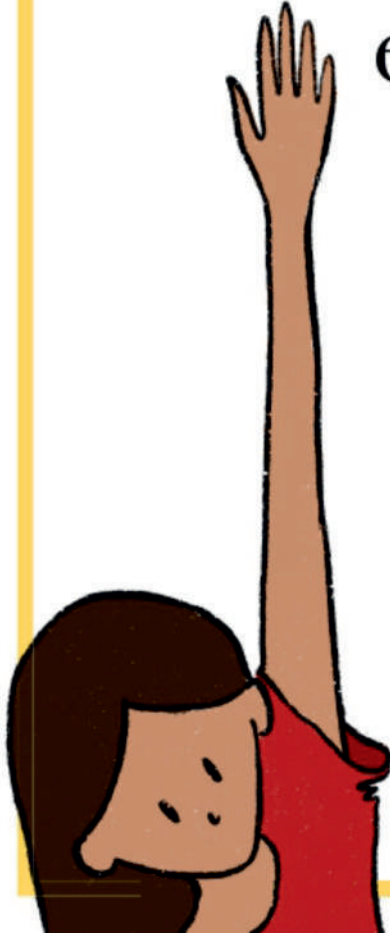




Immediate care for
psychological and emotional
events and emergencies.



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When we see a person suffering a cardiac arrest or snake bite, we may have some awareness about what to do as basic first aid. But are we skilled enough to provide the same when we see a person extremely anxious, tensed, sad or depressed? Often the response is to ask the person to snap out of it or tell him/ her that things will get better.

However, such emotional states, especially if severe and immediate, are signs of a mental health crisis, and warrant attention and basic intervention measures, which may be referred to as providing immediate care for psychological and emotional events and emergencies. A person who provides such a service is called a Mental Health First Aider.

Why Do We Need To Provide Immediate Care?

Myths and misconceptions are widely prevalent about mental health and mental illness. This might prevent people from talking about any mental health issues they may be experiencing, with family, friends or others. This can even cause a delay in seeking professional help. Thus, many individuals continue to suffer silently. All of us face problems in our day to day life. However, while some of us are able to cope effectively, some of us are not. When we are not able to cope, it can manifest as various negative emotional states like anger, irritability, and fear, to name a few. Such negative emotions, particularly when intense and prolonged, often stem from various issues such as being victims of bullying or domestic violence etc.



Friends and family members can have difficulty in identifying a person who is undergoing a mental health problem. They might be aware that something is going wrong with their dear ones, but feel helpless in providing aid. It may be often due to lack of awareness of mental health problems and what needs to be done. Availing mental health services may not be considered as the first option, and delay in recognition and treatment could lead to worsening of the mental health problem.

As a society, we are, and continue to be ignorant, of the mental health problems that the members are facing. If left without active intervention, these problems can escalate to diagnosable mental health disorders. Thus, it is of utmost importance to find ways of improving the general public's knowledge and skills to provide first hand support to people with mental health problems.



Who can be a mental health first aider?

Anybody who is interested in connecting with people, and wants to reach out when a person is in distress, can be a Mental Health First Aider.



How can I go about it?

