



## **TO SUPPORT SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH**

### **1. Ask how they are feeling**

Often when people are experiencing difficulty, others know about it, but say nothing. This simple question communicates care.

### **2. Listen to what they say**

Put your phone away and put your focus completely upon the other person. Let them tell you how it is and use non-verbal cues to show you are fully present. Don't start talking about yourself, but try to reflect back what they are saying in different words to let them know you are tuned in.

Listening is an act of love because it focuses on the other. James commands us to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). When interacting with those struggling with mental health, listening can be a first step in moving forward.

### **3. Be a safe person for them**

It's okay to say, "Tell me more," but don't push them to share more than they want. Let them go at their own pace. It takes courage and trust for them to open up. Such trust is earned through gentleness and kindness.

### **4. Check that they are safe**

You do no harm by asking, "Are you thinking about taking your life?" Asking this question shows you care and will decrease their risk.

### **5. Seek professional help if needed**

Ask them if they have seen their GP. If they haven't, encourage them to do this and offer to help them. If you feel out of your depth, ask for help.

### **6. Ask if you can read God's word and pray**

They need hope. They need to be reminded that they have a God who is sovereign, all loving, all caring, all seeing and knowing and that He can hear their silent groans in that tunnel and is with them. Ask them if you can read a couple of verses from the bible with them – share something that has recently encouraged you as a start, or a few verses from Psalms, and then ask if you can pray. Focus on who God is and how much he loves them and what he has graciously done for them. They need God's word of comfort and consolation.

## **7. Encourage wise behaviour**

Good habits of exercise, diet and sleep promote wellbeing. Another good habit is thankfulness. Give them a nice blank book and suggest they think of three things every day they are thankful to God for and to write them down. They might find this hard to do, but over time, this will help them begin to notice the positives in their life. Encourage them to connect with others – at church or in their local community – and to do things they enjoy.

## **8. Follow them up**

Offer to meet up for a coffee or for a walk in a park to find out how they are getting along. It's easy for them to think that no one could be bothered to spend time with them.

## **9. Put appropriate boundaries in place**

Personal boundaries help define our identity. When we have a clear sense of our values, beliefs, abilities, needs, feelings, etc, we know who we are and are able to make choices that are helpful for us and for others.

Good boundaries enable us to love others better because rather than operating from our insecurities (such as a “need to be needed”) and blind spots we can consider what is truly in the best interests of the other. They are good for us; good for them.

Love is not the same as being nice. Love acts in the best interests of the other – will say ‘no’ when necessary.

Appropriate boundaries will involve thinking carefully about how often we respond to texts or meet up, or the type and amount of practical assistance we provide. It is not loving to enable selfish, irresponsible or overly dependent behaviour.

These are matters that require wisdom, which is worth praying for (James 1:5)!

## **10. Take care of yourself**

Caring for another carries a physical and emotional cost. You care for your own wellbeing not to be selfish, but to enable you to continue to love others.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

A very helpful book on mental health and the church:

Alan Thomas, *Tackling Mental Illness Together: A biblical and practical approach* (London: IVP, 2017)

An accessible overview of mental health conditions and the mental health system (not Christian):

Mark Cross & Catherine Hanrahan, *Changing Minds: The Go-To Guide to Mental Health for You, Family and Friends* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2016)

Other useful Christian books related to mental health concerns:

S. Carr, *Broken Pieces and the God Who Mends Them: Schizophrenia Through a Mother's Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019)

C. Cipollone, *Down, Not Out: Depression, Anxiety, and the Difference Jesus Makes* (The Good Book Company, 2018)

T. Clinton & J. Pingleton, *The Struggle is Real: How to Care for Mental and Relational Health Needs in the Church* (Bloomington, IL: Westbow, 2017)

M.R. Emler, *Descriptions and Prescriptions: A Biblical Perspective on Psychiatric Diagnoses and Medications* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017)

Z. Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for those who Suffer from Depression* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2014)

