

SANE AUSTRALIA

SANE Australia Mental Health Meet-Up

Date: 20/05/2021

Topic: Working and Studying with Complex Mental Health Issues

Description: Work &/or study can take up a large part of our lives and there can be unique challenges associated with this; it's important to think about how we navigate our mental health in these spaces. In this group we will share our thoughts, experiences, and strategies with each other.

TideisTurning(PSW)

Hi everyone! Welcome everyone to today's Peer Group Chat talking about working and/or studying with complex mental health issues. 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 chat 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 access the survey here now:
https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW Tonight, peer support workers @TideisTurning and @HappyCastle will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of working and/or studying with complex mental health issues. Whether you have lived experience of complex mental health issues, you care for someone who does, or both, we hope you'll be able to gain something from the discussion this evening. We'll 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. @Pisces_1 who moderates on the SANE Forums, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety. If you're having any technical difficulties, please see our FAQ (<https://www.sane.org/peer-support/peer-group-chat/chat-faqs#what-if-i-am-having-a-tough-time-and-need-immediate-support>) or message @Pisces_1 We're looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together and expand our ideas about working and/or studying with complex mental health issues.. Lastly, just so you're aware, the transcript of this group will be made available for download afterwards on SANE's Peer Support website.

Shaz51

hello @tideisturning

HappyCastle (PSW)

Welcome to all the new comers tonight!

Tanya82a

newbie here tonight

HappyCastle (PSW)

Happy to have you here!

Tanya82a

thank you and this is a good day to be here too

TideisTurning (PSW)

We'll be starting the discussion shortly, and will just allow a bit more time for people to log on and join

TideisTurning (PSW)

**Welcome everyone! Feel free to introduce yourselves.
I'm@TideisTurning**

HappyCastle (PSW) Hi again everyone. I'm HappyCastle, super excited to be talking about this tonight. Definitely a topic that is close to my heart and has been a factor impact on my mental health over the years

tesorosystem hey people

HappyCastle (PSW) Hey @tesorosystem

Tanya82a hi everyone !!!

pisces_1 (Moderator) Hi i'm pisces_1 nice to meet you all!

Paladin67 Hi all ;-)

tesorosystem how is everyone?

HappyCastle (PSW) wave

Tanya82a today i am low

HappyCastle (PSW) Doing well, cold but well thanks, and yourself?

Paladin67 Complex

HappyCastle (PSW) Sorry to hear that @Tanya82a. I hope being here all together and sharing this space will be helpful for you

tesorosystem mmm, im dissociating a lot and chronic fatigue is acting up again

TideisTurning (PSW) What are some of the concerns you have working or studying with complex mental health issues, and/or supporting someone navigating this? How do you cope?

Judi9877 Hi there everyone! Looking forward to the chat tonight.

Paladin67 Do we answer?

HappyCastle (PSW) Hi @Judi9877 so glad you could make it, @Paladin67, yes we would love to hear your answers

Zoe7 Hi everyone. I have to compartmentalise my life a lot and give myself time for self-care.

Tanya82a i dissociated earlier this year and now i am struggling with my studies, home life, family life and love life

TideisTurning (PSW) Only as much as you feel comfortable @paladin67

Judi9877 For me personally it's motivation and keeping with the course I'm enrolled in. My mental health can really affect my performance at ti

Neverending Low motivation and energy with less interest in studying. My topic was interesting, but depression has made it boring.

tesorosystem @TideisTurning ahahahahaha we do not cope. we have three assessments due in 16 hours and we haven't started any of them. it's constant struggle between trying to get work done, coping with mental health issues and coping with physical health issues on top of everything.

Tanya82a i have been spiralling for a while and struggle to find support etc to help me stop or slow down whats happening

Paladin67 I am a new alter that's taken prominence and took a leave of absence from Uni study, but now I am realising I am not as smart or skilled as the other one (who I used to be).

