



**Western Cape  
Government**

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Department of Health and Wellness

# **Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month (PDAM)**

**July 2022**

Toolkit

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## 1. Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month (PDAM)

- Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month (PDAM) is commemorated annually in July. Mental Health Day is also commemorated on 11 May where October further marks Mental Health Awareness Month and World Mental Health Awareness Day on 10 October.
- Psychosocial disability is defined as a mental illness (a health condition involving changes in emotion, thinking and behaviour or a combination of these), such as depression or schizophrenia, that prevents someone from being able to function fully within society, for example limiting their access to education or employment<sup>1</sup>. This may be through restricting their ability to concentrate, interact with others, manage stress, or be in certain types of environments<sup>2</sup>.
- People with psychosocial disabilities may experience significant stigma and discrimination, as well as barriers to fully enjoying their human rights<sup>2</sup>. Such stigma worsens the experiences of people with psychosocial disabilities since they may be thought of as weak or dangerous, and face discrimination when looking for employment or accommodation. Such stigma may come to be believed by the person themselves, affecting their ability to look for and access help and support<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> SA Federation for Mental Health. Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month: Mental Health For Everyone, Everywhere, Now And Beyond Covid-19. <https://www.safmh.org.za/psychosocial-disability-awareness-month-mental-health-for-everyone-everywhere-now-and-beyond-covid-19/#:~:text=A%20psychosocial%20disability%20is%20when,to%20access%20employment%20or%20education>

<sup>2</sup> NSW Government. What is psychosocial disability? At a glance. <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/psychosocial/foundations/Pages/psychosocial-what-is.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Holness, Willene. (2016). The invisible employee: Reasonable accommodation of psychosocial disability in the South African workplace. South African Journal on Human Rights. 32. 510-537. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318529296\\_The\\_invisible\\_employee\\_Reasonable\\_accommodation\\_of\\_psychosocial\\_disability\\_in\\_the\\_South\\_African\\_workplace](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318529296_The_invisible_employee_Reasonable_accommodation_of_psychosocial_disability_in_the_South_African_workplace)

## Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month

# Identity and Psychosocial Disability

A psychosocial disability occurs when a mental illness becomes pervasive and disabling



A report of the United Nations High Commissioner defined psychosocial disability as actual or perceived impairment. It is concerned with a person's actual disability or how society views them

It is very important for the person to talk about identity and psychosocial disability. It will enable a person to take ownership of their psychosocial disability and help them manage their diagnosis



Identity involves the qualities, beliefs, personality, appearance and expressions that define a person or group



Developing self esteem and a strong sense of identity are very important for good mental health

When a person identifies with their disability in a positive way, many challenges can be overcome



People with psychosocial disabilities need a positive mindset to maintain their health - it can make a big difference to their recovery



If people are optimistic, it can help them follow a healthy lifestyle and make good choices, which will promote good mental health

Mental Health is the Nation's Wealth



SA Federation for Mental Health



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Source: Identity and Psychosocial Disability. SA Federation for Mental Health.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Identity and Psychosocial Disability. SA Federation for Mental Health. [Infographics - Mental Health Infographics - SAFMH](#)

## 2. Theme

- The [South African Federation for Mental Health \(SAFMH\)](#) will be running the theme **"In My Own Words"**, focusing on self-advocacy and storytelling to amplify the voices of mental health care users (MHCUs), with the aim of highlighting the need for inclusion, acceptance and reducing stigma. The campaign will call for persons with lived experience of mental health conditions to share their stories, in any medium they wish, and SAFMH will compile these into a digital magazine, which they will publish in August 2022. See details in the image below on how to submit stories to [michel'le@safmh.org](mailto:michel'le@safmh.org).
- Research shows that when persons with mental illness, including those with a psychosocial disability share their stories, it can have a positive impact on how the rest of society perceives them.<sup>5</sup> The SAFMH hope that this year's PDAM campaign will harness these stories and provide a platform for different voices to be heard and acknowledged.

**Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month 2022**

**"IN MY OWN WORDS"**

**Share Your Story with Us**

This is a call for persons with lived experience of mental health conditions to share your stories with us. You can share in any medium you wish (either write a story, ask to be interviewed, create a piece of art, write a poem, anything you feel comfortable with).

