

M E N T A L H E A L T H & Y O U

We want Anchor to be a safe place for any of us struggling with mental illness, a community where we can all be real about our struggles, and find belonging, friendship, and support.

As a Gospel Community Leader, you play an incredibly important role in nurturing this authentic community, reducing stigma around mental illness, and creating space for open discussion and practical care.

As we approach our three-week series *Vous: Mental Health & You*, we’ve provided this short guide to help you address these issues within your Gospel Community and care for those who struggle with mental illness.

We pray God will empower you with wisdom and compassion from his Spirit to ‘encourage the faint-hearted’ (1 Thessalonians 5:14) in your community.

TIPS TO CARE FOR SOMEONE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

1. Listen Well

Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give to someone. It is an act of love, service, and humility. It is God-like, for God comes near to listen to our prayers.

Put aside distractions. Be present, and pay attention.

Show that you’re listening with appropriate eye contact and verbal/non-verbal gestures.

2. Ask Questions

Thank the person for disclosing their struggle to you.

Seek understanding by asking open-ended questions (can't be answered with 'Yes/No'), yet don't put pressure on them to tell you anything they're not ready to talk about.

Sometimes the best question is not a question: 'Tell me more about that...'

One of the worst questions you can ask is 'How can I help you? What can I do?' as this puts a burden on the sufferer to come up with ideas for how you can help them!

3. Empathise/Enter into their struggle

Listen for emotion, and acknowledge it. Even more, enter into their emotion with empathy: 'I'm sad that you're experiencing this'.

As the body of Christ, whenever one suffers, we all feel it (1 Corinthians 12:26). God calls us to 'grieve with those who grieve' (Romans 12:15).

One of the greatest gifts you can give someone is your presence. Sometimes, more than your words or prayers, someone suffering from mental illness, or any other affliction, simply needs your presence.

Brené Brown on Empathy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewvngu369Jw>

4. Remind them of God's promises

Mental health struggles involve a complex mix of biological, situational, and spiritual factors. We need a holistic response, including medical intervention or therapy when appropriate.

However, it is a mistake to preclude spirituality from a holistic response. As Christians, we believe in the 'renewal of the mind' (Romans 12:1) and that the steadfast character and promises of our good God are cause for hope.

Part of our role as shepherds of God's flock is to 'comfort the faint-hearted' by leading them to the Living Water that satisfies thirsty souls. We don't offer people good advice, we offer them the good news of Jesus in a way that connects with their real struggles—specifically how his life, death, and resurrection provide hope, healing, and comfort in the midst of our sin and suffering.

It takes wisdom to discern how to apply the timeless truths of God's Word to the particulars of someone's circumstances. Pray for God to give you the words to say.

Suggestions of Passages to Read

Lament: Psalms 13, 22, 42–3, 88

Sometimes people need to know it's ok to be depressed; indeed the Bible gives us words of lament to speak to God when we are down and out, and lamenting is an expression of trust in God.

God's Presence: Psalm 23, Jeremiah 1:8, John 16:33, Philippians 4:5b–7, Hebrews 13:5b–6a

God's Care: Matthew 6:25–34, Matthew 11:28–30, 1 Peter 5:7

God's Peace: Romans 15:13, Philippians 4:5b–7, 2 Thessalonians 3:16

God's Deliverance: John 16:33, Romans 8:19–23, 2 Corinthians 1:8–10, Revelation 21:3–4

5. Pray

Faced with the reality of mental illness, we know we need God's help. The good news is that we can draw near to God with confidence, not based on our own wellness—for we are all broken—but because Jesus has opened the way for us through his blood shed on the cross (Hebrews 10:19–22).