Paladin67 So I'm trying to work out what's next

Tanya82a @tesorosystem i know that feeling too well i was 4 days late on an assignment

tesorosystem im part of a really huge system and we're really bad at keeping track of what's done or needs to be done

Paladin67 I can't keep up here

HappyCastle (PSW) @Paladin67 that sounds like quite the journey you're on at the moment. I'm glad you're able to come and share your experiences with us

Siasl Low motivation, executive dysfunction (a problem for me even when I'm relatively well, but worse when I'm not). I've started and not completed a number of courses

HappyCastle (PSW) I have really struggled with balancing priorities in the past. Trying to work to a decent standard whilst also maintaining my health. Challenging especially when stress is a trigger for my mental illness

Paladin67 He was 1/2 way through a Psych degree with a GPA 7, and I feel totally out of 'my' depth

Judi9877 Time management is also another issue for me. If the topic is boring or I have trouble with the teachers, it makes it hard for me to focus and learn.

tesorosystem @Judi9877 yeah same

HappyCastle (PSW) Having trouble when it's boring is relatable for me @Judi9877

Judi9877 @HappyCastle nice to know I'mnot the only one!

TideisTurning (PSW) Definitely not the only one @Judi9877!

Tanya82a i get distractd too easily, when covid was strong and we had to stay at home I would get bored or get distracted and start playing my switch. my husband was angry for it but i still passed the units now this session i dont turn up to tutorials or lectures

adge Working or studying with complex mental health issues is far more challenging - I completed my Degree (BA) + PostGradDipSC, whilst unaware of my having Complex PTSD

Judi9877 @adge wow! What an achievement! I'm proud of you! I had mental health at uni but covered it so well that a lecturer didn't believe I could have depression.

Neverending Not much support around either. I'm in rural Victoria and joined GROW for a few years but all the inner bickering made me leave. In fact, I have to go to court next week to get an intervention order on a fieldworkers partner for threatening me. I give them 1 star out of 5.

Tanya82a I'm trying to do a bachelor of nursing at the moment and I have struggled every year I have been there. I have supports but not enough for what I need. I have borderline personality disorder, and all it takes is one little thing to set me off and I either disassociate, spiral with my emotions and just not function. It's really crippling.

adge Thanks Judi 9877. Extremely draining (taxing) - Very hard to maintain Focus & effective Time-Management (scheduling)

Tanya82a My husband of 20 yrs is at a point of walking out with the kids cos he doesn't want them hurt any more.

Paladin67

too much. I can't keep up. Good night all

TideisTurning (PSW)

And now a question from our community: "What is the best approach to special considerations and leniency with university exams and assignments? I signed up for this when I was at uni but I found that it didn't always work. Now that I am doing post grad study I don't ever submit for special consideration or extensions. I am also entitled to privacy and doing this makes sure it stays that way. Is this okay?"

adge

Yes Judi9877 - Similar with me (at Uni many years ago) - Was probably Depressed, yet no-one knew.

Tanya82a

thats a hard one because each person is different if you can get everything in on time etc then it shouldnt be an issue. if you tell them then ppl know, dont tell them then dont its all up to you

Tanya82a

i'm a heart on my sleeve and tell everyone my problems even when the problem isnt a problem. i see it a totally different way than everyone else

Judi9877

I would say utilise the special considerations as they're there for a reason. I found my uni very understanding and accepting when I needed to use it. Tafe is a bit different though.

Shaz51 Hello @tideisturning , @happycastle , my mr shaz and i are working self employed now after soo many years of losing jobs

Judi9877 Hi @Shaz51 nice to see you!

Shaz51 hello @judi9877

Tanya82a my husband is self employed he tried to do 9-5 job but his mental health didnt like it now his mental health is screwed because of me

adge Whilst at Uni studying - I had to Apply for Special Exam Conditions. I got very low Blood Sugar Levels if I did not eat. So had to be allowed to eat a small amount during an Exam, especially a long 3 hour Exam - Otherwise I could not function.

HappyCastle (PSW) Sorry everyone, I dropped out there for a while!

Shaz51 @Tamy82a my husband works self employed but could not do it without me and he finds it very hard @tideisturning , @happycastle

Neverending I'm trying the 'self employment' thing. Did you know business owners suffer more depression than the general population with all the added pressures. It's not just 9 to 5...you take the work home with you and there's so many other things involved.

