

Mental Health in RACF Toolkit

Improving Emotional Wellness





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PURPOSE

This toolkit has been designed to support capacity building and confidence of care workers when responding to residents of aged care facilities with common mental health concerns.

The Supporting Emotional Wellness in Aged Care program is available for residents in residential aged care facilities across the Adelaide metropolitan region with the aim of supporting the emotional wellness of residents. Whilst the program offers both individual and group based support from trained mental health professionals, the program recognises the important role that care workers play in supporting the emotional wellness of residents and promoting engagement with the program.

This 5-Rs Toolkit intends to provide clinical leads, aged care directors and other professional staff with a flexible and simple resource to support training, capacity building and confidence of care workers when responding to resident's with mental health concerns.

The 5-Rs toolkit is underpinned by an understanding that:

- Mental health refers to a combination of emotions, thoughts and behaviours
- Mental health conditions can be transient (a one off episode that fully recovers) or chronic (recurring throughout one's life)
- Mental health conditions, in particular depression and anxiety, are highly prevalent in people over 65 years and are too often dismissed as normal symptoms of ageing

Overcoming barriers to the recognition of mental health conditions in residential aged care is a key component to providing the right care, in the right place and at the right time. As such, the 5-Rs toolkit aims to:

- Bring attention to the prevalence of mental health conditions in older people
- Build capacity of care workers to identify common signs and symptoms of mental illness in older age
- Increase awareness of stigma and ageism relating to mental health conditions (i.e. negative perceptions of mental illness can prevent people from accessing support services)
- Build the confidence of care workers in being able to prompt conversation and respond to resident's about their mental health
- Facilitate engagement of residents with the Supporting Emotional Wellness in Aged Care and other available support services where appropriate.

INTRODUCING THE 5-RS TOOLKIT

The 5-Rs Toolkit provides a simple and flexible approach to identifying residents who may be experiencing signs and symptoms of mental health conditions. It includes useful statements that may be helpful in conversation with residents who are showing signs of stress, depression or anxiety.

The 5-Rs Toolkit focuses on raising awareness of mental illness in residential aged care facilities. The themes covered in the 5-R pathway are:

- **Recognise** | signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety
- **Respond** | with empathy and reduce stigma/ageism
- **Respect** | choices and decisions
- **Refer** | for additional assessment and professional support
- **Reflect** | on improvements and positive changes

Applying the 5-Rs aims to make the resident feel heard, understood, cared for and supported. In turn, use of the 5-Rs help to break down barriers to help seeking.

RECOGNISE

Encourages staff to notice the body language, words, tone of voice, changes in behaviour or various physical complaints (i.e. digestive problems, difficulty sleeping). If you are concerned or worried about a resident, talk to them, try to understand how they may be feeling, and learn about the warning signs of depression and anxiety in older people. It is important not to ignore the symptoms of mental illness among older people or assume that it is a normal part of ageing.

TABLE 1

Common signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression in older people

Behaviours	Thoughts	Feelings	Physical symptoms
Slowed down	Loss of control	Sadness or hopelessness	Loss of appetite, digestive issues, significant weight loss (or gain)
Withdrawing from others	Negative self-statements (i.e. "I'm useless", "I don't see the point in living")	Irritability, or anger	Pacing, trembling hands
Low motivation	Reduced self-esteem	Feeling worthless	Slowed movement
Lack of enjoyment in activities	Excessive worry about specific things (i.e. health, finances, family)	Guilt	Fatigue or feeling tired all the time
Difficulty making decisions	Suicidal thoughts	Loneliness	Sleeping problems
Agitated, restless or easily startled		Stressed or anxiousness ("nervy" or nervous)	Dizzy or light headed

If you notice any of these signs or symptoms in a resident, let them know that you have observed a change. For example, you may say:

- I have noticed you seem to be spending more time on your own
- I hear that you are worried about your family
- I saw that you were upset the other day – are you okay?

RESPOND

It is possible to learn a lot about how a resident is feeling and thinking by paying respectful attention to their needs. Effective communication skills will help to let them know that they have been heard and understood. When talking, maintain eye contact and try not to change the topic too quickly. By interrupting you may miss important information. Listening to their story helps to re-affirm that they are important and that you are interested in helping them. Respond by letting them know that you have taken notice (and heard) what they have been telling you. Try to understand it from their unique situation. You may say:

- It's okay to be upset, its normal to cry
- You mentioned that you are feeling sad today - is there anything I can do to help?
- Many people find the move to residential care can be hard

Don't worry if you don't get it right the first time, sometimes it's hard to find what to say. If the resident reacts or is upset by something that was said, you could respond:

- I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing or I didn't understand what you were trying to tell me

RESPECT

It can take time for residents to open-up and share their experiences. It's important to be patient and allow the time needed to speak. The rate you provide information can affect how much they can recall and remember. Having pamphlets or information sheets available that can be referred to later may be useful. Sometimes you will be working with residents who have diminished capacity (e.g. memory problems or cognitive impairment), have hearing or vision issues, are living with a disability, are from a different cultural background or hold different beliefs than you. Being aware of these unique individual differences may help you to modify your communication style. However, these differences do not mean that the resident can't still make their own choices. A part of Respect is incorporating their wants, decisions and choices. In doing so, you may have to acknowledge their preference to not seek help. Try to understand that it can take time to be ready to seek professional support or talk to someone. Whilst you may not agree with their choice to decline an offer of further help and support, unless a resident is at risk of hurting themselves or someone else, you should respect their decision. If you are unsure, or suspect, a resident is thinking about suicide, seek urgent support – call the clinical nurse or the resident's doctor immediately for further advice and assessment. There are several mental health crisis services that are available.

