

# HELPING THE HELPERS, CARING FOR THE CARERS

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PSYCHOLOGICAL  
FIRST  
AID

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SAY

# LET'S TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

There has been a lot of talk about mental health in recent years. Previously unspoken, the subject, Previously unspoken, the subject, is now quite common. However, we still lack quality information. So let's start this conversation by saying that talking about mental health is for everyone and is not synonymous with mental illness.

**Good mental health involves everything that guarantees your well-being: good nutrition; adequate housing; basic sanitation, having work and income, education, culture, safety, access to health services, sports, leisure, and access to goods and services available at the community.**

Mental health care is something that involves all of us: people who need one-off care or undergo treatment, caregivers, family, friends, neighbours, educators, health professionals, etc. We must treat mental health care and promotion not as a one-way street flowing from health professionals to patients, but as a circle that keeps care moving in all directions.



**SELF  
CARE IS  
AN ACT  
OF LOVE**



# HOW IS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

## DO YOU FEEL WELL ENOUGH TO HELP OTHERS?

Before you help others, you must first help yourself. Take care of yourself before you take care of others. Always think of your own mental health first. Don't be neglectful of yourself. Your well-being is also involved when you are willing to help your community. Listen and observe yourself, acknowledge and welcome your feelings. Be attentive, careful and affectionate with yourself.

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## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?

Some continuous day-to-day attitudes can contribute to your physical and mental health:

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**Try to find balance between work and rest:** sleep and free time are essential for your well-being.

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**Drink plenty of water:** being hydrated is one of the pillars of good health.





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**Eat regularly** and, whenever possible, eat healthy. Your body needs nutrients to function well.

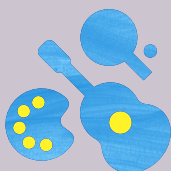
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**Exercise, especially outdoors**, endorphin and vitamin D are quite a combo!

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**Engage in activities that give you pleasure and help you relax:** watching a movie, playing with children, exercising your spirituality, reading, gardening or any hobby you like.

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**Stay connected to your support network:** stay in touch with your origins and traditions. The respect and appreciation you get from this network are important for self-esteem and sense of belonging. Talk about your problems and feelings with people you trust, such as friends and family.

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**Get to know yourself:** there are several ways to know yourself, such as artistic activities in general, therapies, meditation, among others. Sometimes a good book or a play can say more about ourselves than we could imagine. Understanding yourself is a conscious way of being prepared to take care of yourself.

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## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

### Your mental health also deserves attention

Sometimes, the table turns and you are the one who needs to be taken care of. Do not hesitate to seek help from your support network and, if necessary, professional mental health assistance.

# TAKING CARE OF MENTAL HEALTH IS NORMAL

Anyone's mental health can be affected by numerous factors: physical, social, cultural, environmental, etc. There is nothing wrong with seeking psychological or emotional help or treatment.

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- 1 Mental distress is not a figment of your imagination and is not a choice;
  - 2 People in mental distress are no less intelligent and capable;
  - 3 Mental distress is not laziness;
  - 4 Mental distress is not lack of faith;
  - 5 All cases can be treated and some of them can be cured;
  - 6 There are several ways to take care of mental distress;
  - 7 Everyone regardless of their spirituality, colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation or where and how they live needs to be welcomed without judgement.
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People often don't know what to do when they have to deal with their own or someone else's mental health crisis, how to help or get help.

For professionals working in the community, who are in direct contact with the population, especially with young people, it is not uncommon to encounter situations in which it is necessary to intervene to ensure the mental health and safety of residents.

Despite all the experience of working in the community, it's natural to feel insecure in this type of situation: keep calm! **With the information you'll find in this booklet and by using an appropriate way to communicate, you'll be able to help by offering Psychological First Aid (PFA) to young people and adults.**

A good conversation can foster acceptance and access to mental health care for those who need it.



# ANYBODY CAN HELP: YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL


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**PFA** is a human response to support people in situations of suffering and in need of mental health care. This approach works at that first moment when someone demonstrates that they need help because this person isn't well, before receiving professional care.

