

Everyone experiences difficult times in their life. Sometimes these experiences don't go away and we struggle to solve them on our own. They impact on our work, our relationships with family and friends and our general sense of wellbeing. It is important to seek help during these difficult times as eventually they can have a serious impact on our physical, emotional and mental health.



Most men draw upon their strong determination and strength of character when dealing with difficult times. These strengths of being resilient, capable, reliable and coping under enormous stress can also be the same reasons men often don't seek mental health support, or general health care. This is especially apparent early in their experience of a crisis, highlighting a range of reasons why men tend to use indirect sources of help such as talking to a friend or mate. The general misconception that seeking more formal sources of help is a show of weakness reinforces the reasons why men often struggle to get personal support. This can be even more so for men in rural areas where communities are smaller and social networks are intertwined and privacy is reduced.

Conditions in rural Australia especially in times of drought also have a major impact on men's mental health. Rural men in particular struggle to acknowledge that they are experiencing problems and/or distress and resist seeking help, choosing often to 'suffer in silence'.

## Why it is important to seek help

Good mental health is a vital part of overall good health and wellbeing. It is just as important to maintain good mental health as it is to maintain good physical health.

The term 'mental health' usually implies the capacity to love and relate to others, and the willingness to behave in a way that brings personal satisfaction without encroaching upon

the rights of others—to be well adapted and emotionally well adjusted.

Mental health problems can be varied in terms of nature and severity. In many instances it just represents a difficulty coping with day to day issues. This is often caused by a combination of life events leading to a higher level of stress. Getting help can put things into perspective and provide you with information, strategies and support to better deal with issues, however sometimes **it takes courage to ask for help and deal with issues.**

## How do I know if I need help?

It is important to get help when levels of personal distress start to affect your health, when stressful experiences or situations first become apparent, before things get worse and appear too hard to manage.

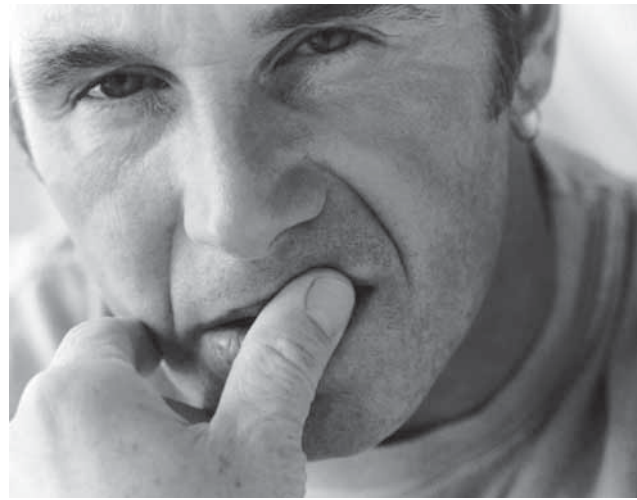
Some **common** examples of difficult times may include:

- Family and relationship challenges (particularly separation or divorce)
- Work pressures, a sense of work related frustration, letdown or job loss
- Financial loss, insecurity and or uncertainty
- Sexual orientation issues
- Changes in physical health or general illness of you or someone close to you

All of these (or a combination) can lead to mental health problems.

Common signs that can suggest your mental health is suffering include:

- Increased use of drugs and or alcohol or an increase in gambling activities
- Feeling tired and restless
- Experiencing headaches, muscle tightness and weight gain or loss.
- Increased nervousness or agitation and feeling out of control



