

# Mental Health

## Caregiver Helpsheets



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What Is

# Mental Health



## Mental health conditions are common and can affect anyone

According to the Singapore Mental Health Study (2016), 1 out of 7 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.

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.



## Resources On Mental Health And Wellness

### Mind Matters Resource Directory Booklet

Provides an overview of the Community Mental Health Masterplan including the available and accessible community mental health services and resources to support you and your loved one in this journey.



### Mind Matters Resource Directory listing

Contains a listing of the GPs and Community Mental Health partners island wide. Respite centres and information on caregiver support groups are also available.





## 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. Often it can be mistaken for 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 down or have poor appetite in response to a loss of a beloved pet.</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>

Another way is to consider the impact of your loved one's symptoms or behaviours. If your loved one's symptoms are affecting how they are able to function and perform their daily tasks, regardless of whether they are due to stress-related or mental health issues, it may be beneficial for your loved one to seek further help.



## Where should I bring my loved one to seek help?

For the list of mental health services available, you can refer to: [www.aic.buzz/mindmatters-directory](http://www.aic.buzz/mindmatters-directory). You may also write in to [ccmh@aic.sg](mailto:ccmh@aic.sg) for enquiries.







## General roles of the various mental health professionals

You and your loved ones will meet many professionals at the various stages of your caregiving journey. Below is a brief list of professionals whom you and your loved one will come across. Do note that there are general duties and that actual roles will vary depending on the hospital or community organisation that you are under.

Profession	Educational background	Broad duties
Psychiatrist	A psychiatrist is a medical doctor with specialised training in psychiatry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal diagnosis of mental health condition</li> <li>Psychoeducation on medication and side-effects</li> </ul>
Social Worker / Counsellor / Psychologist	<p>A social worker is a trained professional with a degree or post-graduate qualifications in social work</p> <p>A counsellor is a trained professional with a degree or post-graduate qualifications in counselling</p> <p>A psychologist is a trained professional with post-graduate qualifications in psychology</p>	<p>Counselling on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing the condition</li> <li>Alleviating other concerns such as relationships</li> </ul> <p>Specific to social worker:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Referral to other services such as financial assistance, means testing for services</li> </ul>



## 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. The professionals are experts in their field of study but you are the expert in your loved one. Navigating the mental health care ecosystem may be challenging. Hence it is crucial that you engage in self-care throughout your caregiving journey.



# Understanding Your Loved One's Mental Health Treatments



Caring for a loved one with a mental health condition can be a strenuous and lonely journey. Knowing more about your loved one's mental health treatment options can prepare you during the upcoming journey. Here is 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 the mental condition and reduce complications. Your loved one can recover 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. Some things to note of mental health treatments are:

- ✓ Although they are effective methods for managing many mental health conditions, they do not cure the mental health condition.
- ✓ Different people may respond to the same treatment differently. The same medication or therapy that works for someone may not be effective for your loved one.
- ✓ Different people may take different amounts of time 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 help to 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 length 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 length of treatment also varies with the type of treatment given. It is important to consider the following when deciding the length of treatment:

- ✓ Treatment successfully ends when your loved one has achieved the goals he/she has agreed upon with his/her therapist/doctor.
- ✓ Discussion of treatment length should be part of your loved one's conversation with his/her therapist/doctor.
- ✓ Treatment length 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 lengths before deciding treatment is not working for him/her.



# Managing Your Loved One's Mental Health Medications



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

If your loved one is undergoing treatment, they may be prescribed various medications in addition to their therapy. It may be overwhelming for you to keep track of and manage your loved one's medications and their side effects. Here are some information and tips on how to manage your loved one's medications and their side effects.



## 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 is concerned with the cost of the medication prescribe, the doctor may be able to switch the medication to a cheaper or subsidised alternative if available.



You can refer to [www.moh.gov.sg/cost-financing/healthcare-schemessubsidies/drug-subsidies-schemes](http://www.moh.gov.sg/cost-financing/healthcare-schemessubsidies/drug-subsidies-schemes) 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 which 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 common psychiatric medications, you can refer to [www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mentalhealth-medications/index.shtml](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mentalhealth-medications/index.shtml).

For more information, speak to your loved one's doctor or a pharmacist to understand more about what can be expected from the medications.



## 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, to understand his/her reasons for refusing his/her medications. Some common reasons are:
  - A lack of awareness and understanding of the severity of their mental illnesses
  - 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.
- ✓ Let your loved one know you are there for him/her, and slowly persuade him/her by addressing his/her concerns.
- ✓ Consult his/her doctor or therapist if you need further help.