It's important to remember that you don't need, and shouldn't, give a diagnosis. Your greatest contribution is attentive, welcoming, and affectionate listening, as well as providing correct information and guidance.

**Outreach and affection are the first and best tools you have to help those in need of mental health care.**

When you are willing to support someone in this situation, you can talk about how they feel, present the treatment options available, and even help them access it. There are different ways to dialogue and connect with someone who is going through a crisis. Take a deep breath and let's go!



# EARS, EYES AND HEART

## AFFECTIONATE COMMUNICATION

### TIPS

Listen and observe carefully and respectfully, doing your best to maintain warm and affectionate communication. **Try to find your own way to communicate and connect with the other person. Chose an approach and a way of talking that works for you. There are no rules at this point, but some tips and information can help you in this mission.**

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Whenever possible, **talk to the person alone and in a private place.** It is important that they feel that the environment is appropriate and comfortable.

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2

**Respect their privacy and confidentiality.** Remember they trust you, but be honest and make it clear that, if necessary, you will seek the help of a professional;

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3

**Be patient and calm.** In crisis situations, staying calm is not always easy, but extremely important! Try to calm down first, and then move on;

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**Show them that you're listening.** It is important that the person feels heard. A simple nod of your head, or saying something like "I understand you" is enough;

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**Only give information you are sure of and be honest about what you are not.** No one knows everything, but we can consult other people or research and later on inform better;

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**Speak simply and concisely.** Stress can make it difficult to process information and it is common for a person in this situation to be confused. So, avoid technical terms and, if necessary, repeat or summarise what you are talking about, and deal with one subject at a time;

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**Show understanding and recognize their condition.** They need to feel that their suffering is valid. A simple "I'm sorry" or "I understand you" helps sometimes;

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**Recognize the efforts they have already made.** If possible, talk about how they have already helped themselves, it can make them feel potent;

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**When silences occur, do not be distressed.** Silence is also part of communication, just respect and feel the rhythm of the conversation, you'll know the right moment to talk;

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**Only touch the person if you feel it's appropriate.** If you think a hug or touch is important, try to see if there is space and intimacy for it. You can also ask if a touch would be welcome.

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## Questions like these can also be a good way to understand what is happening:

Have you been through this situation before?  
What did you do to face it or get out of it?

Do you know someone who also  
went through this?

What do you prefer to do when you're like this?

Do you have other people besides me who can  
help you?

### CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

Do you have other adults, besides me, to help  
you?



## During the conversation, avoid attitudes that could jeopardise the dialogue and make the person in need feel worse:

Pushing the person to speak;

Interrupting or rushing the person who's talking;

Referring to the other using words with negative  
connotations, such as crazy or lunatic;

Judging or blaming;

Telling your own or other people's stories;

Acting as if you could or should solve someone else's  
problems;

Telling the person to be strong, to "come out of this" or  
to be positive.



# WATCH OUT FOR THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS!

It is important to be aware of psychological and emotional signs (what you can hear and observe) and symptoms (what the person tells you). Be aware: some of them could mean risk factors.

## RED FLAG

At the first instance, it's important to understand if the situation involves an **emergency**. Some risk factors suggest the need for emergency care:

- Risk of aggression to oneself or another person at that moment;
- Planned or attempted suicide;
- Overdose of any substance (exaggerated use of substances that can lead to serious physical changes and an altered state of awareness).
- If they are victims of violence or neglect, with special attention to those who are at risk of harming themselves;
- If they suffer intense bullying, isolate themselves, and have a small support network or means to defend themselves.

### CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS



If one or more of these factors is identified, a RED FLAG is raised and you must act quickly, as it is important that this person is taken to an emergency service. In the event of an outbreak or crisis, the most appropriate thing to do is contacting a local Emergency Care Service. To do this, be aware of the limitations that the territory may impose on the service. You may be in an area that is difficult to access, for example. Talk to the health professionals who are assisting you remotely and explain the situation, together you will be able to find the best alternative to provide adequate care to the person who needs it.