K. Greene-McCreight, *Darkness is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015)

T. Lane, *Living Without Worry: How to replace anxiety with peace* (The Good Book Company, 2015)

B.W. McRay, M.A. Yarhouse & R.E. Butman, *Modern Psychopathologies: A Comprehensive Christian Appraisal* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016)

A. Simpson, *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2013)

## ONLINE RESOURCES

Christian resources online:

[www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org](http://www.mentalhealthaccesspack.org)

[www.mindandsoulfoundation.org](http://www.mindandsoulfoundation.org)

[hope4mentalhealth.com](http://hope4mentalhealth.com)

The Mental Health & Pastoral Care Institute runs short courses related to mental health:

[mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/shortcourses](http://mentalhealthinstitute.org.au/shortcourses)

## EMERGENCY CONTACTS

**Lifeline** 13 11 14

Crisis support and suicide prevention service.

**Suicide Call Back Service** 1300 659 467

Phone and online service for those at risk of suicide, carers for someone who is suicidal and those bereaved by suicide.

**NSW Mental Health Line** 1800 011 511

24-hour telephone service that puts you in touch with your local mental health service, including the mental health crisis or acute care team if necessary.

## PRAYERS

**Below are a range of written prayers for those experiencing mental health difficulties:**

Our gracious God and loving heavenly Father, we know that our world is fallen and broken and that this has impacted every aspect of human life. Today we pray for those of us who experience challenges to our mental health. We thank you for the depth of your love for us in giving our Lord Jesus Christ so that we might be restored in relationship with you. We thank you that your love for us does not depend upon what we do or our feelings or the quality of our mental health. Thank you that even when our resources are spent, we rest secure in your loving hands. Please uphold and strengthen us. May our hearts and minds be guarded and kept by the strong and loving peace that is ours in Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have experienced the pain and loneliness of life in this fallen world, with all its disappointments and grief. Thank you that we may come confidently to your throne of grace, assured that your mercy and grace are available to us in our times of need. When it is hard to understand, help us to trust you; when we feel the pain of rejection, in your unchanging love draw near; when we are overtaken by doubts and fears, may we then prove your abiding presence. Prince of peace, give to us the peace of God to guard our hearts and minds through your risen power. Amen.

Sourced from David Short & David Searle, Pastoral Visitation: A Pocket Manual, p. 63

Eternal God, thank you that even before we bring our prayers to you, already you know all our needs. Thank you that even though nothing is hidden from you, nevertheless you encourage us to share with you all our concerns and lay them at your feet. Forgive us that at times our faith is weak. Strengthen our trust in your promises to provide for our needs. Teach us the contentment of resting in the certain knowledge that you do care for us with the fatherly compassion and wise love revealed to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Sourced from David Short & David Searle, Pastoral Visitation: A Pocket Manual, pp 50f.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful, freeing truth that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Thank you that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death. Help us, Lord, to remember and digest this truth. Please carve this truth into our very hearts, so that when our minds accuse us of our failings and we doubt that you are for us, we can find rest and peace for our souls, through the saving work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Adapted from Kathryn Greene-McCreight,**  
Darkness is My Only Companion, p. 49

Lord Jesus Christ, you are medicine for when I am sick;  
You are my strength when I need help;  
You are life itself when I fear death;  
You are the way when I long for heaven;  
You are light when all is dark;  
You are my food when I need nourishment.

**Ambrose of Milan (340-97)**  
Sourced from Kathryn Greene-McCreight,  
Darkness is My Only Companion, p. 63

Almighty God, have mercy upon us, who, when troubled in life, lose faith, and courage, and hope. So have mercy upon us, and uphold us, that we, being sustained by a true faith that you are merciful and forgiving, may go on walking faithfully in your ways, finding joy in your bounty, trusting in your mercy, and with the sure hope of eternal life. Grant to us all, whatever happens to us, to always remember that everything lies under your guidance, care and will. And with this knowledge of you and your goodness, even in the darkest of days may we have courage to go on, faith to endure, patience to persevere and hopefulness to hold out, even to the end. Amen.

**Adapted from George Dawson (1821 – 76)**  
Sourced from Kathryn Greene-McCreight, Darkness is My Only Companion, p. 42

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.