

# Mental ill health - understanding the signs



Understand what to look out for and how to get help

Major mental illnesses rarely appear out of the blue. There are often small changes or feelings that “something is not quite right” about peoples thinking, feelings or behaviours. It is important that we understand what to look for and what to do.

At this time of social distancing we need to be even more mindful of understanding the symptoms of mental ill health so that we can support each other and stay connected as

best we can. With such a substantial change in our lives, it is likely many of us will have some fear and anxiety – this is normal. When it starts to impact our life, we need to ensure we take action. With social isolation, it is harder for others to see some of these signs and therefore it is critical to stay in contact via voice, and where possible video, as well as looking for these signs in yourself.

## The critical steps are:

- 1 Don't be shy to **ask** colleagues, friends and family how they are going mentally – and listen
- 2 Don't be afraid to **share** your own feelings on how you are going mentally if asked
- 3 Do **reach out** to others if you are concerned about yourself to people you know and trust

**36%** of Australians believe that all the uncertainty regarding the Coronavirus Disease is damaging my mental health.<sup>1</sup>

**33%** of Australians feel very isolated from the world due to being in quarantine as a result of the Coronavirus Disease.<sup>1</sup>

**22%** of Australians are doing very poorly / poorly with regards to their sleep.<sup>1</sup>

Around **3 in 10** have sought help due to feeling mentally unhealthy as a direct result of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup>

## Looking out for others

One or two of these things can't predict a mental illness but may be prompts to stay in closer contact and ask more questions. If you are concerned be open, honest and try to get them to seek help.



### Things you can hear

When on a call with a colleague, friend or family – listen carefully for any changes to normal like:

1. **Emotional outbursts** – rapid or dramatic changes in emotions or unusual anger or laughter.
2. **Quiet or withdrawn** – when communicating you sense a drop in their interaction or a loss of interest in something you know that would normally engage them.
3. **Problems thinking** – noticing a loss of concentration, illogical speech or they are finding it hard to explain things.
4. **Apathy** – failure to participate in calls or cancelling continually.
5. **Illogical thinking** – unusual or exaggerated beliefs about what is happening and unrealistic thoughts.
6. **Nervousness** – suspiciousness, changed voice, flat or monotone speech.



### Things you can ask

It is critical that we ask questions about peoples wellbeing even when we think that they are well as sometimes it is what you can't see or hear that is having a greater impact. So try asking:

1. **How is your sleep?** – sleep is critical for our health and a lack of sleep or poor sleep patterns could be a sign of mental ill health.
2. **How is your appetite?** – large changes in appetite either up or down can be a sign that something is not quite right.
3. **Are you drinking more?** – If you have concerns, and feel there are a number of signs, you shouldn't be afraid to ask this one. Share your thoughts and support and listen.
4. **How is your mental health?** – some people just need to be asked. In the current circumstances, we should not be afraid to ask if someone is ok and even ask if they are feeling anxious or depressed. We need to remove the stigma and share our feelings.
5. **Can I help you?** – sometimes people will share that they want your help or need your help.



### Things you can see

Try to connect with friends, colleagues and family via a video platform so you can see them and look for:

1. **Unusual behaviours** – more fidgeting than usual, not looking at you, continual hand movements that are different to normal. Look for things that are uncharacteristic.
2. **Change in appearance** – rapid weight gain or weight loss. Unusual reduction in self grooming.
3. **Drop in functioning** – An unusual drop in work performance, output, engagement in things that are of interest.

## Where to get help if you think you or someone else needs it?

If you, or someone you know needs help and are not coping, here are some links and numbers to contact. Reaching out is winning, it should not be considered defeat:

- **SANE Australia** (people living with a mental illness)  
Phone: 1800 18 7263
- **Beyond Blue** (anyone feeling depressed or anxious)  
Phone: 1300 22 4636 or chat online
- **Black Dog Institute** (people affected by mood disorders)  
Online help
- **Lifeline** (anyone having a personal crisis)  
Phone: 13 11 14 or chat online
- **Suicide Call Back Service** (anyone thinking about suicide)  
Phone: 1300 659 467

**REMEMBER: Listen, Look and Ask.**

**IF YOU THINK THAT THERE IS AN IMMEDIATE RISK OF SELF HARM CALL (000)**

360Health provides solutions to help prevent and manage serious illnesses at every stage of your health journey so that you can live healthier for longer. MetLife 360Health, your health partner.

1. MetLife's COVID-19 Insights research, April 2020

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