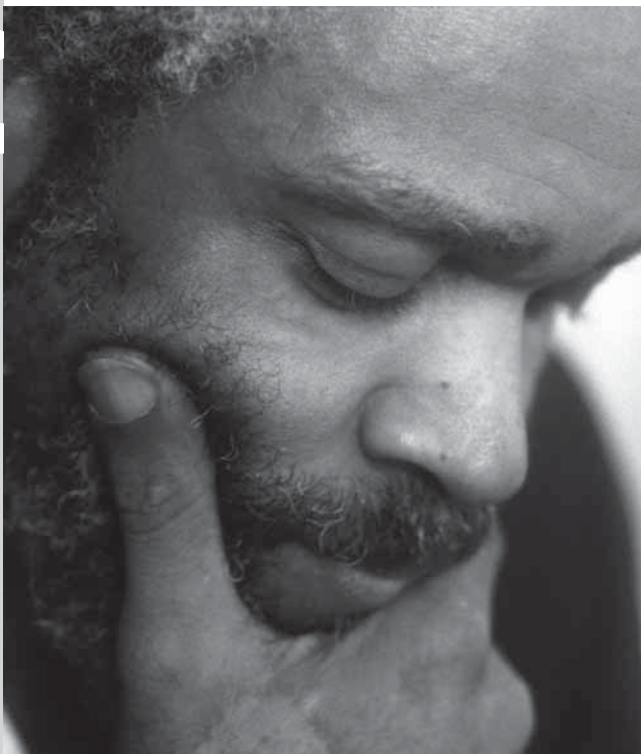
- Feeling depressed and having difficulty concentrating, or feeling worthless,
- Losing interest in activities that you usually enjoy and lacking energy
- Feeling isolated, withdrawing from others and becoming increasingly distant
- Mood shifts and angry outbursts
- Your normal coping skills don't seem to be working

**Not** seeking help could lead to:

- The situation becoming worse and if left unresolved, symptoms not only continue, but may worsen over time and could lead to depression and anxiety
- Prolonged drug and or alcohol abuse which can severely impair a person's ability to make healthy choices and decisions
- Increased suffering as the mental health problem could start to affect other aspects of your life such as relationships and work
- A decline in physical health and the possibility of developing illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, ulcers and sleep disorders
- A greater risk of developing feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and suicidal thoughts

Seeking help could therefore stop a mental health problem interfering with a person's quality of life.

It can be daunting for men to focus on emotions. Thinking and talking about feelings is not something men usually do comfortably. Sometimes it is difficult to be sure what feelings or emotions are being experienced.



# Dispel the myths

## 1 You can talk about mental health

When experiencing difficult times, problems or distress, we often don't acknowledge that this has an impact on our mental health. This can be due to a lack of understanding about mental health.

- It is important to acknowledge that anyone can experience mental health problems.

## 2 Community awareness of mental health problems

Society can stigmatise and negatively judge people with mental health problems and this may deter men experiencing common life difficulties from seeking help.

- Our community is changing to a more positive understanding of mental health and not everyone is quick to judge those experiencing difficulties.

**Don't let stigma win.**

## 3 You don't have to handle this on your own

For some people, admitting they need help is difficult. Personal beliefs may prevent them from seeking the help they need.

- Asking for help requires strength and courage.

**Challenge unhelpful and inaccurate beliefs.**

## 4 Deal with it now

We all have the desire to avoid a difficult situation.

- Dealing with the problem can be difficult; not dealing with it can make it worse.

**Face it head on.**

## 5 Real men do need help

It can be difficult for men to admit they need help and search for support.

Australian norms traditionally imply men should be:

- tough
- strong
- self-reliant
- in control of their emotions or not show emotions
- successful
- powerful

This is especially so for men in rural areas as they often feel that everyone around them relies on them and expects them to cope in the face of hardship.

- Challenging these gender roles can be hard as they have been reinforced throughout our lives.

**Asking for help can be difficult, but it doesn't make you less of a man.**

## 6 Men do cry

It can be daunting for men to focus on emotions. Thinking and talking about feelings is not something men usually do comfortably. Sometimes it is difficult to be sure what feelings or emotions are being experienced. There may be a confusing mix of emotions or it is hard to find the words to describe them. This can make the idea of seeking help confronting and something that is thought of as *all too hard*. Seeking help usually makes it easier to understand what is happening.

- Crying is a healthy response, not an emotional meltdown. It is not something to apologise for and not something to be demeaned.