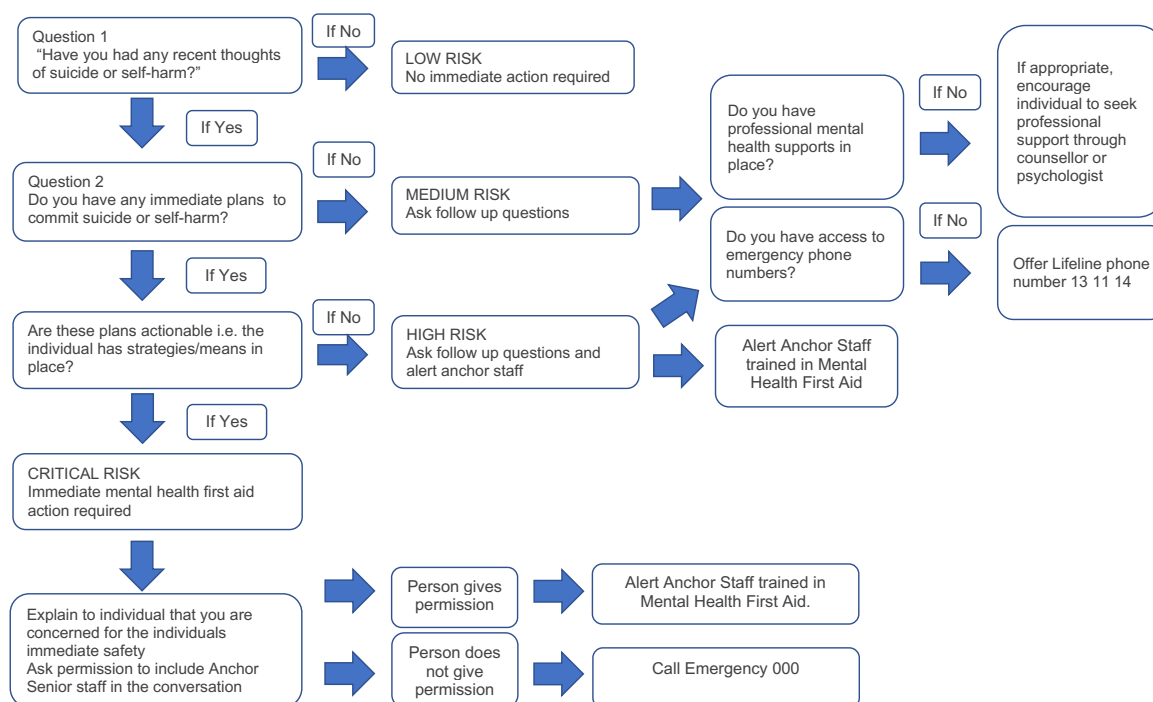
In praying with a friend struggling with mental health, you play a priestly role in bringing them before our compassionate and merciful God who loves to meet us in our darkest needs. You also express that we are dependent on God to bring a remedy—we cannot fix ourselves, but need hope, peace, and healing from him.

6. Refer

A holistic response requires that we address the real biological factors involved with mental illness. Encourage your friend to see their GP to assess their mental health.

If your GP finds you have mental health issues, they may write you a Mental Health Care Plan that entitles you to 10 Medicare rebates a year for individual or group appointments with some allied mental health services.

If you are concerned that the person is at risk of harm, follow Anchor's Process for At Risk Persons:



7. Check In

An important part of caring for someone struggling with mental health is ongoing friendship and support. Assure the person of your ongoing love and care. Take the initiative in contacting or meeting with them to listen to how they're doing—don't rely on them to be the one to reach out.

Be aware that mental health struggles can make it difficult for someone to make it to GC, social events, or a Sunday Gathering.

What Not to Do

- Do not Diagnose
- Do not Blame
- Do not Judge
- Do not Spiritualise
- Do not Avoid the person
- Do not say 'I know how you feel'
- Do not give trite responses: 'cheer up', 'snap out of it', etc.

HOW TO RUN A MENTAL HEALTH SESSION AT GC

1. Intro & Expectations

Normalise & reduce stigma around mental health

1-in-5 Australians will experience mental illness this year, and 45% will experience mental illness in their lifetime. If you haven't personally struggled with mental illness, then someone close to you has.

Create a Safe Space

We want this to be a safe environment for each of us to share what's really happening in our lives and support one another through it.

