

Kelly, C., Kitchener, B., & Jorm, A. (2010). *Youth mental health first aid: a manual for adults assisting young people* (2nd ed.). Orygen Youth Health Research Centre, Melbourne, Australia. ISBN: 9780980554144.

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First aid is well-known as a method of providing the general public with skills to assist injured people before professional medical treatment can be obtained. First aid training has traditionally not incorporated mental health issues despite the increasing rates of mental health issues within the community. It is on this basis that Mental Health First Aid training has been developed to train non-mental health professionals to provide help to a person developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. As with first aid for injured people, this is provided until appropriate professional help is received or until the crisis resolves. *Youth mental health first aid: A manual for adults assisting young people* ("the manual") is used in conjunction with the Mental Health First Aid Training Program, a 12 hour course, to train adults who have frequent contact with young people, for example, parents and guardians, school staff, sports coaches and youth workers.

The first edition, published in 2002, has been widely read in Australia and adapted or translated in 13 other countries. The authors report that previous editions of the manual have been widely used by health professionals, including during training of students in medicine, nursing and paramedicine as well as used for training purposes by Divisions of General Practice. The second edition of the manual is based on mental health first aid guidelines developed with the consensus of expert panels of mental health consumers, carers and professionals and incorporates up to date Australian statistical information and the most recent evidence in relation to treatments and services available for young people.

The manual takes the reader on a comprehensive journey through the developmental changes associated with adolescence before proceeding to describe in detail the most common mental health problems experienced by young people. Care has been taken to clearly describe how behaviours and features of mental health problems can be distinguished from typical adolescent behaviour, whilst acknowledging the interrelationship between adolescence and mental health problems. Each chapter on mental health problems includes definitions, signs and symptoms, risk factors, interventions, mental health first aid action plans as well as current resources (including books, websites and help lines) relevant to the mental health problem with a specific focus on adolescents. The last section of the manual provides first aid for particular mental health crises, including suicidal thoughts and behaviours, severe psychotic states, effects of drug misuse and aggressive behaviours.

Throughout the manual the role of the first aider is clearly defined to place boundaries around it, particularly stressing the importance of early intervention and response but also the necessity for appropriate assessment and interventions from appropriately trained and experienced professionals. The manual alerts the reader that young people may not always wish to seek assistance and provides practical advice for the first aider in responding to that situation.

The tone of the manual is respectful of the needs and rights of young people, encouraging the first aider to offer choices where possible, to respect the right of the young person to make decisions about treatments as well as strategies to encourage open and effective communication. Equally the manual outlines the responsibilities of the first aider in taking action if a young person is deemed at risk of harm, including mandatory reporting of abuse, and seeking emergency treatment for a young person at risk. The manual also explains the nature of professional support provided by a range of professional workers to clearly assist in the help seeking process for young people, whilst also ac-

knowledging the potential benefit of some self-help strategies of interest to young people (such as art as a form of expressing feelings). Early intervention is stressed throughout the manual as the priority – in recognising signs and symptoms early and encouraging young people to seek help prior to crises developing.

In this way the role and responsibilities of the first aider are well defined with the aim of ensuring the adult has adequate information to make well informed decisions about actions to support the young person, clear information to assist in understanding the experience of young people in a mental health crisis and recognition of the difficulties in providing appropriate support at times. Critical ethical issues such as the right to privacy of the young person and their rights to make decisions about health care are covered. Considerable effort is made to encourage adults assisting young people to enhance their listening skills to ensure they listen respectfully and non-judgementally (“You need to set aside your beliefs and reactions in order to focus on the needs of the person you are helping; their need to be heard, understood, and helped”, p. 37). Communicating effectively with young people from different cultural backgrounds is also considered with some guidance about developing understandings in relation to cultural beliefs around mental illness in order to be culturally competent when providing mental health first aid.

The voice of young people is heard throughout the manual by the inclusion of art work and accompanying statements to bring to life the experience of mental illness and feelings associated with it. Some of the artwork describes the benefits of help seeking, setting out the positive changes that occurred after help was sought and obtained (“My drawing represents what I saw then, when I was 14, before I was helped, and what I still see now and again” Jess, aged 16, p. 56). Accordingly the reader is provided with greater insight into mental illness, particularly as it relates to young people as well as validating the important role of the first aider in assisting young people.

Overall, the manual fills a gap in the provision of succinct, evidence-based and up-to-date information about adolescent development and mental health problems and the most appropriate responses from a first aid perspective. It no doubt plays a role in breaking down stigma relating to mental illness in young people and encouraging dialogue with young people through encouraging adults to develop their own awareness and skills to respectfully assist at the earliest possible time to prevent mental health crises developing. Given that “half of all people who ever develop a mental illness will have had their first episode prior to the age of 18” (p. 11) the need for such a resource focusing on the adolescent period is evident.