

Carer Chatter

Winter 2022

**Bendigo Health Mental Health Services, Carer Support Team
Newsletter for families and carers of people with mental illness**

Hello

Well winter is definitely here now. It's been wet so far and everything is looking green and lush. Winter has a lot to offer, if only we look for it. Bare trees allow lots of extra light into our homes, and winter flowers can look stunning as they're not competing with the glare of summer sun.

Although the pandemic is not over, people and places are starting to open up. This can be a mixed blessing; it's lovely to be able to get out and do things and see people, but there are lots of viruses and bugs around so we still need to be careful.

A simple thing everyone can do is to get a flu shot. This year it's free to everyone so it's even easier to stay protected.

Avoiding crowds when possible can also help to reduce the chance of catching a cold or flu or other virus. We don't go into full hibernation like some animals, but many people tend to hibernate a little when the weather gets cold. This can be good for us emotionally as well. It's lovely to snuggle up in front of a warm heater and indulge in comforting hot foods and drinks. The days are shorter so going to bed a bit earlier can also be good as a lot of people benefit from a little more rest.

But remember that even bears and squirrels (who like to sleep away the worst of winter) enjoy going out to stretch their legs and have a snack on mild winter days.

Our needs for sunlight, fresh air and socialising don't go away just because the weather is colder. So take care of yourself and stay well, but also make the most of the winter days.

Best wishes from Faye, Fiona and Kelly



L.E.A.P.

Four steps to successful communication

The **LEAP approach** (Listen, Empathise, Agree, Partner) was developed by clinical psychologist Dr Xavier Amador. It is a way of communicating that helps to build and strengthen relationships by listening in a way that conveys respect for the other person's point of view without any judgement or blame. This strategy can help you to encourage a person with mental illness to accept treatment and support for their illness.

There are only four steps to this method. This sound simple, but of course that doesn't mean it is easy. So it might be a good idea to practice the steps first, then set aside a time to talk to your loved one.

Step 1. Listen to your loved one. When you listen the goal is to gain an understanding of what your loved one wants, feels and believes in. The goal is to not just to listen but to learn. You want to gain a full understanding of **their experience**, not yours, of the illness and treatment.

Effective listening involves sitting back and listening to the frustrations, fears, hopes and dreams of the person you care for, and repeating back your understanding of what has been said. You can use effective listening to stop yourself offering your opinion or advice. E.g. "What happened after you stopped taking your meds?" vs "This happened because you stopped taking your meds".

Step 2. Empathize with your loved one regarding their experiences with the illness and treatment despite how out of touch with reality they may sound to you. This would include listening and empathizing when they tell you they won't take medicines. If you want someone to seriously consider your point of view, be certain that they feel you have considered theirs.

To empathise with another is to identify with their feelings, thoughts and attitudes. To convey your empathy to the person you care for you can acknowledge that their thoughts may be frightening, their desire to prove they are not sick and their wish to avoid treatment.

Step 3. Agree on a common ground. Work on observations together, while remaining neutral, to discover what motivation the person has to change. Common ground always exists between the most extreme opposing positions, the challenge is to find it.

It is important to reach an agreement. To do this discuss only problems or symptoms perceived by the person you care for, review advantages and disadvantages of treatment, reflect back and highlight the perceived benefits. Remember that it's okay to agree to disagree on some things.

Step 4. Partner with your loved one. The aim of this step is to help you collaborate on accomplishing the goals you have both agreed on. This might include goals that you work on together, as well as goals that challenge the person you care for to step outside their comfort zone, but are still within their ability to achieve.

Remember that people living with mental illness may feel isolated and afraid, sure that no one else understands what they are going through. By creating a partnership, you are telling your family member that you do care and you are willing to be supportive in a constructive way. It is worth remembering that sometimes support is not constructive. E.g. Enabling a loved one to continue their substance use because you think it is one way they can cope with mental illness is not constructive and is not a partnership. In a partnership, you help your family member deal with their fears and deal with their substance use in a positive way.