To facilitate that, we need to agree on a few group norms:

- listen attentively without interruption
- respect and honour each other's story and perspective without judgment
- respond with gratitude, compassion, and encouragement
- confidentiality: what is shared in the group, stays in the group

Lead vulnerably about your own mental health journey (if applicable)

Pray

Acknowledge God's presence. Ask for his peace.

2. Listen to God

Read a lament psalm (Psalm 13, or Psalms 42–43)

What emotions is the psalmist expressing? What circumstances might they be going through?

Who is God in all this?

What does this psalm tell us about the place of dark emotions in the life of faith?

What should we do with our dark emotions?

3. Listen to One Another

What has been your journey with mental health?

Remember: leave space for silence. It takes courage for people to share vulnerably.

Thank each person for entrusting their story to you. Express your love and presence with them in their struggle.

What have been helpful and unhelpful things people have done or said?

How can we care for you?

Pray for each person

4. The Journey to Hope

Read Philippians 4:5b-6

What promise does Paul's instruction rest on (v 5b)?

It doesn't often feel like the Lord is near when we're 'walking through the valley of the shadow of death'. How do we make sense of this promise when it doesn't feel true?

How does this reality re-frame our journey with mental health?

As we experience anxiety and other mental health struggles, what does Paul encourage us to do? And how does this help?

How can we find hope, joy, and peace in the darkness of our struggles with mental health?

Pray to close (you might like to use one of the written prayers listed below)

5. Point People to Resources

Distribute referral list of counsellors, psychologists, and helplines.

Books

Available to purchase on Sundays at the Connect Desk

- Zack Eswine. *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression*
- Timothy Lane. *Living Without Worry: How to Replace Anxiety with Peace*
- CCEF Mental Health Booklets
 - *Eating Disorders: The Quest for Thinness* by Ed Welch
 - *Breaking the Addictive Cycle* by David Powlinson
 - *Freedom from Addiction* by Ed Welch
 - *Bipolar Disorder* by Ed Welch
 - *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder* by Mike Emlet

- *Sexual Addiction* by David Powlinson
- *Overcoming Anxiety* by David Powlinson
- *Depression* by Ed Welch
- *Hope for the Depressed* by Ed Welch
- *Helping Your Anxious Child* by Julie Lowe
- *Suicide* by Jeffrey Black

Other Recommended Books

- John Mark Comer. *My Name is Hope: Anxiety, Depression, and Life After Melancholy*
- Dave Furman. *Kiss the Wave. Embracing God in Your Trials*
- J. Alasdair Groves; Winston T. Smith. *Untangling Emotions: God's Gift of Emotions*
- J. P. Moreland. *Finding Quiet: My Story of Overcoming Anxiety and the Practices that Brought Peace*
- Matthew S. Stanford. *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness*
- John Ting. *A Gentle Touch: Christians and Mental Illness*
- Ed Welch. *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*

Online Resources

'Depression & Anxiety: How Can Churches Help?' Talk by David Powlinson

<https://www.ccef.org/video/depression-anxiety-can-churches-help/>

'Hope in the Darkness of Mental Illness' by Glen Scrivener

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/hope-in-the-darkness-of-mental-illness/>

'The Role of Faith in Mental Health'. Talk by Glen Scrivener <https://vimeo.com/169097744>

Head to Health <https://headtohealth.gov.au>

Headspace Mindfulness App www.headspace.com

Mood Mission App <http://moodmission.com>

Smiling Mind App <https://www.smilingmind.com.au>

R U OK? www.ruok.org.au

Beyond Blue www.beyondblue.org.au

Written Prayers

A prayer for one distressed in mind¹

Almighty Father, in your love and wisdom you know the anxieties and fears of your children. Grant that N may be enabled to cast all *his* care on you, for you care for *him*. Give *him* quietness of mind, an unshaken trust in you, and guide *his* feet into the way of peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

¹ The following two prayers are from *A Prayer Book for Australia*.

