

# Seeking Support for the First Time

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We're often told to seek support or talk with someone when we find ourselves struggling with our mental health and wellbeing, but what does this look like and how can we go about starting this process? It's important to keep in mind that seeking mental health support can look different for everyone and that the information and suggestions presented here are drawn from individual lived experiences.

## **When should I seek support?**

Anyone can struggle with their mental health and professional support isn't just limited to those with existing mental health conditions. There are no strict guidelines about when or how someone should seek support.

I sought support from a mental health professional for the first time when I:

- Noticed that the way I was thinking and feeling was impacting my ability to engage in school and work;
- Wanted more advice and information from people outside of my family and friends;
- Found that the self-care and self-help strategies and resources I was using were no longer helping me in the way that I needed; and
- Wanted to know more about myself and what I was experiencing, outside of information I was able to find online.

## How should I expect to be treated?

Talking about your mental health can make you feel vulnerable, upset and confused. It's important in this process that the mental health professional you talk to makes you feel safe and comfortable to share your story. This involves a range of things, such as:

- Maintaining confidentiality, meaning that what you say will not be shared to others without your consent unless you or others are making you feel unsafe.
- Taking your values, goals and preferences seriously
- Listening to you without judgement
- Feeling safe to have an open conversation if you feel like the support you're receiving isn't working

Whilst mental health professionals have relevant qualifications and experience in the mental health field, you are the expert of your own experience and understand yourself best. Mental health professionals should always position you as an active agent of your own care, meaning that the way you go about receiving support and the types of support you receive should be directed by you.



When I noticed that walks, journaling and getting a sweet treat weren't as helpful as before, I reached out for mental health support

## **Where and how can I seek support?**

Where you seek support can depend on a range of factors like:

- What type of support you're looking for
- The state that you live in
- The type of area you live in (metro, rural, regional)
- What public transport you have near you
- The costs of a mental health service
- Your access to Medicare and other services requiring proof of residency or citizenship
- Who you might need to let know if seeking mental health support, eg. Some mental health services require consent from a parent or guardian (if you're under 18 or 16 – depending on the service and state) for you to seek support
- For more information about what support options are available for you, check out our page of support services on the Minding Your Mind website.

## **How do I speak to friends or family about seeking support?**

For some young people, access to mental health support requires the permission of parents or guardians. This means that sometimes a conversation may need to happen to access support. For a lot of people, opening up to loved ones about mental health challenges can be difficult. Keep an eye out for a blog post all about disclosing mental health challenges to those around you!