SANE Australia Mental Health Meet-Up
Date: 08/04/2021

**Topic:** Recognising and Responding to Early Warning Signs

**Description:** Learn what a Wellness Recovery Action Plan is, how to develop one, and how to put it into place when we recognise early warning signs so that we can minimise mental health impacts, and cope and be supported as best as possible.

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**TideisTurning (PSW)**

Welcome everyone to today’s Online Mental Health Meet-Up talking about Recognising and Responding Well to Early Warning Signs. This is a new peer support service we are trialling. Because of this, we really value your thoughts on how it goes, so we will send a link to a short survey at the end of this event for you to complete. While this survey is optional, it is a chance to provide feedback for us to improve our services. In case you might need to leave part way through the event, you can find the survey here now: [https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRQ6wyW](https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRQ6wyW)

Tonight, peer support workers @TideisTurning and @HappyCastle will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of early warning signs and action plans to support our wellbeing. Whether you have lived experience of complex mental health issues, you care for someone who does, or both, these are important to understand and talk about. We, all be moving through a number of discussion questions tonight, and it’s entirely up to you how much or how little you are comfortable with sharing. Some of the conversation may be heavy in nature as we talk about mental health struggles. @Jynx, who moderates on the SANE Forums, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety. We’re looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together, and expand our ideas of responding well to early warning signs in order to look after ourselves.
We will be starting the discussion shortly, and will just allow a bit more time for people to log on and join. In the mean time, please go ahead & introduce yourself or say hi if you'd like to :slightly_smiling_face:

That's totally fine Tracy :relaxed:

Hi I'm Tracy might just read along tonight hope that's ok

Hey everyone. Welcome! I'm looking forward to tonight's discussion

Hey Tracy - nice you could join us. Hey HappyCastle and TdeisTurning.

Hello all. This is the 1st live chat I have been able to make and its timely, given the stuff around I've been given today...it's been a Limp Biscuit 'Break Stuff' kinda arvo...

/waves

hi all. looking forward to this session. New to this but will try to keep up.

Yes I do. It allows me to keep on top of my health - both physically and mentally and reach out for additional support if needed.
Hi, I'm Kes, new here too. Looking forward to tonight.

I'll get things started with our first question now. --> Do you think it's important to have a plan for your mental health, in terms of recognising early warning signs? Why or why not?

@CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker I'm glad you could make it!

@Nio2020 I definitely relate to that. It can be really hard to keep track of early warning signs.

yes, but problem for me is that I often lack awareness of deterioration in mental health.

@Nio2020 totes. Having a family member who is willing to be in a caring role helps, however, I've found, esp with 'severe' an multi diagnoses that it can be challenging to have that support avail.

Have you thought about what your early warning signs are? If you're comfortable to share, what are they?
HappyCastle (PSW) For me, isolating and becoming short tempered/agitated

Nio2020 @HappyCastle (PSW) Totally relate! Especially short tempered and irritable! Flying off the handle, hyper critical

Zoe7 Yes I know mine pretty well and am fortunate that members of the forum also know them pretty well so between us there is a high likelihood that they will be picked up early. I have a safety plan that although I do not need now I do still have several of the same warning signs - go quiet, disengage, no interest or motivation to do anything and a lack of energy to try.

Bpdsurvivor Good evening everyone. My early warning signs are agitation, difficulty sleeping and eating, and feeling "out of control"

Jynx (Moderator) Feeling unable to respond to messages from friends, and being less motivated to do anything beyond video games and netflix are ones I noticed in myself recently. Also being very sensitive to sensory stimuli - like getting really irritated by sounds and bright lights.

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker being 'short tempered' is my personality....its a tricky one when its a learned behaviour from childhood.

Kimberley_cptsd same as @Zoe7. quiet, isolate n numb
Siasl

Isolating, not wanting to do things, wanting to quit my sport

Nio2020

I become a horrible person to be around. Hell, I don't even want to be around me!

jacques

i try to prepare for them, but when they arrive i am paralyzed by fear and dread, my mind goes blank and i can't remember them

jacques

I go days of not leaving the house and sleeping a lot to make time go faster, i struggle to want any contact with anyone

Bpdsurvivor

Another one is obsessive cleaning

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker

my warning signs are anger and reaching for too many unhealthy self soothing options; junk food and alcohol. it comes loooooong before isolation.