## I notice that my loved one is behaving unusually due to his/her mental health condition. What can I do?

- ✓ Listen and show patience, care and encouragement as much as possible.
- ✓ Clear and kind communication is also important, as your loved one needs support and not criticism.
- ✓ Consult his/her doctor or therapist if you need further help.





# Preventing A Relapse

## For Your Loved One



**People in recovery 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 the chances of a relapse for your loved one. 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.
- ✓ Stopping medications prematurely is a major reason for a relapse.

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

- ✓ Learning to spot warning signs and triggers allows you and your loved one to take action early, before it turns into 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 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 triggers are:
  - Loss or grief
  - Conflict among loved ones
  - Significant life changes e.g. births, deaths, loss of a job





# SELF-CARE

## Energise

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

Take note of events and activities that make you feel refresh. Make an active attempt to attend more of such events or participate in such activities. You may find events and activities at your nearest Community Club. Interest groups are available for you to participate in. These are also opportunities to socialise.

## Pay-it-Forward to other caregivers

Share your experience with other caregivers. You can do this via online platforms, face-to-face or even informally. If you know someone whose loved one is undergoing a similar challenge, offer them your knowledge and 'tips' if they are agreeable.

Healthcare professionals are experts of the medical condition but you are the expert of your loved ones'. Advice provided by healthcare professionals might need to be tweaked to your loved ones' personality and interests.

## Ask for help

It is okay to ask for help from family and friends. Requesting for help does not mean that you are unfit or incompetent. We are all humans and asking for help is not an indication of weakness. Examples can be asking for help from a family member to buy groceries; asking for help for someone to care for your loved one while you engage in self-care activities.

## Empathise with your loved ones and be ready to support them

A mental health diagnosis does not define your loved one. Your loved one is more than just a diagnosis on a piece of paper. Your loved one is an individual with hopes and dreams, interests and hobbies. Encourage their interests and be ready to support them in reaching their goals.

## Self-compassion

Be kind and understanding to yourself. Practising self-compassion involves tending to your own feelings and emotions. Caring for yourself involves self-compassion. This means being kind and understanding to yourself instead of criticising or blaming yourself.

## Learn about the services available

Explore the various schemes and services to help you in the care of your loved ones. Be familiar with the various schemes and services that are available. Enquire and apply for such assistance to better support yourself and your loved ones.

## Care for yourself first so you can better care for your loved ones

Ensure that your needs are met first. When caregiving seems to leave little time for anything else, the result is often burnout. To avoid burnout, managing our self-care is a key responsibility to maintain your well-being.

## Be Respectful towards your body, your mind and yourself

- Listen to what your body is telling you. Seek medical attention if needed.
- Observe your sleeping patterns. Ensure you get sufficient rest for better clarity of thought.
- Be mindful of your inner voice and how you talk to yourself. Practice self-compassion with yourself.
- Practice good eating habits and a balanced lifestyle

# Support

## For Caregivers



### Caregiving can be a difficult and sometimes thankless role

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

#### Types of support

- ✓ **Formal support** is support from professionals in the hospitals and community. This can come in the form of counselling, referral for other services and service navigation.

You may request to speak to the Medical Social 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 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 ones. This can be in the form of help with errands or groceries, helping to care for loved ones and others.

However, the best form of support is self-care. If you engage in self-care at every stage of your caregiver journey, you will be healthy, ready and best prepared to perform your role as a caregiver.

## Where to find support

### ✓ Navigating the community care sector



The community care sector can be a maze. You may approach the AIC Link to find out more about the various schemes and services that your loved ones can benefit from. The AIC Link serves as a one-stop place for caregivers to find out more about schemes, subsidies and community resources available for their loved ones: [www.aic.sg/aic-link](http://www.aic.sg/aic-link)

### ✓ Available counselling hotlines



There are available support systems in the community for you to approach. Counselling serves to alleviate your stress by assisting and guiding you in your personal, social or psychological problems and difficulties: [www.aic.buzz/mindmatters-directory](http://www.aic.buzz/mindmatters-directory)

### ✓ Respite options



Respite care helps to provide short-term relief for caregivers. It can be arranged for a few hours or for several days or weeks. Care can be provided at home or in a healthcare centre. [www.aic.buzz/CGNeeds](http://www.aic.buzz/CGNeeds)

### ✓ Caregiver support groups



Caregiver support groups serve as a collective platform for caregivers to come to share more 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.aic.buzz/MHSupport](http://www.aic.buzz/MHSupport)

### ✓ Community mental health support



There are community mental health services for clients and caregivers. Support in terms of counselling, service linkages and psychoeducation can be provided. For more information on the various services in the community, visit [www.aic.buzz/mind-matters-directory](http://www.aic.buzz/mind-matters-directory) or email to [ccmh@aic.sg](mailto:ccmh@aic.sg)



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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.