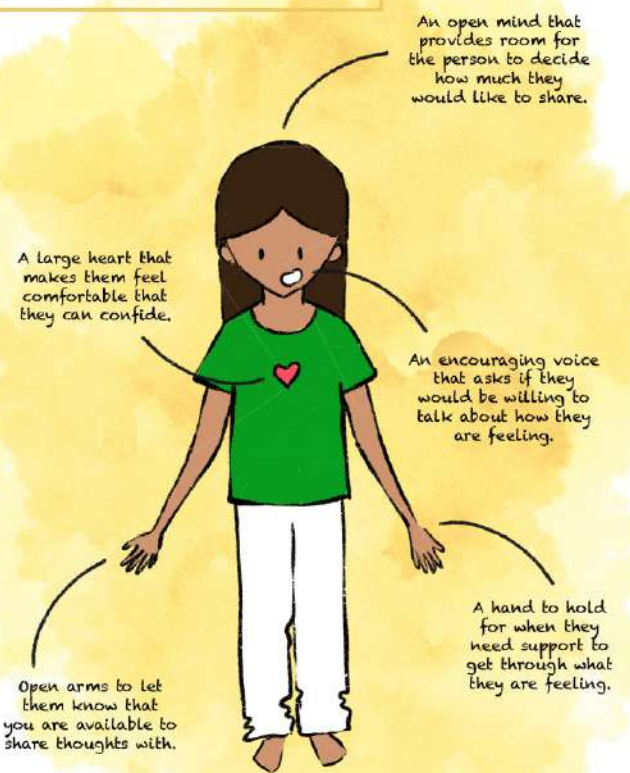
1 Identify the signs of mental health problems and intervene

As a Mental Health First Aider, it is very important to identify the early signs of a mental health problem.

If you notice any of the mentioned signs, approach the person with empathy and try to establish rapport. Once established, try to engage the person in talking about what could be bothering them.

- Looking dull and listless
- Looking sad
- Lack of interest in surroundings
- Crying spells
- Talking of death and dying or suicidal behavior
- Irritability
- Withdrawal from social gatherings
- Anger outbursts or aggression
- Unusual and unexpected behavior

The anatomy of a First Aider engaging in conversation.



2 Avoid being judgmental

At times, in trying to help others, we let our own views dominate our communication, which can be detrimental. We may judge the person based on our views with respect to people or their problems. It is important to recognise this and learn to put our own opinions and values on hold, while helping people in need of our support. For instance, avoid making moral statements such as "This is not the age for you to fall in love" or "you need to realise

that it is not right to think like that", etc. Refrain from asking too many probing questions. The person may not be ready to answer to you initially and can withdraw from talking. Instead, engage more in listening, which will allow the person to ventilate the issues that may be bothering them. Try summarizing at the end to make sure you have understood what the main problem areas are.

I hear you, and this is what I understand... Correct me if I have misunderstood.



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3 Encourage professional help

Once you are sure that the person is experiencing mental health problems, probe gently whether they would like to get help. At times, the person affected may not be aware that help may exist for the kind of problems they are facing. If they appear keen, provide information as to where such help can be obtained, e.g. a psychiatrist/psychologist/counselor.

Assure them that it's perfectly acceptable for them to seek professional help. Instill hope that things will get better and problems will be professionally addressed.

4 Build up coping strategies

Apart from medicines and psychotherapy sessions, encourage the person to enhance their coping skills by expanding social network, developing new hobbies, reading books, volunteering for a social cause, and so on. Strengthening coping skills can help individuals in defending themselves against crisis situations that may come their way. Also provide information about local support groups with which they can connect, participate and share their problems.

It's so lovely of you to be a part of something like this.



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5 Follow up

It would also help the person if you connect with them occasionally to find out how they are doing and ask if any further assistance is required.



I am feeling burnt out!!

When you as a First aider listen to people with mental health issues for a long time, you may have to face burnout. Burnout is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. Burnout is where you feel helpless, overloaded, loss of patience, interest, agitated, mentally exhausted, loss of hope of change in the present the situation, feel tired, drained, headaches, muscle pain, lower motivation, or unappreciated. Burnout is a gradual process.

If you find something is unusual from that point itself you have to take care of that and should take measures that will help you. For example; take a break, ask some other trusting individual take over your role, don't give any promises regarding your availability.

In conclusion, you can play a crucial role in identifying and intervening with mental health problems, and making prompt referrals as needed. Such strategies will go a long way in preventing the problems from turning into a mental disorder. Providing immediate care for psychological and emotional events and emergencies is also simple, which anyone interested in helping can learn and practice, and make a difference in the lives of people.

If you would like us to host an event at your institute, or are interested in attending an event hosted by NIMHANS :

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