Nio2020

@Bpdsurvivor Yes!!! Forgot about that one LOL
If you were to ignore your early warning signs, what kinds of things might happen with your mental health? What would we like to avoid by acting early?

OMG @bpdsurvivor I hear you, but only my kitchen...I channel my beloved deceased Nanna who’s severe anxiety prevented her from engaging to her fullest potential...she defaulted to cleaning the kitchen bench obsessively and I do the same, when stressed.

Hi, I’m a bit late joining discussion. Mine are lack of sleep, mind racing, All my senses become super sensitive, slight paranoia.

It would deteriorate to the point of SI

spiral of negative thinking which ends up with me feeling everyone hates me and I hate them

I like to keep an eye on my early warning signs so I can try get on top of the beast before it gets out of hand!
jacques when my anxiety is high I pace a lot, walking up and down the hall, I still don't know why I do it, it is very soothing for me. I guess I feel helpless and it is a way to cope

Nio2020 I'd like to avoid destroying all my relationships and then beating myself up over it which leads to spiralling out of control

Bpdsurvivor If I ignore my warning signs, I end up lashing out t other ppl. By acting early, I can prevent a meltdown. It doesn't get to a “no going back”

jacques i self harm a lot, become suicidal and all my thoughts turn negative, if I am able to break the thought cycle I can stop the negative think but struggle without the other two i have become dependant on SH

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker @tideisturning if I ignore them I become the 'Hulk'. He is my alter ego. So, I try not to ignore them. I have 1 drink of wine, listen to some awesome angry music, like Limp Biscuit, play with my dog or bird, go for a walk, etc...

HappyCastle (PSW) @Nio2020 I feel you on that. Hopefully avoiding going into relationship damage-control

HappyCastle (PSW) So I'm hearing a lot of us feel our relationships suffer when we ignore our early warning signs
Yep. No one likes to be around super cranky angry pants.

Yes, I have acted and sought help to get on top of it quickly.

Jacques, I push my partner away when I get really low because we both struggle with mental health issues and I don’t want to distress her. But I am doing better at opening up to her.

Nio2020
@HappyCastle (PSW) Totally!

TideisTurning (PSW) Have you ever acted in the past when you recognised early warning signs? What happened as a result?

Bpdsurvivor I’m a lot better with self care nowadays when I see red flags and warning signs.

HappyCastle (PSW) @Kimberley_cptsd Grounding exercise sounds like a great strategy

@nio2020 It certainly does feel isolating

Nio2020 It’s really hard being around people who don’t have or get mental health issues. They just don’t get it.
Kimberley_cptsd: I did a grounding exercise to stay in the present rather than get consumed by my anxiety. It helped me stop the thinking.

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker: Love yin yoga! :D

Nio2020: I tried DBT but it didn't help much. I've now started doing Yin Yoga. It's early days yet, but I'm finding it really calming.

jacques: sometimes distracting with games and music really loud to stop myself thinking works, a way of distracting, it does help me cam down faster, and move past my thoughts quicker.

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker: I hear you on the DBT...I feel like its not super helpful for emergency self care, like yoga or breathing exercises and other mindfullness activities are

adge: I do ordinary Hatha Yoga 2 classes every week - it helps me a lot

jacques: what is yin yoga?

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker: How good it feels to get in your body and out of your mind, hey Nio2020?!
Jacques, yin anything is calming to the body and mind...heaps of you tube ones if you are curious :)

I hide all my early warning signs as when I had psychosis breakdowns my family didn’t understand and said hurtful things like “stop it your embarrassing yourself”. I prefer to try and recognise my own signs and seek professional help on my own. I need to maintain my independence.

