

# Coping with receiving a mental health diagnosis

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## What does being diagnosed with a mental health condition mean for me?

In practice, a mental health diagnosis should function as a tool to help you and the people supporting you communicate about things you may struggle with and things you may find helpful. Every person is different and a mental health diagnosis does not explain all of your challenges or define what you have to do to manage your mental health. Whilst at times it can feel like it, a diagnosis is not there to label you or convey everything about you.

## How receiving a mental health diagnosis can feel

People can feel a range of different things when they're diagnosed with a mental health condition.

<p>You may feel negatively towards a diagnosis because it can make you feel:</p>	<p>You can have positive feelings towards a diagnosis because it:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Like your mental health challenges are 'realer'</li><li>• That you are 'broken' and a 'lost cause'</li><li>• Like a burden to those around you</li><li>• Scared for the future</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Makes you feel understood</li><li>• Explains why you are experiencing something</li><li>• Can help you access the right support</li><li>• Helps you explain your feelings, behaviours and thoughts to other people</li><li>• Validates how you feel</li></ul>

## **Ways a mental health diagnosis can be helpful**

A mental health diagnosis is helpful since it can help guide care and provide you with access to different types of services, accommodations and supports in schools, workplaces and the wider community.

Accommodations and support in **school** or study can look like:

- Access to quiet/wellbeing rooms
- School counselling
- Exam adjustments, such as taking your exam in a smaller, separate room or being allowed to take a sensory fidget into an exam
- Having support from a Student Support Officer or Student Learning Support Officer (to see how these roles differ and information about other supports check out the [different types of professionals](#) on the Minding Your Mind website)

Accommodations and support at **work** can look like:

- Mental health days off
- More days of remote work
- Communication in your preferred form, eg. Having follow-up emails with verbal conversation recorded in writing

Support in the **wider mental health system** can look like:

- Access to diagnosis-specific or complexity-specific mental health services
- Financial and housing support
- Access to see specialists or specific group programs
- Insurance coverage for mental health services if you have private health insurance

Having the correct diagnosis means that you and your supports can know what types of therapy or medications may work best for how you are feeling, thinking and behaving. It does not mean that you must engage in these types of treatment, but it means they are more likely to help you and those who have similar challenges to you.



### **What should I do if a mental health diagnosis doesn't feel right for me and my experiences?**

Although a person such as a psychologist, doctor or psychiatrist is a trained mental health professional, you are the expert on yourself and know yourself best. If you feel that a mental health diagnosis does not accurately describe your mental health challenges or experiences, you can bring this up with your treating professional/s if you feel comfortable or find another mental health professional who can give you a second opinion.

Whilst a doctor may put down a mental health diagnosis on your mental health care plan, or a mental health diagnosis may be put in your hospital records if you seek support from a hospital service, a mental health diagnosis is not kept in any centralised records between services. This means that a mental health diagnosis does not necessarily 'follow you' and you do not need to disclose any mental health diagnoses you have been given to current or future supports, your friends and family or your employer, so long as it does not affect the way you do your job.

## **My experience with receiving a mental health diagnosis**

During the past couple years when I have received mental health support, I discovered, with my supports, diagnoses that I feel fit me and accurately describe my experiences. However, this process took me some time. I needed to talk with a few different people, like my regular psychologist, a clinical psychologist and a psychiatrist to find out what diagnoses best captured what I was experiencing.

One of the first diagnoses I received from a clinical psychologist initially made me feel really heard and understood. However, I found that overtime this diagnosis wasn't really true to my experience and I had misattributed the underlying drivers behind some of my behaviours. I spoke to my regular psychologist about this previous diagnosis and my feelings about it and they agreed that the diagnosis likely wasn't a good fit for me. We worked together to get me an updated assessment which resulted in me receiving my current mental health diagnoses.

The previous diagnosis is still something I'm diagnosed with, despite me and my current psychologist believing it isn't true to my experience. I've been told that I can have a reassessment to 'undiagnose' this but since the diagnosis has no practical impacts on my mental health care this isn't something I've wanted to pursue.

Some people are understandably worried about the consequences of receiving a misdiagnosis and I hope my story has provided some insight into what you can do in these situations. Keep an eye out for more blog posts about advocating for yourself when receiving mental health care!

- Tara