



# Health and Safety

for congregations

*Psychosocial safety, helping those around us*

## Providing help

If you think someone might be experiencing distress or mental illness it can help to start a conversation. Conversations about mental health, whether public or private, can be difficult but gently raising concerns can be very protective. If you are talking with a staff member or a volunteer when discussing mental health, always offer the employee assistance program and remember not to overstep the boundaries of your role. Support and pastoral care can be part of the healing process however most of us are not trained to provide treatment. A link to the employee assistance program is found **here**. If it is an emergency call 000.

If the matter relates to an employment issue such as bullying and harassment, the Synod People and Culture team can also provide support. The Synod People and Culture team can be contacted via email: [People@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:People@nswact.uca.org.au).

## Starting a conversation

Take time to talk with a person who has let you know they are living with mental health issues. Listening itself can be healing.

- Remember to ask the person how they are, "Are you OK?" is an acceptable question
- Remember that up to 70 per cent of communication is nonverbal, so talk calmly, keep an open posture, respect personal space and be sensitive as to whether eye contact is helpful or not
- Always respect confidentiality and don't share conversations or even the fact that the person has mental health challenges unless they have given permission to do so
- Remember to share God's unconditional love for them when it is helpful
- Offer to pray with the person, but don't insist
- Encourage the person to sleep well, eat well and exercise if they can
- Ask what you can do to help, and offer practical support where appropriate
- Learn to identify individuals who need more than pastoral care, and refer them to appropriate mental health professionals
- Look after yourself and seek support if you need it
- If you suspect a person is at risk of suicide or self-harm, encourage them to seek help immediately. Lifeline can be contacted on 13 11 14. Any disclosures about suicidal feelings must be taken seriously
- Call the police, or the mental health crisis team if you are worried about their safety

## Who to see and when

### HEALTHY



**I want to change the way I think**

- Counsellor
- Psychologist (EAP)
- Psychotherapist

### REACTING



**I am showing signs of distress**

- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Psychotherapist
- Medical practitioner
- Social worker

### INJURED



**Life is complicated and I have multiple issues**

- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Psychotherapist
- Medical practitioner
- Social worker
- Psychiatrist

### ILL



**I have severe mental health illness**

- Psychologist
- Psychotherapist
- Medical practitioner
- Psychiatrist

A medical practitioner can often be the first place to access this support. They can also help develop a mental health plan where Medicare rebates are available.