Yeah! i find moving my body helps. even just 10 minutes a day of light exercise like pilates or just moving myself. helps me remember i am in control of my body

cognitive behavioural thinking (CBT) has helped me sooo much, like @Kimberley_cptsd, it brings me into the present. Music is essential for me - I can stop most panic attacks if I sing

Certain situations or triggers might cause these early warning signs, for example- interpersonal conflict, criticism, feeling like there is too much or too little to do, etc. What kinds of situations would you anticipate to cause difficulties?

thank you CPTSD

it's really really slow yoga. you hold poses for several minutes at a time. There's no downward dog or any fast moving yoga which i hate
Hear ya Kez. Music feeds my soul.

@Kmay I’m so sorry to hear that. It’s great you are able to recognise your own signs and seek help when you need it.

I’ve got little post-it notes around the house reminding me to ‘take three deep breaths’ at random points. It helps to remind me to slow down sometimes.

my work is a massive trigger - triggers come at me every day from every direction.

@kes, good point about singing because it’s all to do with the breath in slowing down your fight or fight mode.

criticism is a big one for me, when other people express anger even if not directed at me. social situations like being in a cafe or mall. before my breakdown i was busy all the time.. then covid i had to slow down i couldn't cope.. also romantic songs trigger me. movies about happy families or romance films haha.. at the moment im sensitive to a lot of stuff still.

Hi Adge - feeling a bit invisible myself tonight
Jacques: Having contact with family fills me with dread, also working or being in a place I can't escape from, if I feel trapped I freak right out. Due to past abuse. Also having people tell me to get over it or I'm faking it for attention really hurts.

Adge: Hi Zoe7 - I've been here all along (shortly after start) - just cannot keep up with the pace of posts flowing down screen....

Jacques: Zoe and Adge, just go at your own pace. Sane Jynx moderator is there any way to add a timer to slow down chats?

Kmay: Thanks Happy Castle, I haven't always been able to recognise signs. It's taken 10 years and an excellent psychologist to work it out! Oh and a good effective medication that I've taken regularly for many years.

Bpdsurvivor: Isolation and boredom affect me a lot.

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker: @tideisturning anything can be triggering. Phone calls, email notifications, family, yes Jacques, I hear you! I feel my breath quickening and becoming more shallow when I know I have to speak with certain family members.

Jynx (Moderator): No way to slow down the pace unfortunately, but we do provide transcripts at the end if you'd like to find anything you may have missed :)

Nio2020: Had a great GP and found out she had left the practice this week - massive trigger as it took me years to find a good GP.
Good to see you Jacques - Assuming you're the same Jacques I know of.....

@kimberly I hear u...I had 1 particular song I couldn't listen to, but exposure therapy fixed that. luckily!

A Wellness Recovery Action Plan is a tool you can develop to provide guidance towards recovery and long-term stability. It is based on your personal strengths and needs, and can be drawn upon for support when you recognise early warning signs. We will provide a link at the end of tonight's group to a resource to help you develop your own Wellness Recovery Action Plan :)

@nio2020 that is so devastating...been there many times. It's shitty.

@Nio2020 That can be a really big trigger. It can be so hard to find good supports

Stress is a major trigger of mine.

That's tough, but sounds like you've found a clever work around
Kimberley_cptsd  i get triggered by jogging in my complex. i get home and have to rest for half an hour on my bed because of the anxiety. so now i exercise using youtube vids in my rooms mostly

jacques  yes it is me Adge :)
jacques  maybe talk to the tech guys Jynx, i know these webchats do have a function to add a timer between chats

Jynx (Moderator)  Thanks for the feedback @jacques - we do provide a link at the end for a survey, might be a good idea to pop your suggestions in there.

Kmay  For example, work stress and helping my father with his declining health and eventual passing cause relapses.

TideisTurning (PSW)  You may be quite familiar mental health crises and crisis safety planning. Something that Wellness Recovery Action Plans encourage is thinking about what happens after a crisis. What kind of care and support do you imagine you would need to recover after a crisis?

Bpdsurvivor  A check in phone call by my treating team often helps
@bpdsurvior is that through the public system?

Zoe7

I have an amazing GP who checks in regularly.

Kes

@Bpdsurvivor, boredom is huge for me too. It's hard to do nothing, be bored and anxious, but I can't do anything because I'm so low and tired - so many contradictions.