Shaz51 very true @neverending , always maintenance to be done

HappyCastle (PSW) @Neverending there sure are a lot of unique challenges to working for yourself. Is there something in particular you are finding hard to balance?

Neverending I'm single so have to self motivate. Mornings...just finding the motivation and energy is difficult...the worst problem for me.

MsKitty I'm in the position where I have

HappyCastle (PSW) @Neverending that's absolutely a challenge

TideisTurning (PSW) If you care for someone who is in an unsupportive, stressful work or study environment that is challenging to their mental health, it can be hard to sit by and watch, especially if it's not an environment they can quickly or easily get out of. If you have experience like this, how have you managed to take care of yourself? Are there points you have reached out for help for yourself?

HappyCastle (PSW) That's a great question @TideisTurning

Judi9877 Just out of interest, how do people motivate themselves to study as I'm going to tafe next semester and would like advice please?

TideisTurning (PSW) **Great question @Judi9877!**

HappyCastle (PSW) @Judi9877 that's really exciting. So happy you are planning on going to TAFE. I think it's really important to be kind to yourself and know that motivation can ebb and flow

Neverending 2 yrs ago I was going into overwhelm and having month panic attacks (similar to heart attack symptoms). I'd go to the ER....but it was only stress. So then I tired LifeLine and they spoke me out of it for 20 minutes and prevented a trip to the ER. They got me to focus on other things to distract myself.

pisces_1 (Moderator) @Judi9877 Hopefully you will enjoy the topic so it doesn't end up feeling like a chore

Tanya82a that is a good thing @neverending

Judi9877 @pisces1 It's a mental health course that hopefully I'll get into since I've done part of it before and had to drop out of due to mental illness

TideisTurning (PSW) **Taking sick days for physical health is commonplace. It can be all too easy to convince yourself that poor mental health isn't a good enough reason to take time off work. If you're physically able to work, why not go in and get paid? But remember that your mental health is just as important to your overall well-being as your physical health. Just like any bout of illness or bodily distress, your mind needs time to rest and recover.**

" <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/how-to-take-a-mental-health-day#When-to-take-one> Have you ever taken a mental health day off work or study? What have these experiences been like for you?

HappyCastle (PSW) @MsKitty returning to study as a mature age student can be super daunting. For myself when I went back to study I wrote a list of the reasons why I wanted to study...it helped me when I was overwhelmed with worrying about it. Reminded me I was there for me

Judi9877 @TideisTurning I'm scared to take days off for my mental health because I've done this before and then struggled to return to the course. I've also felt guilty about it despite needing the time off.

Neverending @MsKitty I was having a group DBT session weekly for a few weeks and one of the counsellors only just started doing his psychotherapy course at aged 50. He has a HUGE mortgage and used to be a police officer. I'm 50 myself and just starting out, so many our age are starting anew. I'm not so concerned about it now. BUT the pressure is on to do something and make progress since we are ageing.\

Tanya82a yep and i let my daughter in yr 7 do it too because its not worth her breaking down

Shaz51 @tideisturning , as a unpaid carer and wife and partner I will watch and if my mr shaz needs to have a day off i will rearrang a afternoon or a day foo from our work

- Jacque9898 I hate that my lecturers dont understand my Inhabiting to do assessments sometimes because it's mental health related
- HappyCastle (PSW) @Judi9877 It would be so wonderful if we could ask for what we need without that sense of guilt. There is still so much stigma around mental health. If people can't see it sometimes they just can't understand
- TideisTurning (PSW) Community question: "It would help if the general public were more conscious that the way a person is acting may be due to a mental health issue. That way, instead of assuming the person is a bad person, they could consider that they may instead have a mental health issue that is causing them to come across as someone they are not." -> Sometimes a lack of understanding or stigma from others can affect us. Have you had experiences like this? What did that look like? Have you ever spoken up to address stigma or a lack of understanding, and has this helped?**
- tesorosystem I've had to continuously tell people not to refer to me or other people with mental health issues as "crazy" or "scary" just because of the issue :(
- Neverending Anger due to mental health issue or addiction is a difficult one! I've often judged the person to be just an angry person but later got more perspective and realized it was a reaction to something else. Not them. I learnt when someone is about to be violent, in my case he was drunk, validation and agreeing with them calms them down.

