

# Mental Health

## Caregiver Helpsheets





This booklet of helpsheets is developed to provide caregivers with essential information and tips on caring for your loved one with mental health issues, and caring for yourself.

Remember, caring for your loved one is important, but it is equally important to take care of yourself.





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What Is

# Mental Health



## **Mental health conditions are common and can affect anyone**

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Good mental health is related to mental and psychological well-being.

According to the Singapore Mental Health Study (2016), one out of seven people in Singapore will develop a mental health condition over the course of their life. Major Depressive Disorder, Alcohol Abuse and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder were found to be the top three most common mental health conditions in Singapore.

## Resources On Mental Health Services



### Community Mental Health (CMH) Wayfinding Tool

Try out this virtual wayfinding tool to find mental health services based on your needs, age and location, all within three clicks. **[www.for.sg/wayfinding](http://www.for.sg/wayfinding)**



### Mind Matters Resource Directory listing

Check out this consolidated listing of available mental health services and caregiver support within each region. **[www.for.sg/mh-mindmattersdir](http://www.for.sg/mh-mindmattersdir)**





**Caring for a loved one with a mental health condition can be a strenuous and lonely journey**

You can support and provide better care when you are informed about the conditions, type of treatment and help available. We hope the information in this guide can support you in your journey.



## How to tell if it is a mental health condition or is it just stress?

It is not always easy to notice changes in someone's behaviour and mood, even if you know them well. You are more likely to notice big or sudden changes, but gradual changes can be easy to miss. It can often be mistaken as signs of stress.

Consider the context of the symptoms or behaviours	
Stress-related issues	Mental health condition
<p>The symptoms are usually linked or due to a recent incident or event.</p> <p>The severity of the symptoms is usually proportionate to the intensity of the event.</p> <p>E.g. your loved one may be feeling stressed due to a challenging project at work.</p>	<p>The symptoms are usually not due to any identifiable event or incident.</p> <p>If there is an identifiable event, the severity of the symptoms also may not appear to be proportionate to the intensity of the event.</p> <p>E.g. your loved one is feeling down or has poor appetite suddenly without any triggering events or incidents.</p>

If your loved one's symptoms are affecting their daily functions, regardless whether it is due to stress or mental health issues, it is good for your loved one to seek help.



## General roles of the various mental health professionals

You and your loved one will meet many professionals at the various stages of your journey. Below are examples of care professionals you and your loved one may come across, and how they can support your mental health needs. Do note that the actual support may vary across different organisations.

Profession	Broad duties
Counsellor	They provide counselling and help persons with mental health needs develop coping skills, guide them on how to access resources and tap on support services for multifaceted issues. If needed, they will also talk to caregivers to better support their loved one. A counsellor may also plan and implement assistance programmes.
Social Worker	They improve the social functioning of individuals and families, assist to recognise social reasons for mental distress and provide basic emotional support. They also partner with other agencies to support other needs of the person with mental health issues.
General Practitioners (GPs)	They provide consultation, diagnosis, treatment and work with other mental health professionals to support persons with mental health and physical health needs.
Clinical psychologist	They provide psychological assessments and diagnosis for various mental health conditions (e.g., depression, anxiety, etc.). They can also treat the conditions with various psychological interventions. They provide a safe space for individuals to effectively address their mental health needs, and offer guidance and coping skills.
Psychiatrists	Similar to clinical psychologists, psychiatrists are also mental health specialists who diagnose mental health conditions and manage treatment. A key difference is that psychiatrists can prescribe medication as they are medical doctors, while clinical psychologists cannot. Psychiatrists may also make referrals to a psychologist for psychological interventions.







## What to expect?

A mental health condition is a lifelong and persistent condition. Similar to a physical health condition, such as diabetes, there is no cure for a mental health condition. However, new behaviours and habits can be formed to better manage the condition.