Submissions can be sent to [michel'le@safmh.org](mailto:michel'le@safmh.org)

  [info@safmh.org](mailto:info@safmh.org)  [www.safmh.org](http://www.safmh.org)  011 781 1852 

<sup>5</sup> American Psychiatric Association, A., 2020. Stigma, Prejudice and Discrimination Against People with Mental Illness. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/stigma-and-discrimination>

# Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month 2022

## "In My Own Words"



Psychosocial Disability (PD) Awareness Month is celebrated annually in July. For 2022 we are running the theme "In My Own Words", focusing on self-advocacy and storytelling to amplify the voices of mental health care users, with the aim of highlighting the need for inclusion, acceptance and reducing stigma.

### Self-Advocacy

The aim of self-advocacy is for persons with PD to decide what their needs and wants are and how they would like to implement an advocacy policy or plan.

#### Layers of self-advocacy:

- **Personal:** be assertive, practice self-care and know your therapy and medication needs
- **Community:** includes working with other advocacy groups and developing good relationships
- **Political:** vote for candidates and representatives who are conscious of your needs

### Stigma

Whilst people may be accepting of the medical diagnosis of a mental health disorder, many people still have a negative view of persons who are diagnosed with a mental illness. Stigma is one of the main barriers faced by persons with PD today.

#### Harmful effects of stigma:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Social isolation
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers, or others
- Fewer opportunities for work, school or social activities

### Storytelling

Storytelling can empower individuals and communities by recognising their experiences and expertise and promoting their sense of empowerment. It has become an important advocacy technique when it comes to breaking stigma.

#### Effective storytelling:

To ensure a story is effective, one can follow a few crucial steps including: getting informed consent from the person sharing their story; collaborating with communities to find storytellers and remembering to craft an engaging story to keep your audiences captivated.

### Our Call-To-Action

- We are calling for the South African government to refresh the Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan in collaboration with mental health care users.
- We call for meaningful commitment from government to listen to the stories of persons with PD and to learn exactly how their needs should be met.
- We call on organisations working with persons with PD to purposefully commit to instituting storytelling as a tool for effective advocacy.



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### **3. Objectives of this toolkit.**

- The objective of this toolkit is to assist activities aiming to address the stigma associated with psychosocial disabilities through education and awareness raising. This toolkit includes a variety of psychosocial disability related topics that can be addressed in support of Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month (PDAM) in July and beyond.
- This toolkit also contains additional resources to promote mental wellness.
- The reader can choose key messages and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) material most suited for their setting. Note that some of the materials used in this toolkit were produced by Cape Mental Health and the South African Federation for Mental Health (SAFMH) and are therefore copyright protected.

### **4. Target audience for this toolkit.**

- Facility based staff and Health Promoters working in health facilities in the Western Cape.
- Western Cape on Wellness (WoW!) Champions to share with their members.
- Community Liaison Officers in Metro and Rural Health Services.
- Community Health Care Workers.

### **5. Channels of communication to use.**

- The toolkit will be shared with the target audience via email.
- The recipients could then use the information in the toolkit to inform activities for Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month (PDAM) and Mental Health Awareness.
- Key messages and IEC material used in this toolkit can be shared via social media pages such as the WoW! Facebook Group (WoW! WesternCape on Wellness) and the Department of Health and Wellness Facebook page (Western Cape Government Health).

## **6. Suggested activities to promote Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month.**

- Promote the South African Federation for Mental Health (SAFMH) project with the theme "In My Own Words", focusing on self-advocacy and storytelling to amplify the voices of mental health care users (MHCUs) (more details above).
- Recipients can further use information in the toolkit to inform activities such as health education talks, information tables, sharing of IEC material and sharing information in the toolkit via email, among others.

## **7. Leaflets to use.**

- The following material can be used to raise awareness and to educate about certain psychosocial disabilities.
- As mentioned above, stigma can occur when people with psychosocial disabilities are perceived to be weak, dangerous, incompetent, socially isolated and excluded, not understood by family, friends, co-workers and others, and have fewer opportunities at school, work or socially.
- For this reason, it is important that there is a better understanding of the different types of mental illnesses.

## 7.1 Depression

- It is natural to feel sad or down at times. This is a normal part of everyday life.
- When someone experiences sad or negative feelings that interfere with normal functioning and that last for at least two weeks, they could be suffering from depression.

### Common symptoms of depression include:

- Ongoing feelings of sadness, anxiety, or “empty” mood.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed, including sex.
- Feelings of hopelessness and gloom.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness, shame.
- Problems with sleeping e.g. sleeplessness, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping.
- Decrease in appetite and weight loss or overeating and weight gain.
- Decreased energy, fatigue and feeling run down.
- Restlessness, irritability, aggression.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions.
- Continuous physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain.
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts.