**If the person does not show any of these risk factors, care may be less urgent, but it is still important to be aware of other warning signs and symptoms. Without proper outreach and treatment, they can get worse:**

- ⦿ Difficulty perceiving reality. Unusual thoughts, delusions, and hallucinations, such as hearing or seeing things that aren't there;
- ⦿ Alcohol and drug problems. Substance abuse episodes;
- ⦿ Less activities performed and/or lower performance at work or school;
- ⦿ Discouragement, general disinterest, indifference and little social interaction;
- ⦿ Insomnia or other sleep problems, causing a constant feeling of tiredness and low energy;
- ⦿ Self-neglect (appearance, personal hygiene, eating habits, etc.);
- ⦿ Extreme mood swings. Emotional outbursts, being unusually quiet or withdrawn;
- ⦿ Feeling very sad or depressed;
- ⦿ Constant worry or fear. Feelings of anxiety and anguish;
- ⦿ Confusion and disorientation;
- ⦿ Impulsiveness, excess energy, lack of patience and restlessness;
- ⦿ Difficulty concentrating;
- ⦿ Distancing from your support network, especially family and friends;
- ⦿ Feelings of guilt or worthlessness;

- Changes in eating habits, with changes in appetite;
- Suicidal thoughts or behaviour, self-harm or injury without suicidal intent, destructive or risky behaviour;
- Inability to carry out daily activities or dealing with daily problems and stress;
- Inability to perceive changes in their own feelings, behaviour or personality;
- Repetitive and intrusive bad thoughts (which “invade your mind”).

#### CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

- Complaints of learning difficulties, behaviour or late development (commonly observed by tutors or at school);
- Issues that suggest eating disorders: signs of intentional vomiting, extreme weight loss, symptoms of morbid obesity or binge eating.
- Aggressiveness. In children and adolescents it can be one of the signs of depression.



Also pay attention to **recent grief**. It is a natural process of life, a set of reactions and emotions caused by the loss of someone or something of emotional value, and it needs time to be elaborated and lived. Sorrow, sadness and longing are to be expected: professional follow-up can help the bereaved person to deal better with the loss and to go through this difficult time.

**People showing any of these signs can be referred to a mental health service, where a qualified professional will indicate the best treatment for them.**

# STARTING THE PROFESSIONAL CARE TRAJECTORY

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The sooner you seek professional support, the better, but if the person is resistant, try to understand why and make them feel good about seeking treatment. It is important that everyone, especially those who are going through a delicate mental health situation, either their own or of their loved ones, understand that receiving professional support and mental health treatment is not something for “crazy people”, but for those who are loved and cared for.

**Taking care of your own physical and mental health is for everyone and doesn't make you less strong or normal.**

Except in cases where the person puts themselves and others at risk, the choice about what to do with our own health is individual. You must respect the person's right to decide about their own health, whether or not they accept help. In case of children and adolescents, it is important that a family member, teacher or responsible adult is aware of the situation and assists in the decision.



**If the person is interested in getting help,** you can refer them to a care facility. If this occurs, explain what the next steps will be. If you feel comfortable and willing to, you can, from time to time, follow the development of the situation. You don't have to take responsibility for monitoring treatment, but rather show that you're around and that you care. A simple “hi, I thought of you, how are you?” can make the person feel more welcomed and supported during the process.

