

# What Can I Do?

## > Supporting A Young Person With A Mental Illness

There are many ways to help a young person experiencing a mental health problem. Although a young person may have a case manager at ORYGEN, there are many reasons why other professionals remain involved in their care, one of them being the expertise they bring in a particular area eg. employment. This involvement requires the development of partnerships among professionals to develop clarity between roles, responsibilities and expectations. This can be achieved and maintained via phone calls, email and/or face to face meetings.

Case Managers will endeavour to undertake this task but other workers are encouraged to contact the Case Manager if they have not been contacted. Seeking consent from the young person to share information between workers is an important part of this process. Another benefit of developing these working relationships is to ensure that everyone is working consistently in response to the young person's behaviour and difficulties.

Young people often talk about what they found helpful to them when they were recovering from their illness. One aspect that stands out is how other people responded to them. Here are a few things to keep in mind when supporting a young person with a mental illness.

- > Try to understand the nature of the illness, how it affects the young person and what treatment they are receiving. Speaking with the Case Manager is one way of doing this.
- > Often young people who are ill can experience considerable distress and fear. Ensure they have a supportive and comforting environment to help them manage these emotions.
- > Remain hopeful that the person will recover but understand that it might take some time.
- > Often young people benefit from being engaged in activity. This enables them to feel a

sense of accomplishment and pleasure, and may also distract them from their difficult thoughts and feelings.

- > Continue to be clear about the limits and boundaries of your own role.
- > If the young person acts aggressively, ensure the safety of yourself and others and call police if required.
- > If a young person speaks about suicide it is important to take it seriously and assess the situation further. Important questions to ask would be how often they think about ending their life, what they plan to do, and what things can be done to help keep them safe. If you are unsure of how to assess the level of risk, or you feel that extra support is needed to keep the young person safe, contact your supervisor or local mental health service to consult. Remember, your duty of care is to act on any concerns you may have about a young person's risk and ensure adequate supports are put in place. Duty of care overrides any confidentiality agreements made with the young person.

NB: Often working with young people with complex difficulties has an emotional impact on the workers involved. Processes such as supervision, debriefing and team discussions can be of great benefit in offering support to workers who work with young people with mental health issues.

## RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

People with mental illness have a right to expert and professional health care. Other rights include:

- > To be treated with dignity and respect, and to be free from any form of harassment (physical, sexual or emotional);
- > To be provided with information about mental health issues, treatment options and availability of appropriate services;
- > To participate, as far as possible, in decisions about the kind of care and support that is provided;
- > To have family, friends or advocates provide support;
- > To have an interpreter, if needed;
- > To have their privacy and confidentiality respected.

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People with mental illness also have responsibilities. These include:

- > Cooperating, as far as possible, with the staff who are providing care. This includes providing accurate information about topics such as the symptoms of the illness, social situation, drug or alcohol use, and issues relating to safety of themselves or others.
- > To respect the safety, privacy and dignity of other people, whether staff, other clients, other families and friends.

## CONFIDENTIALITY & MEDICAL RECORDS

When young people are accepted into ORYGEN, they are formally registered as clients and medical records are kept. Records can be accessed by all programs of ORYGEN. The law requires staff to maintain records about each visit. Similarly, the law controls the way that records can be accessed. Clients are allowed to see their own medical records if they make an application in writing to the Medical Records Manager.

In general, staff are not allowed to give information to parents, family members or other workers without the permission of the client. This can cause some difficulties within the family or when other workers are involved, and sometimes requires careful negotiation.

Protecting each person's privacy is very important, but there are some situations where it will not be possible. Mental health workers have a duty to protect people's safety. This means it may be essential to share information if someone is at risk of harming themselves or others. Also, mental health workers might have to share information if they are required to give evidence in court.

## THE MENTAL HEALTH ACT

When a mental illness causes a person to act in a way that is dangerous to themselves or others, Victorian law allows for treatment against their will, but under a strict set of rules. The law is designed to protect people, not to punish them.