### How to cope and where to go for help:

- Like other medical illnesses, depression can be treated. In most cases the best treatment for depression is a combination of medication and psychotherapy.
- Psychotherapy or “talk therapy” may help you gain a better understanding of your illness, change negative thoughts and feelings, and learn new behaviours and coping strategies.
- Relaxation techniques, exercise and lifestyle changes have been noted as beneficial in managing depression.

For more information, look at the Depression leaflet attached to this toolkit.

Source: Depression<sup>6</sup>. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

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<sup>6</sup> Depression. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

## 7.2 Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

- Generalized anxiety disorder refers to a condition characterised by extreme worry.
- People with GAD worry about everyday life circumstances (e.g., job responsibilities, finances, the health of family members) or about more minor matters (e.g., household chores, keeping appointments). The worries are experienced as difficult to control, and they are clearly distressing or interfere significantly with work or with social functioning.
- The worrying is accompanied by one or more of a range of physical symptoms, such as restlessness, getting tired easily, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, and disturbed sleep.

### Common symptoms of GAD include:

- People with GAD are prone to expecting the worst, even when there is no apparent reason for it.
- The worry is constant and occurs on most days for at least six months.
- Worrying generally concerns health, family, money or work-related issues.
- The excessive worry interferes with all aspects of functioning and everyday living.
- Physical symptoms commonly associated with GAD are restlessness, irritability, muscle tension, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and difficulty concentrating.
- Cognitive symptoms include difficulty controlling the worrisome thoughts.

### How to cope and where to go for help:

- Keeping a journal is a useful way to identify the stressors in your life and can be beneficial to your therapy.
- Setting up schedules and prioritizing your life may help to manage your time and energy.
- Keep alcohol consumption in moderation and avoid drug use.
- See your doctor or find a support group to help with more effective coping strategies.
- Medication and psychotherapy (talk therapy) may also help. As with most other disorders, a combination of the two is more beneficial.

For more information, look at the Depression leaflet attached to this toolkit.

Source: Generalised Anxiety<sup>7</sup>. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

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<sup>7</sup> Generalised Anxiety. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

### 7.3 Bipolar Disorder

- Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain disorder that causes extreme changes in mood, energy and the ability to function.
- The mood usually swings from overjoyed, irritable and/or aggressive (manic) to sad and hopeless (depression).
- Periods of fairly normal mood can be experienced between cycles.

#### **Common symptoms of a manic episode include:**

- Increased energy, activity and restlessness
- Excessively high, euphoric mood
- Extreme irritability
- Spending sprees
- Distractibility (cannot concentrate)
- Little sleep needed
- Racing thoughts, rapid speech
- Poor judgment (excessive buying, sexual indiscretions)
- Inflated self-esteem
- Increased sociability
- Binge eating, drinking and/or drug use
- Denial that anything is wrong

#### **Common symptoms of a depressive episode include:**

- Persistent depressed mood, most of the day, almost every day
- Decreased interest and pleasure in almost all activities
- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, guilt
- Tiredness, listlessness, restlessness or irritability
- Impairment in concentration
- Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation
- Change in appetite and/or weight gain/loss

#### **How to cope and where to go for help:**

- Bipolar disorder requires long-term treatment, since it is a chronic (ongoing), relapsing illness. The most effective treatment plan includes a combination of medication, psychotherapy, lifestyle changes and social support.
- Psychotherapy (talk-therapy) used to treat bipolar disorder includes cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and family-focused therapy.
- Psychotherapy may help you gain self-insight, change negative thoughts and feelings, and learn new behaviours and coping strategies. Talking about your emotions with a trained professional can help reduce symptoms.

For more information, look at the Depression leaflet attached to this toolkit.

Source: Bipolar Disorder<sup>8</sup>. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

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<sup>8</sup> Bipolar Disorder. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

## 7.4 Schizophrenia

- Schizophrenia is a severe and disabling illness that affects the brain.
- In schizophrenia, there is a tendency towards disintegration of the personality.
- Recurrent episodes of acute psychosis and remission are typical.

**To be diagnosed with schizophrenia, a person must display two or more of the following, each present for a significant portion of time during a one-month period (or less, if successfully treated):**

- Delusions (false personal beliefs resulting from an inability to separate real from unreal experiences)
- Hallucinations (auditory hallucinations - i.e. hearing voices that other people do not hear - is the most common type)
- Disorganised speech (vague thoughts, loose association of ideas, thought-blocking and creation of new words [neologisms])
- Grossly disorganised behaviour (e.g. dressing inappropriately, neglecting personal hygiene, social isolation) or catatonic behaviour
- Negative symptoms (e.g. lack of or decline in emotional response, speech, motivation, and concentration).