"When you share the same goals, you can work together instead of being at odds"

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Self care in winter

It may be cold outside, but winter doesn't have to be sad or unhealthy. There are many ways to ensure that you can keep yourself healthy and happy, no matter what the weather is like.



Prioritise a good night's sleep. Getting enough sleep is vital for boosting your immunity, energy levels and mental health. If you struggle to sleep well try switching off screens and doing something relaxing before bed. And by the way, a *short* afternoon nap can work wonders.

Stay hydrated. Cold weather is drying, and we're more likely to drink tea and coffee. It's easy to become dehydrated in winter so drink your water. Your body needs it to stay healthy, and your skin will thank you as well. Aim for 6 glasses of water a day. If you really want a hot drink try a herbal tea.

Create something. There are lots of things you can make yourself that will give you a sense of achievement: a painting, a windowsill herb garden, something knitted or a photo album of happy memories. If you're not already artistic or crafty, adult colouring books and YouTube tutorials are a good place to start. Your local neighbourhood house or library might even offer workshops so you can learn something new.

Take a bubble bath. When did you last soak in the tub while reading a book or listening to music? Add some Epsom salt or bubbles and let yourself unwind and relax.

Switch off. Turn off your TV and phone, wrap yourself in a blanket, and spend 10 or 15 minutes unwinding and simply being present in the moment. This is a great way to reset your brain.



Declutter your home. Decluttering is a wonderful form of self-care. Most people have clothes and other items that they don't like or use anymore. Start small, one cupboard at a time. Go through and keep only things that you love or use regularly. Give the rest away. You will feel much lighter in spirit when you're not surrounded by clutter.

Start a gratitude journal. Get in the habit of noting down a few things that you are grateful for each day. Simple things like warm blankets, good heating, or a nice view out your window can be taken for granted, but are actually quite wonderful if we take the time to notice and appreciate them.

Go outside. Really! Yes, it's cold, but don't let that deter you. Wrap up warmly and go anyway. Nature, sunlight and fresh air will help you relax and rejuvenate, keep your vitamin D levels up, your bones strong, and ward off the winter blues. If it's raining take an umbrella and enjoy the patter of the raindrops.



Family & Carer support groups

Bendigo Family, Friends & Carers Group: 5454 7612

Cohuna Mental Health Carers: 0407 316 183

Campaspe Mental Health Carers Group: 5482 0606

Castlemaine Mental Health Carers Group: 5454 7612

Family Drug Support: 1300 368 186

Heathcote Mental Health Carers Group: 5454 7612

Kids with Confidence: 5454 7612

Macedon Ranges/Gisborne - P.S. My Family Matters: 0475 269 965

Maryborough & Districts Mental Health Carers Support Group: 0428 378 583

Rochester: 0401 406 881

Wycheproof Carers: 0428 935 275

Important phone numbers

Mental Health Carer Support Team:
5454 7612

Bendigo Health Psychiatric Triage Service:
1300 363 788

Carer Gateway: 1800 422 737

Carers Victoria: 1800 242 636

Family Drug Support helpline: 1300 368 186

Head to Help: 1800 595 212

Independent Mental Health Advocacy:
1300 947 820

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

Lifeline (24 hours): 13 11 14

Mensline: 1300 789 978

Mental Health Complaints Commissioner:
1800 246 054

Olinda St. Mental Health Resource Centre:
5454 7670

Talk it Out Helpline: 1300 022 946

The Mental Health Tribunal: 1800 242 703

Useful internet sites

Bendigo Health
<https://www.bendigohealth.org.au/>

Beyond Blue
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Carer Gateway
<http://www.carergateway.gov.au/>

Carers Victoria
<http://www.carersvictoria.org.au/>

Children of People with a Mental Illness
<http://www.copmi.net.au/>

Eating Disorders Victoria
<http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au>

Loddon Mallee Mental Health Carers Network
<http://www.lmmhcn.org.au/>

Mental Health Legal Centre
<https://mhlc.org.au/>

Wellways
<https://www.wellways.org/>

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