

Managing good mental health during change



“Why do I feel so... stressed?”

We all know that good mental health is important, but ‘why’ is often a question left unanswered. During times of significant change, it is normal to feel stress, anxiety, and even fear about what is ahead. Understanding why we feel this way and knowing how to best manage our mental health during these times are key.

Understanding mental health

‘Mental health’ and ‘mental-ill health’ are different.

When people talk about mental health, they are often referring to **mental illness, which is when functioning is impaired and is associated with feelings of distress**. Mental health, on the other hand, is a **state of wellbeing that allows people to thrive and cope with the challenges of everyday life**. It is as important to start talking about mental health and how to maintain it, as it is talking about mental illness.



THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM



How mentally healthy am I?

We all sit at different points on the mental health continuum, depending on what is going on in our lives. Throughout our lifetime we move along this continuum in response to the events we face, our thinking, our coping skills and supports.

Things that might reduce our mental health are:

- Poor sleep/fatigue
- Feeling uncertain about the future
- Workload (working too much or too little)
- Changes in routine
- Lacking social connection or support

The closer we are to the red, the harder it is to cope with everyday stressors. We cannot always control or change things that cause us stress, or move us further into the red of the continuum. But, by developing healthy habits and strategies, we can maintain and often improve our mental health and wellbeing.

“I know people who aren’t doing well. What can I do?”

It’s always important to check in with others, particularly prior to and during times of instability. Here are some practical steps you can follow to look out for those in your network.

NOTE: You’re not expected to provide ongoing care/clinical support. Formal supports are available (please see page 2).

1. Start the conversation

Normalise discussions about mental health and promote a safer space to talk. Reminding people that they can come to you for support invites them to reach out, and is a useful reminder that even though times can be tough, no one is ever alone. **Acknowledge** what is going on for them and **show empathy**.

“Hey, I know it’s a really tough time at the moment. If you ever want to have a chat I could make time.”

What to look out for...

The **warning** signs



Exaggerated emotions

Being snappy, teary or irritable



Reduced focus or attention

Difficulty paying attention or getting distracted



Changes in communication

Reduced contact or illogical text messages/emails



Catastrophic thinking

Assuming the worst “This will last forever”.



Avoidance or being distant

Not attending meetings or gatherings.



Any change in usual behaviour

Things that are out of the ordinary for extended time.

Australia Post support contacts

Workforce Assistance Program (WAP)

1300 687 327 / convergeinternational.com.au

Emergency contacts – 24 hours

Police and Ambulance: Dial 000

BeyondBlue: 1300 224 636 / beyondblue.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service:

1300 659 487 / suicidecallbackservice.org.au

2. Check in (more than once)

There is no ‘one size fits all’ to checking in, but it is useful to pay attention and listen to what they’re saying. Connect on an **authentic** level. Show **empathy** and genuine care for the people you are talking with. People may not disclose to you that they are having a difficult time right away, so checking in more than once can create opportunities for them to open up when they’re ready.

“You mentioned X last week, how is that going?”

3. Pay attention to the signs

We all have “bad days”, but how do we know when it is more than a “bad day”?

It can be helpful to be aware of some signs. If you notice any, check in and link them in with supports.

TIP: if you notice any signs, remember to link people in to supports. You are not expected to ‘fix’ anything.

4. Communicate

Communicating transparently and clearly during times of change is critical, especially if the changes affect your team. Keeping people informed will likely reduce worry, and maintain and enhance trust.

TIP: Don’t assume people share the same level of understanding about change as you do. If managing others, invite questions and collaborate as much as possible.

Prioritising You

It’s important to care for yourself. Sometimes that means prioritising you or reaching out for support. Here are a few self-guided tips:

Show yourself **compassion** – it’s a hard time and you are doing great! Pay attention to your body and give yourself some me-time when needed.

Talk to a loved one or colleague – sometimes, getting things off your chest can relieve some tension and worry. If you have limited time to touch base, over lunch time could be a good time to organise a casual call.

Do what is in your control to care for you – focus your energy on:

- Eating well
- Exercising
- Connecting with others
- Focusing on the present

