The foundation helps profit to member superannuation funds to promote and support improved mental health and wellbeing for their members, through the workplace. Created by the Industry Funds Forum, SuperFriend collaborates with industry superfunds, group life insurers and the mental health sector to facilitate targeted workplace mental health initiatives for members of these funds. SuperFriend's work focuses on the development, promotion and facilitation of information, resources, programs and research about mental health, health and wellbeing. By improving the understanding of mental health and mental illness in individuals and workplaces, SuperFriend influences the policies and practices that foster mentally healthy, supportive work environments.

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