Judi9877	I had this experience as a 2nd year teaching student. When I mentioned my depression, the principal said I'd never make it as a teacher and hence , I never did. I graduated with an Arts degree instead that I'm proud of in politics
HappyCastle (PSW)	I have absolutely had those experiences @tesorosystem. People throw words around a lot without the understanding. I think stigma is a huge barrier in reaching out for help in workplaces.
Jacquie9898	I've had that issue so much in my life particularly from teachers growing up... I'm Autistic & with ADHD & Anxiety
Bpdsurvivor	Today at work, I spoke to someone and told the. Having a MI does mean you are a failure, nor weak. This is a stigma I've had to address
tesorosystem	Since all of my stuff has been around and I've been aware of it since i was young i've been very good at hiding it so that i dont get judged.

Tanya82a i hate the word narcissist, that word is thrown around so much lately. its lost its meaning

HappyCastle (PSW) It sounds like a few of us have had some pretty negative experiences with stigma. I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the strength of everyone in this room. Thank you for sharing, for showing up and getting up to fight these challenges everyday

TideisTurning (PSW) Do you mean doesn't @bpdsurvivor?

MsKitty I've found that there is still so much stigma around mental health. I admitted to having a mental health issue at my last place of employment. I was made redundant shortly after. I have absolutely no doubt that it was related to my disclosure as a similar role was advertised a few months after. It was cleverly worded and structured and enough time had elapsed to avoid an unfair dismissal claim.

Zoe7 I have had the opposite experience - not only supported but aided in returning to work.

Neverending The problem is so many have never experienced real depression. They don't know how bad it can feel especially chronic long term depression and anxiety. I have a friend who's in his late 60s....very smart guy once said, "I can't understand depression".... he thinks we can just talk ourselves through it and it's all a logical process. So wrong.

Judi9877	I'm scared to tell people I have schizophrenia here in Victoria because of a serious crime that happened a few years ago in Melbourne city. People think I'll act out just like that person did.
HappyCastle (PSW)	@Zoe7 that's fantastic. I'd love to hear more about that.
Tanya82a	i dont like letting people know I have BPD or mental health issues because of the stigma around it. I suppose getting into the health industry helps as they want to work around my issues and not see me struggle
tesorosystem	I still live with family and they don't believe that mental health is real so that's very difficult when i'm trying to heal
Neverending	Sometimes it's difficult to hide it. I'm often asked if I'm feeling okay since I'm always so pale and always look so down.
Tanya82a	im looking at trying to get onto the NDIS and get some more supports

Judi9877 @Tanya82a I agree with BPD. Certain medical facilities can be so negative towards me with it that I refuse to go there unless absolutely necessary

tesorosystem @Neverending Same! and because when i walk i wince but that's just physical illness stuff

Bpdsurvivor So many places are trained NOT to provide ongoing support for ppl with BPD

Zoe7 My initial experience was very negative but I did not let it get to me and asked to be moved. I was then placed in a school closer to home for a year where I was not only supported but checked in on regularly and encouraged to take time when needed - which I did. I then moved to the school I am in presently (2nd year) teaching what I love and fully supported as well.

Tanya82a agree @BPDsurvivor . if you have BPD most therapists dont want to deal with you as you are placed in the too hard basket

Bpdsurvivor I used to try and hide my MH....now, because I e got a recovery story to tell, I advertise it pretty much. I,Äôve got a SANE forums laptop window shutter attached to my work laptop for everyone to see

Neverending There is a psychologist in rural Victoria with a doctorate degree. She does DBT but cost \$300 an hour. Even with the subsidy of 6 sessions you're \$170 out of pocket. But she is the rare few who actually do get results, she's brilliant.

HappyCastle (PSW) @Bpdsurvivor that is SO great!!!!