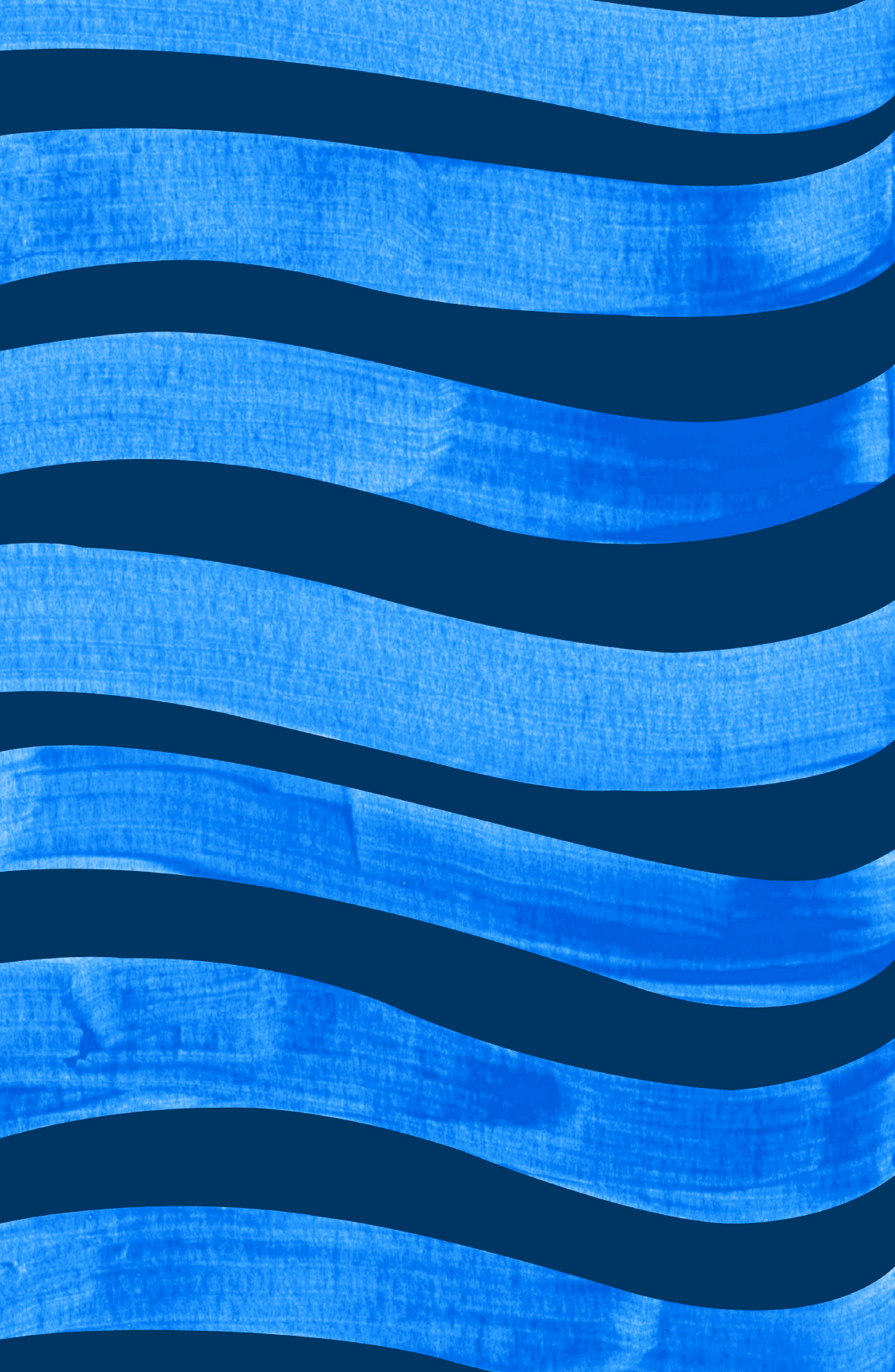


**If the person does NOT want treatment,** there is not much you can do, but you can still make yourself available, make your communication channels accessible to them (telephone, WhatsApp, social networks, etc.), in case they change their mind. The good old “I'm here if you need me” could be a way.



**LIVING  
IS A  
COLLECTIVE  
ACTION**









# NOBODY IS LEFT OUT!

**If we live in a community, it is together that we must take care of our health and that of others.** In addition to specific individual support actions (such as the PFA actions you learned here and self-care), you can also contribute to the mental health of your community by strengthening this debate and promoting the collective knowledge on the subject:

Learning about mental health and helping to raise awareness and inform others;

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Taking a stand against discrimination against people in mental suffering and seeking to promote equality, human rights and positive attitudes;

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Following and supporting mental health advocates and movements;

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Keeping an eye on your rights and how they are being treated by policies;

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Advocating access to health services of quality. This should be everyone's fight.

#KNOWLEDGE,  
#AFFECTIVE  
COMMUNICATION,  
#RESPECT FOR  
DIFFERENCES AND  
#LOVE!

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REMA  
MARÉ

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REALIZATION

redesmaré

SUPPORT



PARTNERSHIP



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
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**the power of love.**