Nio2020

Just having a support team would be a plus, especially for those of us without family or few friends. I have a good psychologist thank god, but have lost my gp who was part of my care team.

HappyCastle (PSW)

Aftercare is super important and often overlooked.

jacques

I struggle to find help, I push anyone away that wants to help me. I fear getting better, I know that sounds stupid, I fear the unknown.

Bpdsurvivor

Hey @kes, I do understand where you are coming from. For me, because Boredom and isolation is a trigger, I fill my day up SOOOO much that I have no chance to breathe. That’s my shortfall. I haven’t yet found the balance. Even tonight, I rushed home to get on this chat. I’ve been out since 7:30am!
adge  Ok thanks Jynx - I am reading & Smiley Facing or Thumbs-Upping nearly every post. Yet cannot type fast enough to have anyone read my contribution

Kimberley_cptsd  i think anger can be a strength when we channel it into determination to be resilient.

Zoe7  I am actually really calm in a crisis but then have to deal with the aftermath myself - which means lots of self care and reaching out to my team.

TideisTurning (PSW)  This is an amazing resource that indicates what strengths you have. We recommend completing the free 15 min questionnaire after the end of this group :)  
https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register

TideisTurning (PSW)  Another thing that Wellness Recovery Action Plans encourage you to think about are your strengths. Have you found there are strengths of yours that have helped you get through difficult times before, that you’d be open to sharing?

Jynx (Moderator)  @adge Your responses are definitely appreciated, be they reactions or written responses :) Can get a little hectic of course! But it’s good to have you on board.

Bpdsurvivor  @CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker, yes, the public system. I’ve never been in the private system
HappyCastle (PSW)  Definitely being good at boundaries! Putting them in place and respecting others. It helps with the damage control

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker  @kimberly I hear you and agree! I have had many a person tell me that I'm great at 'getting things done', as I do exactly that...turn my anger into determination and grit.

Kes  I hear you @Bpd survivor. My pendulum swings more from extreme to extreme than hanging in the middle but I am finding strategies to bring it closer than it used to be.

jacques  my strength is my partner and her beautiful children, i don't want to hurt them in any way, so i try to stay safe because i have reason to now with them. i guess having something to lose has helped me a lot

Jynx (Moderator)  @Kes I like that imagery - I'm all about balance

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker  on strengths, I like to use my determination and grit in advocacy to help others...hence the peer work role :)

Kmay  My strength is........I don’t know........
@CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker So true. Going through this makes us very useful as peer workers. Empathy is one thing I've gained from this.

@Kmay Showing I think showing up for events like this, to share your experiences is a strength.

@nio2020 Vulnerability is a strength too. It takes a lot of guts to be authentic and show vulnerability.

adge Balance Yes - That's what my daily Breathing/ Mindfulness Meditations Do (are for) - They bring me Balance, in Mood & energy.

Kimberley_cptsd even if we can't think of any strength in the present, we can think of how we got through hardships in the past and how we really are a strong person to get to today.

@nio2020 Agreed. I'm a heart on my sleeve kinda person.

@Kmay Couldn't agree more @Nio2020
Kimberley_cptsd totally agree @nio2020 to have the vulnerability and courage to share with another person.. helps us face our feelings of shame and fear..to cry in front of others, to not be ok , to say how we really feel.

Kimberley_cptsd i do watercolour paintings of the sky and clouds. mixing the colors and painting helps me be mindful and calm

HappyCastle (PSW) Watching Parks and Recreation!

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker As amazing as you all are, I have to go...family are squawking at my for dinner...

adge Thanks Jynx - Much appreciated.

TideisTurning (PSW) A Wellness Recovery Action Plan includes a Wellness Toolbox, that is, a list of activities or things that you can do or focus which may help you feel better. It is helpful for these activities to be as specific as possible- for example, instead of “listening to music” specify the type of music, or your favourite album. What kinds of things might you include in your own personal Wellness Toolbox?

Jynx (Moderator) Nature is definitely a big one @nio2020!