MsKitty @ HappyCastle (PSW) I appreciate your kind words and feedback. I really am struggling with myself and hearing this makes it sound possible. I just need to keep reminding myself ,

Tanya82a i've been told to go to robina private hospital on the gold coast to "get support" but cant afford \$750 a day

adge Well I'm 52 Neverending - No we cannot Simply "Talk ourselves out of Depression" - In my Case it would be: "Talk myself out of Complex PTSD Trauma Response" & Dissociation - No that does not work

Neverending @Tanya82a there are many resorts that charge around\$20,000 for a month and offer just a plethora of treatments. You can get them all individually yourself. They do yoga, meditation, counselling, etc. And there's a group spirit that makes you feel better but when you go home it soon wears off...along with your 20K.

TideisTurning (PSW) **“How do you deal with a workplace that is not supportive of staff with mental health issues, to the point that they make it even harder for you?”**

MsKitty @Neverending thanks for sharing your experience and story. I genuinely appreciate it. I've been battling this internal struggle about restarting my life from scratch. Thank you for your wise words and inspiring me with hope.

HappyCastle (PSW) That's a good point to consider. I think learning to advocate for ourselves is super important for our recovery so getting the support you need to be able to do that is really helpful

Neverending You feel like leaving!

Tanya82a i quit, ive done it many times before and then i have an identity crisis and ususally dye and cut my hair

Shaz51 my husband has quit many many times @tideisturning @happycastle

Judi9877 @TideisTurning I can't answer that question only to say that my workplace 20 years ago made me quit when I had undiagnosed depression and was continually making mistakes because of it. Turns out I was suffering from the grief of my mum.

Bpdsurvivor To deal with it, I see it as a challenge I need to face in order to grow as a person. You can,Äôt change people...you can only change yourself

HappyCastle (PSW) That's a really positive way of reframing @Bpdsurvivor. I appreciate that

Judi9877 @Bpdsurvivor I like that! I'mnow going to try and use this when I'mfaced with challenging people in my mental health Tafe course. Thank you !

HappyCastle (PSW) You're going to be fantastic in mental health @Judi9877

MsKitty @Neverending you've nailed it. People who haven't experienced mental health issues just have no understanding and often say "just get over it". I had an interesting discussion with my cousin who I haven't spoken to in a while and he felt the same until he started having lung issues. He became worried. He started having problems sleeping, he was shaking, his heart was racing, he couldn't breathe, his thoughts were all over the place... He was having panic attacks and episodes of anxiety... boom! He now gets it. Just because you can't see it on a blood test, X ray whatever people don't get it. That's why it's called the invisible illness.

Bpdsurvivor

@mskitty...spot on!

Bpdsurvivor

If only ppl realise - just as the body gets sick, so does the mind

HappyCastle (PSW)

Absolutely @MsKitty

Judi9877

Thanks for the encouragement @HappyCastle. I,Äôve just got to hope I get in. I'musing my Community Guide background to help me with it.

Neverending

@MsKitty yes you're correct, it's only until they experience it. Then they'll appreciate how ever did we survive with it for so long.

TideisTurning (PSW)

Do you know of any extra support services available at your (or your loved one's) workplace or place of study? E.g. counselling; EAP. Have you reached out to them before? What has that experience been like for you?

Judi9877 I used my uni counselling service in a major way at uni to the point where the counsellor came to my graduation ceremony. A hospital admission in 1st year led me to him and he stayed in my life for 6 years.

HappyCastle (PSW) In the mental health field, we usually have access to EAP and Supervision which is brilliant. I have accessed counselling services at University too

HappyCastle (PSW) Wow @Judi9877!!!

Bpdsurvivor Cool @judi

Bpdsurvivor We have EAP, well-being services, and a whole array of other services in the education sector

Shaz51 great @judi7899

HappyCastle (PSW) @soppykat2 welcome!

Judi9877 @ HaplyCastle He even helped me deal with stigma and discrimination of the uni accommodation services who didn't want ,Äòsomeone with mental illness,Äô living on campus. I did live on campus though thanks to him advocating for me. Paid dividends in the end as students learnt about mental illness and I graduated. Win, win for everyone involved.