REFER

Encourage helpseeking and for residents to engage with psychological and social supports. Maintaining hope and letting them know that they do not have to recover alone can be helpful. If they appear overwhelmed, provide reassurance to them know that you are willing to help. Offering options for help is validating their experience and reinforces that their emotional wellbeing is important. You do not have to have the answers to the problem, but rather it is about showing commitment and support as they find a solution to a problem. Try saying:

- It might be hard to talk about this, but there is help available
- It may help to talk to someone about how you have been feeling
- I'll see if I can find someone to come and talk about your worries

REFLECT

Even when achievements are small, reflect this back to the resident and let them know that you have noticed a change. Highlighting gradual improvements can help to maintain hope. Try saying:

- Last time we met you were feeling down, it's good to see you looking a bit happier today
- You seem to be sleeping better, have you noticed a change?

Educational tools to introduce the 5-Rs at your residential aged care facility are provided.

- Educational poster/pathway for use in residential aged care facilities
- Information sheet for care workers

START THE CONVERSATION

RECOGNISE

signs and symptoms of depression anxiety

- I have noticed you seem to be spending more time on your own
- I hear that you are worried about your family
- I saw that you were upset the other day – are you okay?

RESPOND

with empathy and reduce stigma and ageism

- It's okay to be upset, its normal to cry
- You mentioned that you are feeling sad today - is there anything I can do to help?
- Many people find the move to residential care can be hard

RESPECT

choices and decisions

- When you are ready, I can help you find the support you need
- Would it be helpful if I get some information on supports available for you to consider later?

REFER

for additional assessment and professional support

- It might be hard to talk about this, but there is help available
- It may help to talk to someone about how you have been feeling
- I'll see if I can find someone to come and talk about your worries some more

REFLECT

on improvements and positive changes

- Last time we met you were feeling down, it's good to see you looking a bit happier today
- You seem to be sleeping better, have you noticed a change?

ENHANCING HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Information sheet for care workers

RECOGNISE | signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety

Have you noticed any of the common signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression in older people?

Behaviours	Thoughts	Feelings	Physical symptoms
Slowed down	Loss of control	Sadness or hopelessness	Loss of appetite, digestive issues, significant weight loss (or gain)
Withdrawing from others	Negative self-statements (i.e. "I'm useless", "I don't see the point in living")	Irritability, or anger	Pacing, trembling hands
Low motivation	Reduced self-esteem	Feeling worthless	Slowed movement
Lack of enjoyment in activities	Excessive worry about specific things (i.e. health, finances, family)	Guilt	Fatigue or feeling tired all the time
Difficulty making decisions	Suicidal thoughts	Loneliness	Sleeping problems
Agitated, restless or easily startled		Stressed or anxiousness ("nervy" or nervous)	Dizzy or light headed

If you notice any signs or symptoms in a resident, let them know that you have observed a change.

Start the conversation

Let the person know that you have observed a change. Listen and let them know you have understood what they are telling you.

- It's okay to be upset, it's normal to cry
- You mentioned that you are feeling sad today - is there anything I can do to help?
- Many people find the move to residential care can be hard
- I'm sorry if I said the wrong thing or didn't understand what you were trying to tell me.

Respect the person's preferences

Incorporate the person's wants, decisions and choices. Allow extra time for the older person to decide on the support they need.

- When you are ready, I can help you find the support you need
- Would it be helpful if I get some information on supports available for you to consider later?

REFER | for additional assessment and professional support

Encourage help-seeking and access to supports

Supports are available to help in the recovery from anxiety and depression. Show your support by helping the person find the options available to them.

- It might be hard to talk about this, but there is help available
- It may help to talk to someone about how you have been feeling
- I'll see if I can find someone to come and talk about your worries some more.

REFLECT | on improvements and positive changes

Notice the positive changes, no matter how big or small

Notice the small stuff. Seeing gradual improvements can help to maintain hope.

- Last time we met you were feeling down, it's good to see you looking a bit happier today
- You seem to be sleeping better, have you noticed a change?

ABOUT SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL WELLNESS IN AGED CARE

The Relationships Australia South Australia's Supporting Emotional Wellness in Aged Care service provides free counselling and or groups for people living in residential aged care facilities (RACFs). This service enables residents of registered RACFs to access free mental health services available to those in the community.

Several types of support may be helpful and are offered by trained health professionals. Talking about feelings can be enormously beneficial such as feelings of loss and grief, anger, anxiety and depression.

Emotional wellness is important part of our general health.

The Supporting Emotional Wellness service is here to support residents of aged care facilities.

Contact us

Phone: (08) 8419 2000

Website: www.rasa.org.au/sew





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