A prayer for healing

Almighty God, giver of life and health, hear our prayers for N, that by your blessing on *him* and on those who minister to *him*, *he* may be restored to health of body and mind according to your will, and in the presence of your people give thanks to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

A liturgy for those who weep without knowing why²

There is so much lost in this world, O Lord, so much that aches and groans and shivers for want of redemption, so much that seems dislocated, upended, desecrated, unhinged—even in our own hearts.

Even in our own hearts we bear the mark of all that is broken.

What is best in this world has been bashed and battered and trodden down.

What was meant to be the substance has become the brittle shell,

haunted by the ghosts of a glory so long crumbled that only its rubble is remembered now.

Is it any wonder we should weep sometimes, without knowing why?

It might be anything. And then again, it might be everything.

For we feel this.

We who are your children feel this empty space

where some lost thing should have rested in its perfection,

and we pine for those nameless glories,

and we pine for all the wasted stories in our world,

and we pine for these present wounds.

We pine for our children and for their children too,

knowing each will have to prove how universal pain is also personal.

We pine for all children born into these days of desolation—whose regal robes were torn to tatters before they were even swaddled in them.

O Lord, how can we not weep, when waking each day in this veil of tears?

How can we not feel those pangs, when we, wounded by others,

so soon learn to wound as well, and in the end would even ourselves?

We grieve what we cannot heal and we grieve our half-belief,

having made uneasy peace with disillusion,

aligning ourselves with a self-protective lie

that would have us kill our best hopes just to keep our disappointments half-confined.

We feel ourselves wounded by what is wretched, foul, and fell,

but we are sometimes wounded by the beauty as well,

² Douglas Kaine McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy*.

for when it whispers, it whispers of the world that might have been our birthright,
now banished, now withdrawn, as unreachable to our wounded hearts
as ancient seas receding down some endless dark.

We weep, O Lord, for those things that, though nameless, are still lost.
We weep for the cost of our rebellions,
for the mocking and hollowing of holy things,
for the inward curve of our souls,
for the evidences of death outworked in every field and tree and blade of grass,
crept up in every creature, alert in every longing, infecting all fabrics of life.

We weep for the leers our daughters will endure,
as if to be made in reflection of your beauty were a fault for which they much pay.
We weep for our sons, sabotaged by profiteers
who seek to warp their dreams before they even come of age.
We weep for all the twisted alchemies of our times
that would turn what might have been gold into crowns of cheap tin
and then toss them into the refuse bins
as if love could ever be a castoff thing one might simply be done with.

We weep for the wretched expressions of all things
that were first built of goodness and glory but are now their own shadow twins.
We have wept so often.
And we will weep again.

And yet, there is somewhere in our tears a hope still kept.

We feel it in this darkness, like a tiny flame, when we are told

Jesus also wept.

You wept.

So moved by the pain of this crushed creation,
you, O Lord, heaved with the grief of it,
drinking the anguish like water and sweating it out of our skin like blood.

Is it possible that you—in your sadness over Lazarus,
in your grieving for Jerusalem, in your sorrow in the garden—
is it possible that you have sanctified our weeping too?

For the grief of God is no small thing,
and the weeping of God is not without effect.
The tears of Jesus preceded a resurrection of the dead.

O Spirit of God, is it then possible that our tears might also be a kind of intercession?

That we, your children, in our groaning with the sadness of creation,
could be joining in some burdened work of coming resurrection?
Is it possible that when we weep and don't know why,
it is because the curse has ranged so far, so wide?
That we weep at that which breaks your heart, because it has also broken ours—
sometimes so deeply that we cannot explain our weeping, even to ourselves?

If that is true, then let such weeping be received, O Lord, as an intercession newly forged of holy sorrow.

Then let our tears anoint these broken things,
and let our grief be as their consecration—
a preparation for their promised redemption,
our sorrow sealing them for that day
when you will take the ache of all creation,
and turn it inside-out, like the shedding of an old gardener's glove.

O Lord, if it please you, when your children weep and don't know why,
yet use our tears to baptize what you love. Amen.