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Some principles that may help you as a carer

As a mental health carer, consider approaching the topic of diagnosis with an open mind. Here are some key principles you can keep in mind.

- **Respect autonomy:** Actively encourage the person you care for to make informed decisions about their mental health care. Where appropriate, respect and support their autonomy in relation to diagnosis and treatment.
- **Open communication:** Encourage open conversations about mental health by creating a safe and non-judgmental space for discussion. Encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings about the prospect of receiving a diagnosis.
- **A holistic approach:** Focus on helping the person you care for to follow good practice related to physical health, social connections, and self-care. The person is not defined only by a diagnosis.
- **Advocate for better treatment:** Advocate for equal treatment and access to resources so that all people with mental health issues receive the care they need regardless of their specific condition.
- **Combat stigma:** You can help combat the stigma associated with a mental health diagnosis by educating yourself and others, challenging stereotypes and promoting understanding.



- **Flexible approach:** It is important to remember that recovery is not a one-size-fits-all process. Try and be flexible and be prepared to adapt your support to the changing needs of the person you care for.



Further Information

- **NSW Mental Health Line:**
1800 011 511 - A 24/7 phone service
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-line.aspx>
- **Head to Health national information service:**
www.headtohealth.gov.au/mental-health-conditions-and-disorders
- **Health Direct – Australian Government information:**
<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-illness>
- **13Yarn:**
Call 13 92 76 to speak with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Crisis Supporter 24/7;
www.13yarn.org.au
- **SANE Australia – a non-government support service:**
<https://www.sane.org/>

Understanding mental health diagnosis

Information for carers

As a mental health carer, you may need to help the person you care for understand issues about their diagnosis. This brochure discusses the advantages and disadvantages of a person with mental health issues knowing their diagnosis.



Mental Health Carers NSW

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What is a mental health diagnosis and how does it differ from a physical health diagnosis?

When someone is having mental health treatment there will always be a diagnosis made by a health professional, whether they or you want one made or not. You and the person you care for can decide if you want to know the diagnosis or not.

The doctor or psychologist should consider all the information available to them from the consumer, their family and carers, and from other members of the treating team before making a diagnosis. So, the information you have about the person you care for is important.

A mental health diagnosis:

- Is based on the history of the condition, the severity of symptoms and the impact the condition has on the person's daily activities.
- Assists the treating team when discussing care and treatment with consumers, carers and other members of the treating team.
- May change over time as new information becomes available to the health professional.

The process to decide on a mental health diagnosis can differ from getting a physical health diagnosis. A mental health diagnosis is reliant on the information provided by you and the person and the treating team's clinical knowledge and experience. It is less reliant on diagnostic tests (*pathology, imaging etc*) which are often important when making a physical health diagnosis.



The advantages of knowing a mental health diagnosis

Access to resources:

Some drugs and welfare payments subsidised by the government are only available for people with a specific diagnosis.

It can help you to understand your concerns:

A mental health diagnosis can help explain the symptoms and behaviours the person is experiencing, reassuring you and them that their struggles are real and not imagined. It can also help you talk with the treating team about care and treatment.

Tailored treatment:

A diagnosis helps the treating team to recommend the most appropriate therapies, medications, or interventions for that condition.

Connections:

A diagnosis can help you and the person you care for connect with support networks and communities and organisations of people facing similar mental health challenges.

Personal empowerment:

Knowing the diagnosis can help you to better understand your person's struggles and may assist you with advocacy and active involvement in their treatment plan.



Things to consider when getting a diagnosis

Stigmatisation:

Diagnostic labels may lead other people to regard the person a certain way based on stereotypes about that mental illness. People who receive a mental health diagnosis might be concerned of what others will think.

Labelling:

Some people can feel that a diagnosis reduces them to a label and limits their potential. This can impact self-esteem and self-identity.

Medication:

In some cases, individuals may receive medications or treatments that are based on the diagnosis and not them as an individual. As a carer you have a right to question the use of medication and treatments that you believe may not be useful.

Uncertainty:

Individuals may have fluctuating symptoms and receive different diagnoses over time. This uncertainty can be frustrating and confusing for both you and the person you care for.