**Challenge yourself and break out of your comfort zone. It's okay to show your feelings.**

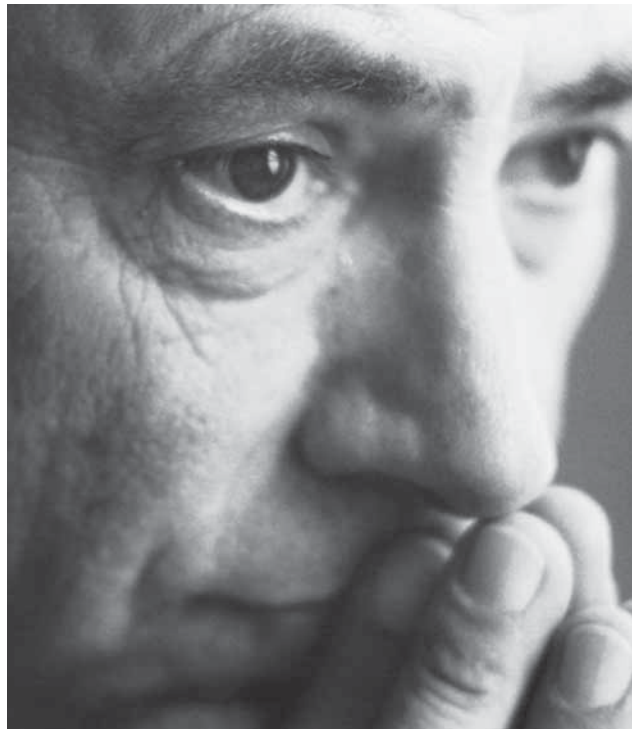


## 7 The mark of a man is that he knows how to stand on his own two feet and he can lean on a mate when times are tough

- Talking to a good friend can reduce your sense of isolation and aloneness. You may be surprised that he has experienced similar feelings but not had the courage to talk about it.

### Talk to a mate

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## How to get help

### Who can you go to for help?

A number of professionals are trained to help people at times of crisis and with mental health issues. Each has an area of expertise so you will need to determine which person is a best fit for you. In many cases there is a low fee for services since most mental health services can be covered through Medicare, or they may even be free.

### General Practitioners

A local doctor is often the first point of contact for men seeking help during difficult times. For people in rural communities, the GP may be the only person available as specialist services are limited. You can expect GPs to look for any physical causes of a mental health issue, provide medication and make referrals to other health professionals. You can find a GP in your local phone book.

### Psychologists

A psychologist can provide a range of support that doesn't involve the use of medications for people dealing with emotional and mental health problems. You can talk through personal issues in a safe supportive and confidential environment.

To find a psychologist ask your GP for a referral, contact your local community health centre or call the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 for a private referral. You will need a GP referral to be able to claim your visit on Medicare.

### Psychiatrists

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor specialising in mental health. You can expect a psychiatrist to make medical and psychological assessments and, if necessary, prescribe medication.

A referral from your GP is needed to see a psychiatrist and is no different than visits to other specialist doctors.

### Community Health Workers

Your local community health centre usually has social workers, occupational therapists and mental health nurses who can help with a wide range of issues.

You can find your local community health centre listed in your local phone book and they are usually listed under '*Community Health Centre*'.

### Helplines

Telephone counsellors are available, often 24 hours a day, where you can anonymously and confidentially talk about issues, or seek information about services and support.

You can find Helplines listed in the front of your local phone book and they are usually listed under '*Health & Help*' or '*Community Help*' or see the list below under **Useful Resources**.

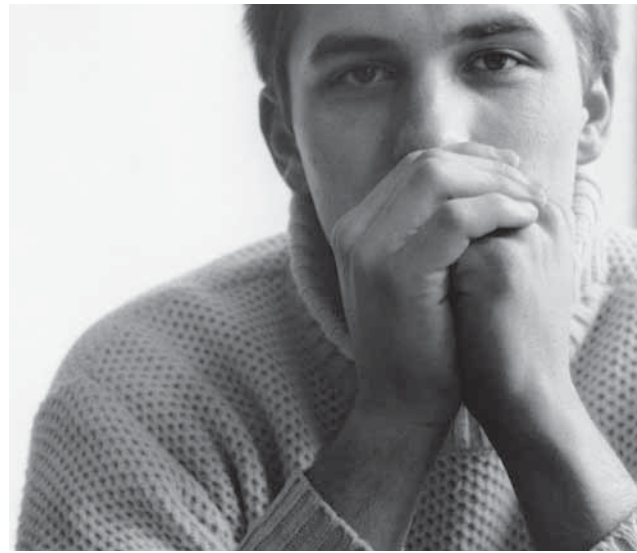


## Some useful tips

It takes courage to ask for help. Sharing personal problems with someone you are unfamiliar with can be uncomfortable and difficult.