Kimberley_cptsd i also make things from airdry clay..something tactile is really good for when im stressed. it can turn what feels like is going to be an overwhelmingly bad day into just a bad hour

CPTSD&BPD Peer Worker lol HappyCastle I love that show...love Amy Pohler (sp)

jacques so be very specific about the things that work, tidels? is it a sensory box, or written?
Nio2020

Movement of some kind....dancing, yin yoga, walking... and if it's out in nature, even better

HappyCastle (PSW)

@CPTSD&BPD thank you for stopping by. Your contribution has been so helpful for us all

Kimberley_cptsd

the one other thing that gets me through every morning mood is playing with my cats and feeding them and watching them. always improves my mood to care for something else. animals are so good.

Kmay

Aqua aerobics, Pilates, visiting a friend, having time to myself.

TideisTurning (PSW)

The specific activities you might engage in @Jacques :)

Zoe7

Adge - see you on the other side

Nio2020

@Kimberley_cptsd yes! animals are great

adge

Yoga classes, Breathing/ Mindfulness Meditations, Energising emotional music - Like ACDC & Kiss
Bpdsurvivor
Visit my nieces and nephews

HappyCastle (PSW)
@adge, I agree with the music! I love dancing around and getting body, mind (and heart) going at once

Jynx (Moderator)
Omg Adge your cat's name is Jelly? That is adorable!

TideisTurning (PSW)
Who might you imagine writing up a Wellness Recovery Action Plan with? By yourself? Or might it be helpful for you to collaborate with your therapist, GP, a friend, family, a partner, etc.?

 jacques
Kimberley i love animals, they help ground me too

 adge
Plus watching & Listening to my Canaries & Finches Singing, & Cuddling my Cat Jelly

HappyCastle (PSW)
@jacques is that something you would feel comfortable doing on your own?

 jacques
i would have to write one myself, i don't trust anyone to help me do it, i can't let family in, they don't know how much has gone on for me and i don't want to upset them
Kes

I'm gentle with myself nowadays. I know when to try hard, not give in to my mental having a mental. Some times I've found that isn't the best for me. Now if I really think I'll be better having a day under the doona, ignoring phone calls etc, that's also in my Wellness tool kit.

Kmay

I would also write myself, as every time I mention even just a small detail about my mental health issues my family members shut down. They don't have anything to say to me. I trust myself to look after myself.

jacques

I don't know HappyCastle, I have had to up till now, I would have to manage

Nio2020

@Kes Love that! Yes, that's something I'm also learning to do. That, and checking in with myself regularly.

Jynx (Moderator)

@Kes I really love that and think it's so important - we all deserve a day where we are beholden to no one. Guilt-free laziness!

Nio2020

I agree. Not many people I could do this with.

adge

Yes Jynx - I love the name Jelly - Never would have thought of it myself. That's what the Rescue Cat people named her. So I kept it as Jelly.

Jynx (Moderator)

@Adge well it's just delightful :smile_cat:
Kimberley_cptsd  
i do it with my therapist. and as i get stronger i can add more things

TideisTurning (PSW)  
At what point would you decide who to share your Wellness Recovery Action Plan with? Who might you share it with?

Kmay  
I would share it with my psychologist

Nio2020  
I used to be in DBT group and it was nice to share it with others in that group. It's good to share this stuff with people who get it.

jacques  
i would share mine with my partner, she is the only one i have told everything, but i worry it would be too much pressure on her

HappyCastle (PSW)  
@kimberley_cptsd that's so wonderful

Kimberley_cptsd  
me and my housemate worked on a plan when i first had a breakdown and i was really depressed. we stuck it on my fridge. 3 things positive about me i could look at every time i went to the fridge and a reminder to shower, change my clothes that day and walk for 10 minutes. depending how i felt around the block or around the rooms in the house. that was great at the time and got me through a dark period

Kimberley_cptsd  
haha yeah@nio2020 @happycastle. my housemate is a qualified counsellor. it came in handy when i had the breakdown, thats for sure.
@Kimberley_cptsd sounds like a wonderful housemate!

good night jacques. Lovely to have you in the group

HappyCastle (PSW) Goodnight @jacques, it was a pleasure you having you here with us!

night everyone

Have you learned anything helpful from others experiences here tonight that you might be able to apply in your own life? If yes, what did you learn?

i might call it a night my forum family, i am getting tired and need to rest

@Jynx, what I mean is if I'm having panic attacks, some times I know I need to fight it and go out or whatever. Other times I know in my heart it's not a battle to have and so I surrender I guess to the panic allowing myself to stay under the doona where I'm safe. Nothing wrong with having lazy days ever, but not what I meant and it's an important difference. No offence...