### **How to cope and where to go for help:**

- A psychiatrist should examine the patient to make the diagnosis. Tests are carried out to exclude medical illnesses.
- Supported job training, housing and other community support will be needed.
- The person with schizophrenia must learn how to take medications correctly and how to manage side-effects.
- They need to see their doctor often and must learn how to notice early signs of a relapse.
- Family members should be educated about the disease and offered support.

For more information, look at the Depression leaflet attached to this toolkit.

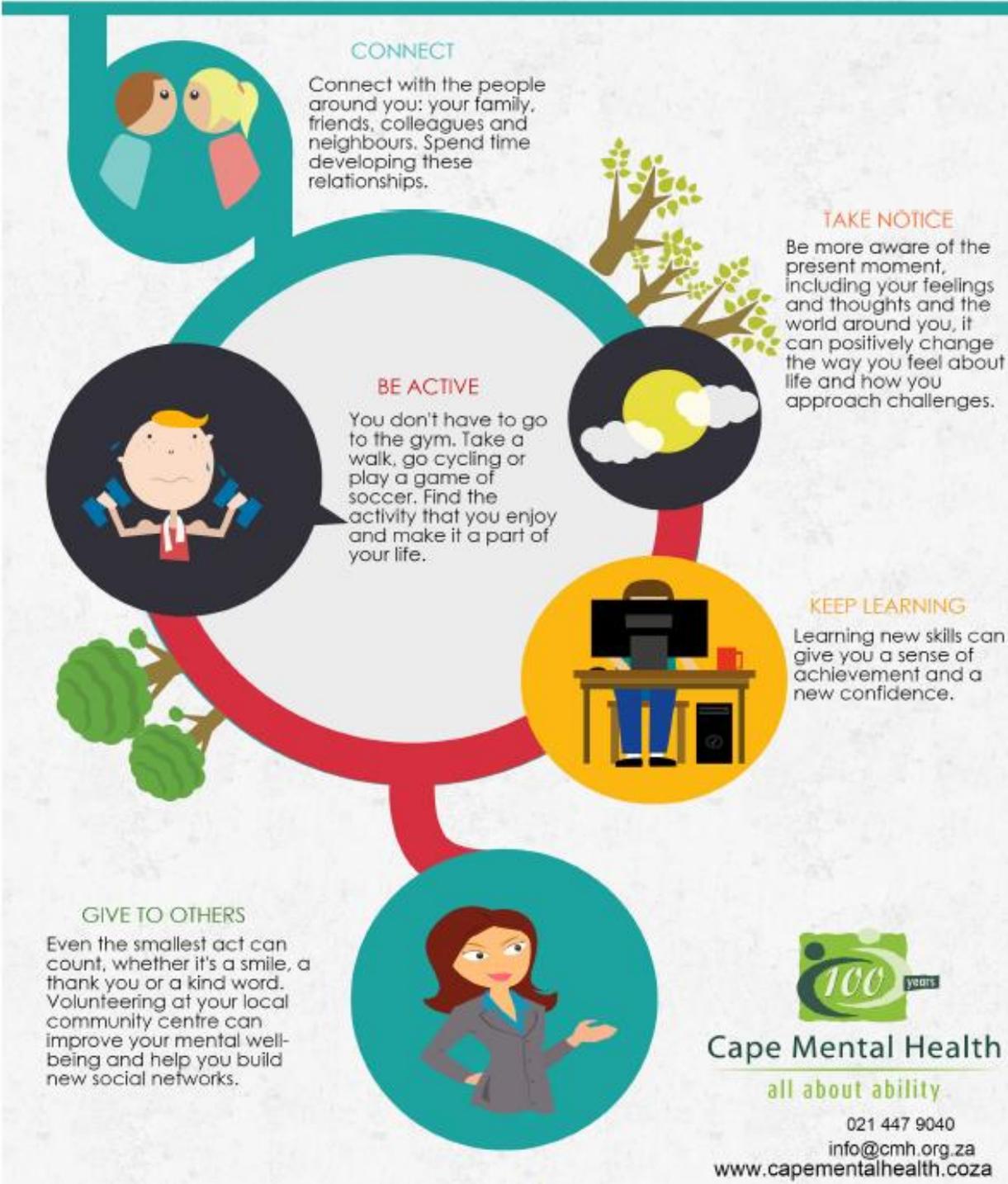
Source: Schizophrenia<sup>9</sup>. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

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<sup>9</sup> Schizophrenia. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

## 8. Additional resources to promote mental wellness.

# 5 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR MENTAL WELL-BEING



**CONNECT**  
Connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.

**TAKE NOTICE**  
Be more aware of the present moment, including your feelings and thoughts and the world around you, it can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

**BE ACTIVE**  
You don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of soccer. Find the activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.