- **Get help early.** As with a physical illness, the earlier you seek help, the easier you will feel. Be aware of the first signs of a problem and take action.
- **Be prepared.** Write down your thoughts, feelings and questions to make it easier for you to be open and communicate with your GP or mental health worker.
- **Be willing** to provide your mental health worker with the details of your situation.
- **Find the right treatment.** There are many different mental health treatments and support options available that have been proven to be effective. You will need to work with your mental health worker to find the one that is right for you.
- **Find the right professional.** In order for treatment or support to work, you need to find a professional you feel comfortable with. It's okay to change treatment professionals until you find someone you trust to help you manage your health.
- **Think about the options that best suit you.** There are a range of options to suit all circumstances; some offer low or no cost services; as well as Medicare rebated services and private services.
- **Be patient.** Recovery can take time. It is important to follow your individual treatment/support program and talk to your mental health worker about what is or isn't working.

**Value your health, you are worth it.**



## How you can help someone going through a difficult time

It can be difficult to watch someone you care about going through a hard time. They may be more comfortable talking to you, a trusted friend, a mate before they talk to their family or a professional. You are not expected to have all the answers but there are some things you can do to begin to help.

- **Approach** your friend and reassure them they don't have to go through this alone.
- **Listen** to your friend's problem. Often, our instinct is to focus on finding a solution to the problem, but this may not be helpful. It is more important for you to listen and allow your friend to express what they are thinking and feeling and how they are coping.
- Know that you have the ability to **influence** your friend to get help.
- Inform your friend that **help is available**.
- Encourage your friend to **get help early** before things get worse.
- Be **positive** about how seeking **support** can help.

## Useful Resources

**Mensline Australia:** 24 hours a day, confidential, anonymous telephone support, information and referral for men with family and relationship problems, especially around family breakdown or separation.

1300 789 978 or [www.menslineaus.com.au](http://www.menslineaus.com.au)

[www.mensheds.com.au](http://www.mensheds.com.au)

[menshealth.uws.edu.au](http://menshealth.uws.edu.au)

[www.dadsindistress.asn.au](http://www.dadsindistress.asn.au)

**Lifeline:** 24 hours a day confidential, anonymous telephone counselling and referral to other counselling options in your area.

13 11 14 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

## Useful Resources (continued)

**Lifeline Service Finder:** Lists details of services and service providers around the country. You can search the database using keywords for the type of service and location required. Alternatively you can direct your search by typing in your postcode.

[www.lifeline.org.au/find\\_help/service\\_finder](http://www.lifeline.org.au/find_help/service_finder)

**Beyondblue info line:** Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders.

1300 22 4636 or [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**SANE Australia helpline:** Information and referral, and free info pack available for support for people affected by mental illness.

1800 18 SANE or [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

**Relationships Australia:** Services to help strengthen and build relationships or resolve relationship breakdown issues.

1300 36 42 77 or [www.relationships.com.au](http://www.relationships.com.au)

**GLWA:** provide a peer-based telephone counselling, referral and information service to ALL people dealing with sexuality and/or gender issues and people impacted upon by those dealing with issues arising from sexuality and/or gender.

1800 18 45 27 or [www.glwa.org.au](http://www.glwa.org.au)

**Counselling Online:** This service is free for anyone seeking help with their own drug use or the drug use of a family member, relative or friend.

[www.counsellingonline.org.au](http://www.counsellingonline.org.au)

**G Line:** Telephone counselling, crisis intervention and referral for problem gambling.

1800 63 36 35

**Kids Help Line:** Kids Help Line is Australia's only free 24 hour, confidential and anonymous, telephone and online counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.

1800 55 18 00 or [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

**PACFA:** The PACFA Register is designed to provide a comprehensive list of Psychotherapists and Counsellors for the Australian community.

03 9468 3077 or [www.pacfa.org.au](http://www.pacfa.org.au)

**Australian Psychological Society:** Search for a psychologist in your area with access to psychologists Australia wide, who are in private practice and provide services for a fee.

1800 333 497 or [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

**Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry – Rural Financial Counselling:** Free, impartial and confidential financial counselling to help farmers, fishers and agriculture-dependant small business in their decision making and improve access to services.

1800 68 61 75 or [www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought/assistance/rfcs](http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought/assistance/rfcs)

**Australian Government Regional Information Service:** Information on the full range of programs and services

1800 02 62 22 or [www.regionalaustralia.gov.au](http://www.regionalaustralia.gov.au)

**National Relay Service:** A phone solution for people who are deaf or who have a hearing or speech impairment.

Voice 1800 55 56 60 or TTY 1800 55 56 90 or [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au)



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We invite your feedback and comments at [infoservice@lifeline.org.au](mailto:infoservice@lifeline.org.au)



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