You're lucky @kimberley
Nio2020  Yes, it's been really useful hearing about other people's experience. I find it invaluable. It makes me feel less alone.

Jynx (Moderator)  @Kes thanks for making the distinction - no offence taken and I can totally see what you mean.

Kimberley_cptsd  i learnt that a lot of us share similar early warning signs. helps me feel more "normal" hehe

Kes  night jaques

HappyCastle (PSW)  I've really enjoyed hearing everyone's thoughts and have really taken away a theme that we all show deep concern for the people around us we care for

Nio2020  It'll be good reading the transcript too at a more leisurely pace :D

Kmay  This has been a great experience for me. I've never done it before and I also feel less alone tonight.
Kimberley_cptsd        im just soo grateful for this chat. im aussie but actually doing volunteer work in north sumatra.. and had a breakdown here cant get back to aus for time being with covid. so having this sort of thing to connect with is great for my mental health because i am in a country where there is not as much awareness and openness about mental health as back home. thanks all :D

TideisTurning (PSW)     Tonight’s topic may have brought up some heavy feelings as we talked about mental health crises. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do?

Jynx (Moderator)        I learned about Yin Yoga! Something I’m excited to try. And also echoing the above re: learning how many similarities we have helps to break down potential barriers to asking for help

Bpdsurvivor             So good to hear @kmay

Bpdsurvivor             Sleep LOL

HappyCastle (PSW)        Going to play with the dogs!

HappyCastle (PSW)        @Kimberley_cptsd that’s so wonderful to hear you have found that connection here. Sending you best wishes from the other side of the world!

Kmay                    I will do my normal,’going to bed routine” which relaxes me.
Nio2020       cup of tea

Nio2020       @Kimberley_cptsd sending you much love. It must be so hard.

Kimberley_cptsd       i got this eye steam mask thing im gonna try and relax with it..pamper myself haha.
                        thanks all :D

adge       :D

TideisTurning (PSW)       We’d like to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this
                            Online Peer Group Chat. As we’re trialling this service, we’d love to hear any feedback
                            you may have. It will only take a few minutes to complete. Please click this link:
                            https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW

Kes       Have something yumbo for dinner.

Jynx (Moderator)       Thanks for coming, being open and feeling brave enough to be vulnerable everyone

HappyCastle (PSW)       @Nio2020 lovely having you! Hope to see you around the forums
Kmay  Goodnight everyone, thank you

Kes  Thank you for being here everyone, it's been really good:pray:

Nio2020  Thank you so much for organising this. It was really great to be able to chat to kindred spirits. I really enjoyed interacting with you all. Look forward to seeing you in the next chat.

Jynx (Moderator)  XD
Kes  I help pack up chairs

Kes  Is this where everyone has left the room and I'm last to leave so

Kimberley_cptsd  thanks, checking out the links now. see you next fortnight all :D byeeeee

Kes  Goodnight...thank you
Here are some further resources we recommend having a look at:

Guide to developing a Wellness Recovery Action Plan:


Strengths survey:
https://www.viacompetences.org/survey/account/register

@Kes lol appreciated!

Take care @Kimberley_cptsd

Bye everyone, Good topic, good suggestions & ideas.

@Bpdsurvivor same!

Thank you! So happy to have made it!

Jynx and PSWs, thank you very much for your time. @tide... thanks for the reminders. I really appreciate them, and needed each of them!

@Bpdsurvivor aww thank you, and so glad it was helpful for you :)
Thanks TideisTurning, Thanks Jynx - Yes I'm on the mailing list

TideisTurning (PSW)

Thank you for joining, and we hope you enjoyed the discussion. If you'd like to be informed when our next Online Mental Health Meet-Up will be taking place, you can sign up to our mailing list here https://www.sane.org/peer-support/online-mental-health-meet-up