

The Mental Health

First Aid Action Plan

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Before being able to give mental health first aid, first aiders need some basic knowledge about mental health problems so that they may be able to recognise that a mental illness may be developing. It is important that the first aider does not ignore the symptoms they have noticed or assume that they will just go away. If a first aider believes the person they care about is experiencing symptoms of mental illness, they should approach the person and see if there is anything they can do to assist them.

Having an action plan can help to do this more effectively. In any first aid course, participants learn an action plan for the best way to help someone who is injured or ill. The most common mnemonic used to remember the procedure for this is DRABC(D), which stands for Danger, Response, Airway, Breathing and Compressions (Defibrillation). The first aider will not always need to apply all actions as it will depend on the condition of the injured person. For example, once the first aider determines that the person is fully conscious, the subsequent actions of ABC(D) are not needed.

Similarly, the Mental Health First Aid Program provides an action plan on how to help a person in a mental health crisis or developing mental health problems. Its mnemonic is ALGEE (see below). Although the action of assisting with a crisis is the highest priority, the other actions in the Mental Health First

Aid Action Plan may need to occur first. Therefore these actions are not necessarily steps to be followed in a fixed order. They are numbered purely to help remember them. The helping person has to use good judgment about the order and the relevance of these actions and needs to be flexible and responsive to the person they are helping. Listening non-judgmentally is an action that occurs throughout the giving of first aid.

Mental Health First Aid Action Plan

1. **Approach the person, assess and assist with any crisis**
2. **Listen non-judgmentally**
3. **Give support and information**
4. **Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help**
5. **Encourage other supports**

Action 1 – Approach the person; assess and assist with any crisis

The initial task is to approach the person, look out for any crises and assist the person to deal with them. In a situation involving a person with a mental health problem, the possible crises are that:

- The person may harm

themselves (e.g. by attempting suicide, by using substances to become intoxicated, or by engaging in non-suicidal self-injury);

- The person experiences extreme distress (e.g. such as a panic attack, a traumatic event or a severe psychotic state);
- The person's behaviour is very disturbing to others (e.g. if they become aggressive, or lose touch with reality).

If the first aider has no concerns that the person is in crisis, they can ask the person about how they are feeling and how long they have been feeling that way and move on to ACTION 2.

Action 2 – Listen non-judgmentally

Listening to the person is a very important action. When listening, it is important to set aside any judgments made about the person or their situation, and avoid expressing those judgments. Most people who are experiencing distressing emotions and thoughts want to be listened to empathetically before being offered options and resources that may help them. When listening non-judgmentally, the first aider adopts certain attitudes and uses verbal and non-verbal listening skills that:

- Allow the listener to really hear and understand what is being said to them, and

- Make it easier for the other person to feel they can talk freely about their problems without being judged.

It is important to listen non-judgmentally at all times when providing mental health first aid.

Action 3 – Give support and information

Once a person with a mental health problem has felt listened to, it can be easier for the first aider to offer support and information. The support to offer at the time includes emotional support, such as empathising with how they feel and giving them the hope of recovery, and practical help with tasks that may seem overwhelming at the moment. Also, the first aider can ask the person if they would like some information about mental health problems.

Action 4 – Encourage the person to get appropriate professional help

The first aider can also tell a person about any options available to them for help and support. A person with mental health problems will generally have a better recovery with appropriate professional help. However, they may not know about the various options that are available to them, such as medication, counselling or psychological therapy, support for family members, assistance with vocational and educational goals, and assistance with income and accommodation.

Action 5 – Encourage other supports

Encourage the person to use self-help strategies and to seek the support of family, friends and others. Other people who

have experienced mental health problems can also provide valuable help in the person's recovery.

It is important to care for yourself

After providing mental health first aid to a person who is in distress, you may feel worn out, frustrated or even angry. You may also need to deal with the feelings and reactions you set aside during the encounter. It can be helpful to find

someone to talk to about what has happened. If you do this, though, you need to remember to respect the person's right to privacy; if you talk to someone, don't share the name of the person you helped, or any personal details which might make them identifiable to the person you choose to share with.

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