Medications combined with psychotherapy and counselling are the most effective methods for maintaining the mental and emotional stability of your loved one. Do check in with the psychiatrist on any medication concerns that you may have.

As a caregiver, you are a key component in the journey of your loved one. While the care professionals are experts in their respective fields, no one knows your loved one better than you. While you provide support for your loved one, it is crucial that you care for yourself throughout your caregiving journey.



# Understanding Your Loved One's Mental Health Treatments



Knowing more about your loved one's mental health treatment options can prepare you during the upcoming journey. Here are some information on common mental health treatment options which your loved one may be undergoing.



## **What can my loved one and I expect of this mental health condition?**

- ✓ A mental health diagnosis may change over time, or when there are new information or symptoms uncovered which may point to a different diagnosis.
- ✓ Getting timely support for your loved one can help to manage their mental health condition and reduce complications. Your loved one can get better and achieve a fulfilling life.



## What treatment options are available for my loved one?

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health treatment. Do take note of the following:

- ✓ Mental health conditions can be managed via a combination of pharmacological and psychosocial approaches.
- ✓ Your loved ones will be receiving an individualised treatment plan from his/her care team.
- ✓ Different people may take different duration to recover.

Below are some of the common treatments today which your loved one may be undergoing.

Treatment	Psychiatric Medications	Psychotherapies
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Antidepressants</li> <li>○ Anxiolytics</li> <li>○ Mood stabilisers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cognitive-behavioural therapy</li> <li>○ Psychoanalytic therapy</li> <li>○ Client-centred therapy</li> </ul>
What should I take note of if my loved one is undergoing this treatment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Psychiatric medications can make other concurrent therapies more effective.</li> <li>✓ Some psychiatric medications take around a few weeks for the full effects to be felt.</li> <li>✓ Psychiatric medications should not be stopped without the advice of your loved one's doctor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Psychotherapies involve your loved one talking about the condition and related issues with his or her therapist.</li> <li>✓ Your loved one will learn about his or her condition, moods, feelings, thoughts, and behaviour.</li> <li>✓ With these insights, your loved one can learn coping and stress management skills.</li> </ul>



## How long does my loved one have to undergo treatment?

The duration of mental health treatments varies from one person to another, and is usually matched to the nature and severity of the person's presenting issues or concern. The duration of treatment also varies with the type of treatment given. It is important to consider the following when discussing the duration of treatment with your loved one's healthcare professional.

- ✓ Treatment successfully ends when your loved one has achieved the goals he/her has agreed upon with the therapist/doctor.
- ✓ Discussion of treatment duration should be part of your loved one's conversation with the therapist/doctor.
- ✓ Treatment duration is often tentative and revisited throughout the course of treatment.
- ✓ It is common for therapists to have a few rounds of assessment or evaluation sessions before suggesting a treatment plan for your loved one. In some cases, additional treatment goals may then be suggested by the therapist.
- ✓ In general, people show higher levels of recovery with longer lengths of treatment. It is important for your loved one to have received enough treatment and have reasonable expectations of treatment durations before deciding treatment is not working for him/her.



# Managing Your Loved One's Mental Health Medications



If your loved one is undergoing treatment, they may be prescribed various medications alongside their therapy. Managing and keeping track of these medications and their potential side effects may be overwhelming for you. Here are some valuable information and tips to support you.



## **I am worried that my loved one's medications may be too expensive. What can I do?**

- ✓ Discuss this with your loved one's doctor if you or your loved one are concerned with the cost of prescribed medication. The doctor may be able to switch the medication to a cheaper or subsidised alternative if available.



You can refer to **<https://for.sg/zxfzww>** for the list of subsidised medications in Singapore.



## **What are the side effects of my loved one's medications?**

All medications can have side effects. During treatment, the doctor will try to find medications which work for your loved one and only cause side effects that your loved one can manage. This may take a few trials of different medications.