HappyCastle (PSW)	That's such a great reminder to all of us I think that where even though there is bad there is also so, so much good out there too
Shaz51	hello @soppykat2
HappyCastle (PSW)	Hi @P12 nice to see you
TideisTurning (PSW)	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?
tesorosystem	sadly, no.
HappyCastle (PSW)	This has been really great for me. There's something about hearing other peoples experiences that are similar to my own. It helps me feel more understood
Neverending	Well it validates that I will share with my patients that I too suffer from Depression/Anxiety rather than keeping it disclosed. They'll know I understand how they feel and would prefer to work with someone who has it too.

Judi9877 To be honest, what @bpdsurvivor said about people and mental health and taking them as a challenge to learn from. That's important for me as I have BPD and this can affect how I react to the person and how I perform in the course or subject.

Neverending I also planned on placing the fact I have depression/anxiety as part of the 'story' on advertising material

TideisTurning (PSW) Tonight's topic may have brought up some heavy feelings as we talked about the challenges inherent in working and/or studying with complex mental health issues. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do?

HappyCastle (PSW) For me, I'll be reflecting on the resilience everyone here has shown along the way on their journeys. Also, chocolate cake!!!!

Judi9877 I'm planning on going back to knitting a new blanket I started before logging in tonight and having a nice cup of tea. I'd like to possibly continue this discussion further maybe in the forums? Just an idea I had.

Neverending I'll have a nice warm shower and watch some Netflix ;)

TideisTurning (PSW) We'd love that. Go for it @Judi9877!

adge Mmmm Chocolate cake Happy Castle....

Judi9877 Thanks for the support @TideisTurning. I'll just need to think about how to work it out. Don't want to make it too educational or stuff.

adge Well I just had a Quick munch/ Bite of Pavlova....

HappyCastle (PSW) @adge yes for dessert self-care!

MsKitty @tideisturning self care is important, I'm going to spend some time with my brother who just popped by now. Thank you and everyone else in this forum for their comments and contributions, you're all super stars ,

Tanya82a lots and lots of chocolate

Tanya82a anything chocolate

tesorosystem unfortunately i dont have time for self care this evening

Tanya82a

but then i tend to binge eat :(

HappyCastle (PSW)

Thank you @MsKitty, your contributions have been so helpful and valuable. Thank you

butterflycacoon

Hi everyone, I was at my laptop ready to go at 6.40pm, well I finally made it. haha!

HappyCastle (PSW)

YOU MADE IT @butterflycacoon. As they say, better late than never!

adge

It's actually 6.22pm here (Now)...

Judi9877

It's 8:22 here in Melbourne!

Neverending

Yes 8.23 here in Victoria

adge I know Judi9877 - I grew up Over East, so I'm always Aware of the Time Difference.

tesorosystem its almost 8:30 in queensland

TideisTurning (PSW) **We'd like to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this 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

adge Well Qld & WA Bothe have No Daylight Savings Time - We have that in Common Teorosytem

adge Thanks Tideis Turning, Thanks Happy Castle, Thanks Everyone

HappyCastle (PSW) Thank you all so much for your time and contributions tonight!

Neverending Thankyou HappyCastle!

Judi9877 Thanks for running this tonight @TideisTurning @HappyCastle.
Thanks for the interesting chat everyone!

HappyCastle (PSW) I just want to let everyone know we are now offering a 1:1 Peer
Support service starting with 'Email a Peer Support Worker'

TideisTurning (PSW) **Here are some further resources we recommend having a look at:**
<https://www.psych.com/how-to-talk-to-your-boss-about-your-mental-health/>
<https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/how-to-talk-to-your-boss-about-taking-a-mental-health-sick-day/12646988>
<https://www.headsup.org.au/your-mental-health/talking-about-a-mental-health-condition-at-work/should-i-tell-my-employer>

HappyCastle (PSW) You can find the link on the Peer Support landing page!

HappyCastle (PSW) Bye everyone!

tesorosystem bye