**KEEP LEARNING**  
Learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence.

**GIVE TO OTHERS**  
Even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Volunteering at your local community centre can improve your mental well-being and help you build new social networks.

  
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Source: Cape Mental Health (<https://capementalhealth.co.za/>)

# 5 ways to improve your mental well-being



01

## CONNECT

Connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.



02

## BE ACTIVE

You don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of soccer. Find the activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.



03

## GIVE TO OTHERS

Even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Volunteering at your local community centre can improve your mental well-being and help you build new social networks.



04

## KEEP LEARNING

Learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence.



05

## TAKE NOTICE

Be more aware of the present moment, including your feelings and thoughts and the world around you. This can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.



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# Supporting colleagues with mental health problems

Sometimes it may seem obvious when someone you are working with is going through a hard time, but there is no simple way of knowing if they have a mental health problem. And, in reality, it isn't always necessary to know. It's more important to respond sensitively to someone who seems troubled, than to find out whether or not they have a diagnosis.

The most important thing you can do is to treat colleagues with respect and dignity.

Talking to your colleague is the first step to finding out how they would like you to support them.

It is important to know that while you play a supportive role for your colleagues, you are not their therapist or doctor. Don't try to diagnose someone or second guess their feelings. Encourage them to get professional help.

## How can I help colleagues who are in distress?

Let your colleagues know that you are there if they want to talk. Make sure you can talk somewhere quiet and private.

Try not to be judgemental regarding the circumstances your colleagues may be going through.

Let your colleagues share as much or as little as they want.



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# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

"When terrible things happen, psychological first aid (PFA) is a set of skills that anyone can use when lending a helping hand to those who are affected."

– WHO, 2011

**PFA can be given to any person experiencing psychological or mental distress**

**CAR ACCIDENTS, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, RAPE, VIOLENT CRIME OR NATURAL DISASTERS ARE A FEW OF THE TRAUMATIC EVENTS THAT SOMEONE MAY BE EXPOSED TO IN THEIR LIFETIME.**

## PFA ACTION PRINCIPLES

**LOOK**

*Check for safety.  
Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs.  
Check for people with serious distress reactions.*

*Approach people who may need support.  
Ask about people's needs and concerns.  
Listen to people and help them feel calm.*

**LISTEN**

**LINK**

*Help people address basic needs and access services.  
Help people cope with problems.  
Give information.  
Connect people with loved ones and social support.*

## PREPARE

**Helps prepare by learning about the crisis situation, who is affected and what services and resources are available, as well as safety and security concerns for those affected.**

**PFA AIMS TO MINIMISE HARM FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE SUFFERING, AND TO SUPPORT THEM IN WAYS THAT RESPECT THEIR DIGNITY, CULTURE AND ABILITIES.**

### PROVIDING PFA RESPONSIBLY MEANS:

Respecting people's safety, dignity and rights.  
Adapting what you do to take the person's culture into account  
Being aware of other emergency response measures.  
Looking after yourself.



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## 9. Useful websites to visit

- Cape Mental Health  
<https://capementalhealth.co.za/>
- Mental Health Information Centre South Africa  
<https://mentalhealthsa.org.za/>
- SA Federation for Mental Health  
<https://www.safmh.org/>
- The South African Depression and Anxiety Group  
<https://www.sadag.org/>

## 10. Reference list

1. SA Federation for Mental Health. Psychosocial Disability Awareness Month: Mental Health For Everyone, Everywhere, Now And Beyond Covid-19. <https://www.safmh.org.za/psychosocial-disability-awareness-month-mental-health-for-everyone-everywhere-now-and-beyond-covid-19/#:~:text=A%20psychosocial%20disability%20is%20when,to%20access%20employment%20or%20education>. [Accessed 19 June 2022].
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7. Generalised Anxiety. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.
8. Bipolar Disorder. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.
9. Schizophrenia. Western Cape Department of Health and Wellness.

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