To understand the common side effects caused by psychiatric medications, you may refer to **<https://www.healthhub.sg/a-z/a?-cat=medications>**

For more information, speak to the doctor or a pharmacist to understand more about the medication.



## My loved one is refusing his/her medications. What can I do?

- ✓ Family support is vital to persuading him/her to resume their medications.
- ✓ Talk to your loved one without being judgmental, and try to understand the reasons for refusing medications. Some common reasons are:
  - They are unaware and do not understand the severity of their conditions.
  - They cannot manage the side effects of the medications.
  - They feel that the medications are not working for them.
- ✓ Manage your loved one's expectations of the medications he/she is taking.
- ✓ Assure your loved one that you are there for him/her and try to address his/her concerns
- ✓ Consult the doctor or therapist if you need further help.





# Preventing A Relapse

## For Your Loved One



**Individuals recovering from a mental health condition may sometimes fall back into a relapse when they encounter certain triggers or stressful times**

Knowing what you can do to support your loved one during such times can help reduce their chances of a relapse. Here are some information and tips on what you can do to help prevent and manage a relapse.





## What can I do to help my loved one prevent a relapse?

### ① Medication Management

- ✓ Advise your loved one to continue taking their medications even if they are feeling well.

### ② Look out for potential warning signs and triggers of a relapse

- ✓ Different people may have different warning signs that they are about to fall back into a relapse. Some common warning signs are:
  - ⦿ Lack of sleep or too much sleep
  - ⦿ Weight loss or gain
  - ⦿ Irritability or anger
  - ⦿ Withdrawal from friends, family, or colleagues
- ✓ Different people can also have different triggers for a relapse. Some common ones are:
  - ⦿ Loss or grief
  - ⦿ Conflict among loved ones
  - ⦿ Significant life changes e.g. births, deaths, loss of a job

### 3 Reinforce healthy coping skills

- ✓ Having healthy coping skills can help your loved one handle stresses or triggers more effectively and reduce the chances of a relapse.
- ✓ Discuss with your loved one about practical coping skills which he/she can adopt when facing stressful situations.
  - Face the stresses slowly and gradually
  - Remind them to allocate time for self-care
  - Cut back on ongoing responsibilities that are not essential
  - Make sure their expectations of the situation are realistic

### 4 Remind your loved one to seek help when needed

- ✓ Remind your loved one that seeking help is not a sign of weakness; encourage him/her to understand their mental health triggers and seek help early.
- ✓ Discuss any issues with your loved one's healthcare professional if needed.
- ✓ Develop a plan with your loved one on what to do in the event of a relapse. This will help ease stress on you.
- ✓ The plan may include:
  - At what point does your loved one want to seek help?
  - Is there a preferred treatment or specialist to approach if there is a relapse?
- ✓ You can also discuss with your loved one about helping them with their duties or chores in the event they need to spend time in a hospital during a relapse.

For example:

- Helping them to settle their bill payments
- Taking care of their children



# Practising Self-Care

**Self-care is a deliberate and intentional act done to care for one's own mental, physical and emotional health**

It is important to care for yourself during your caregiving journey to prevent burnout.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or experiencing burnout, you may reach out to your nearest Community Outreach Team (CREST) or contact us at [enquiries@aic.sg](mailto:enquiries@aic.sg) for support.

## Energise

Do things that energise and excite you. Rekindle your interests and hobbies that remind you of pleasant memories.

Participate in events and activities that make you feel refreshed. You may find out about available activities and interest groups that you can participate in at your nearest Community Club. These activities offer opportunities for you to socialise with others.

## Find time for yourself

It is important to make time for self-care and recharge. Try to schedule some time for yourself each day, even if it's just a few minutes.

It can be as simple as watching a favourite TV show, reading a magazine, or doing a hobby.

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## Self-compassion

Be kind and practise self-compassion by tending to your own feelings and emotions. Do not criticise or blame yourself.

## Learn about the services available

Find out about available schemes and services to support the care of your loved one. You may enquire and apply for these assistance.