'Involuntary' treatment might require admission to hospital and the use of appropriate medications. Often the period of involuntary treatment is only a few days. Community Treatment Orders (CTOs) require people to continue treatment after they leave hospital and are living back at home.

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Staff at ORYGEN are able to provide information on the powers of the Mental Health Act, and the way it is used. The rights of clients are very clearly defined in the Act, and independent authorities that have not been involved in the decision or the subsequent treatment routinely review decisions about involuntary treatment. For further information please refer to [www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/patientrights/index.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/patientrights/index.htm).

## > Useful Websites

**[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)** Beyondblue is an Australian site dedicated to providing information and resources on depression.

**[www.ybblue.com.au](http://www.ybblue.com.au)** Ybblue is a community awareness campaign designed to reduce the stigma associated with depression and to promote help seeking behaviour in young people aged 17 to 25.

**[www.depressionet.com.au](http://www.depressionet.com.au)** depressioNet provides a comprehensive online resource for Australians living with depression and their families and friends to come for information, help & support. The dNet team are Australians from a variety of backgrounds who have personal experiences with depression.

**<http://bluepages.anu.edu.au/>** BluePages provides information about the symptoms of depression and how depression is diagnosed: which medical, psychological and alternative treatments work for depression and which don't; people, organisations, books, web sites and other resources that may be helpful if you are depressed.

**[www.eppic.org.au](http://www.eppic.org.au)** The EPPIC website has information about a number of topics including: early psychosis; getting help; services provided by EPPIC; and research that is being conducted at EPPIC. Different parts of this site cater for different audiences, such as mental health professionals, people who know someone who might be experiencing psychosis, people who are experiencing or recovering from psychosis and the general public.

**[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)** SANE is an independent national organisation committed to improving the wellbeing of Australians seriously affected by mental illness. This site offers a wide range of information for carers, family and friends about mental illness.

**[www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe](http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe)** The Mental Health Branch of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services aims to improve mental health outcomes in Australia by providing a national policy approach to mental health. Click on publications & resources for good quality mental health information for young people and parents.

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**[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)** The betterhealth channel provides information on a multitude of health related topics including mental health.

**[www.getontop.org](http://www.getontop.org)**

**[www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)** The healthinsite provides a wide range of up-to-date and quality assessed information on important health topics such as mental health.

**<http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/>** MoodGYM is an Internet-based therapy program designed to prevent depression in young people. It consists of five modules, a workbook and some interactive extras, including an interactive game. It includes assessments of anxiety and depression, 'warp' thinking, life-event stress, parental relationships, and pleasant event scheduling. Although it is intended for young people, people who are older may also find it helpful.

**[www.kidshelponline.com.au](http://www.kidshelponline.com.au)** Kidshelponline provides access to web-counselling, an email a counsellor service and fact sheets and resources. It is designed for 5 - 18 year olds.

**[www.headroom.net.au/](http://www.headroom.net.au/)** Headroom aims to inform young people, their caregivers and service providers about positive mental health.

**[www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au)** Reach Out is a comprehensive and interactive internet site for young people. There is information about the types of people you can talk to about your problems and how to get in touch with services in your local area throughout Australia. There's even a place where you can 'scream' your thoughts away into cyberspace!

**[www.somazone.com.au](http://www.somazone.com.au)** Somazone is an interactive Internet site for young people that focuses on general health and wellbeing. It includes personal stories, a question and answer section, and where to find a wide range of support services in your area.

**[www.itsallright.org](http://www.itsallright.org)** A site for young people who have a friend or family member affected by mental illness. Itsallright is a website where you can read the diaries of four fictional teenagers touched by mental illness. It also has useful factsheets and provides an online information and referral service for mental illness including schizophrenia, depression and anxiety disorders.

**[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)** The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry site aims to assist parents and families to understand developmental, behavioural, emotional and mental disorders affecting children and young people.

**[www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)** The Royal College of Psychiatry provides a list of comprehensive resources on mental health problems. Click on public on the home page and then mental health information.

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