

# Helping Others

## 1. Active Engagement

Don't wait for an individual to approach you; individual men may be reluctant to seek out help or disclose vulnerability

## 2. Trust your guts

Often we get an unconscious sense that something is not right with a person; check out your unease with others before acting.

## 3. Look for indicators of changes in behaviour:

- Verbal – listen to language being used e.g. “I feel as though I can't go on”; “I have had enough”; “what's the point of all this”; “things are not good”, etc
- Non-verbal behaviours
  - > Stressful situations may be accompanied by the fight / flight response
  - > Fight – aggressive behaviour (language); fights / conflict triggered by seemingly small issues; disproportional response

to an issue; physical agitation in a particular situation; increased risk taking

- > Flight – physical withdrawal – isolates from friends / community / peers; silence – doesn't join in conversation; chooses to work alone than with others; absent from work; starts late / leave early; sickness; heavy drinking; party boy – doesn't want to be alone; increased work load (working late)
- > Kinesthetic manifestations of stress – shaking (hands / feet); fidgety;
- > Tears; incoherent thinking / speaking; unable to process information
- > Sleep – too much / too little; food – too much / too little; smoking increased; changes in normal routines

## 4. Supportive Skills

In reaching out to someone and engaging their trust, it is important to employ:

- Active listening – open and closed questions; reflection of feelings, summarising, etc
- Reflect Empathy – reflect feelings and meaning
- Demonstrate Genuineness / authenticity
- Reflect Informality
- Approaches that equalise the relationship (side by side approach) – particularly if there is an authority / power differential.

## 5. What Not To Do

- Interrogate or demand disclosure
- Judge or criticise – no matter what you hear
- Breach confidentiality (unless there is a clear risk of harm to self or others)
- Give advice or tell them what to do
- Become a counselor or therapist – know and set clear boundaries.



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## 6. Engagement

**a. Role clarity:** Understand and be clear about your role and the relationship between you and the individual. You are not a counselor or therapist.

**b. Timing the approach:** Choose an appropriate opportunity to raise concerns; a time when other are not around.

**c. Be concrete in your observations:** Be careful to avoid making personally interpretation / judgements about what might be happening. E.g. “John, I have noticed that you have not been joining activities like you used to, I am wonder if there is anything bothering you?”

**d. Acknowledge:** If person discloses or you become aware that something has happened in their life – acknowledge the likely emotional impact on them. “That is a significant event, you must be feeling ... distress, confusion, sadness, anger, etc”.

**e. Normalise:** Let them know that their response to

stressful situations is normal – often men think they are going crazy or behaviour and feelings are not right; or they are the only one who feels this way. A Mental Disorder is a diagnosable illness. One in five Australian adults will suffer from some form of common mental disorder in any year. Common mental disorders include depression and anxiety. Schizophrenia and bipolar disorders are less common.

**f. Be genuine:** You must be authentic in your concern and support – people will know when you are not real and you are just going through the motions

**g. Check your hunches:** Don't be afraid to ask the “Suicide” question; Naming and breaking the silence helps contain the situation;

**h. Resources and supports:** Check out what supports he might have access to such as family, friends, doctor, etc. This will provide you with information about isolation and whether the individual has

reached out to such supports in their life.

**i. Referrals:** In some cases professional support may be required. Again raise the question of referral within the context of acknowledging what is happening for them; it is important to normalise help seeking – it is not unmanly. Supported referrals are more successful. This might mean, for example, offering to assist the individual to link with services rather simply giving them a number to ring.

**j. Check-in:** Contract to follow-up with the person after the initial conversation; check-in that they were able to get to the referral you gave them.

This tip sheet was adapted from the work of Lilia Szarski BAMED (psych) Monash Reg Psych Vic./McIntosh J. Because it's for the kids – building a secure base after separation, Bambra Press, Melb./Family Court resources, [www.familycourt.gov.au](http://www.familycourt.gov.au)

The only service of its kind, Mensline Australia provides confidential telephone counselling, information and referral to specifically enable men to enhance their relationships and manage the challenges associated with disruptions to their family life or primary relationships.

Managed through Crisis Support Services Inc, Mensline Australia is a national service available 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the cost of a local call.

Mensline Australia was established in September 2001 as part of the Commonwealth Government's Men and Family Relationships initiative. Since then, the service has been overwhelmed by calls from men around the country wanting to talk about their relationships.

**1300 78 99 78**  
[www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)

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