## **Ask** for help

It is okay to ask for help from your family, friends and care professionals to manage your caregiving journey.

Requesting for help is not an indication of weakness or incompetency as a caregiver. You may consider asking your family member to buy groceries, or getting someone to care for your loved one while you take a break.

## **Enrich** your relationship with your loved one

Your loved one's mental health diagnosis does not define him/her. Remember that your loved one has dreams and interests too. Encourage him/her to pursue their dreams and support their journey to achieve their goals.

# CARE

## Conduct regular **Check-ins**

Remember to prioritise yourself as a caregiver. Take a moment each day to check in with yourself. Ask how you're feeling, what you need, and if you are taking care of your own well-being. Self-care starts with self-awareness.

## Eating **Right** and stay healthy

Practise good eating habits and lead a balanced lifestyle with sufficient rest. Listen to what your body is telling you and seek medical attention if needed.

# Support

## For Caregivers



**Caregiving can be a rewarding and fulfilling journey, with adequate support.**

Without adequate support and coping capabilities, you may experience exhaustion, emotional stress, financial and other care-related strains; this could lead to burnout which will affect your ability to care for your loved one. Support is crucial in your caregiving journey.

### Types of support

✓ **Formal support** is care provided by care professionals e.g. from the hospitals or community organisations. The support includes counselling, therapy, case management and referral to other services.

You may request to speak to the medical social worker or case worker to find out more about the services and schemes that you and your loved one may be eligible for. Do note that most services and schemes are means-tested based on per capita household income; taking into account the overall income of the household divided by the number of occupants in the house. Subsidies are granted based on the per capita income of the household.

✓ **Informal support** comes from family, friends and loved one. This can be in the form of help with errands or groceries, helping to care for loved one and others.

# Where to find support

## ✓ Navigating the community care sector



Care Services Recommender is an online tool to help you find community care services and financial schemes to manage your loved one's care. By answering some questions about your loved one's care needs and health condition, you will be able to view relevant services, schemes, and tips for you to consider.

**[www.go.gov.sg/careservicesrecommender](http://www.go.gov.sg/careservicesrecommender)**

## ✓ Available counselling hotlines



There are available support systems in the community for you to approach. Counselling serves to reduce your stress by assisting and guiding you in your personal, social or psychological matters and difficulties.

**[www.for.sg/mh-mindmattersdir](http://www.for.sg/mh-mindmattersdir)**

## ✓ Respite options



Respite care can be provided at home, in a day care centre or in a nursing home.

**[www.for.sg/aic-cg-selfcaretips](http://www.for.sg/aic-cg-selfcaretips)**

## ✓ Caregiver support groups



Caregiver support groups serve as a collective platform for caregivers to come together and share about their caregiving journey. The support group also serves as a social connection for you to bond and build relations with other caregivers. You are not alone!

**[www.for.sg/cgofmh](http://www.for.sg/cgofmh)**

## ✓ Community mental health support



There are community mental health services for your loved one and caregivers like you. Support in terms of counselling, service linkages and psychoeducation can be provided. For more information on the various services in the community:

**[www.aic.sg/mentalhealthfinder](http://www.aic.sg/mentalhealthfinder)**

# The Heart of Care



**Click**  
**[www.aic.sg](http://www.aic.sg)**



**Call**  
**1800 650 6060**



**Visit**  
**AIC Link**

The Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) aims to create a vibrant care community for people to live well and age gracefully. AIC coordinates and supports efforts in integrating care to achieve the best care outcomes for our clients.

We reach out to caregivers and seniors with information on staying active and ageing well, and connect people to services they need.

We support stakeholders in their efforts to raise the quality of care, and also work with health and social care partners to provide services for the ageing population.

Our work in the community brings care services and information closer to those in need.



We hope you can take a few minutes to share your feedback with us by scanning the QR code. Thank you!

Information in this booklet is accurate as at November 2024