

Unit 1 : Acknowledge the impact of the role of a lay mental health advisor on their mental health

Helping responsibly also means taking care of **your own health and well-being**. As a helper, you may be affected by what you experience in a crisis situation, or you or your family may be directly affected by the event. It is important to pay extra attention to your **own well-being** and be sure that you are **physically** and **emotionally** able to help others. **Take care of yourself** so that you can best care for others. If working in a team, be aware of the well-being of your fellow helpers as well.



Source : Canva

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Why does it matter?

Because chronic stress can prompt people to feel disconnected from themselves and others, which can result in a less-attuned, less-sensitive, less-empathic therapist.

The longer this stress goes on, the more likely it will surface and potentially interfere with how you can guide and support mentees you will engage as a lay advisor.

Without self-care and control of stress, you will not be able to support others to access mental health services and supports in your community.

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What are the causes?

As a helper, **you may feel responsible for people's safety and care.**

You may witness or even directly experience terrible things, like destruction, injury, death or violence.

You may also hear stories of other people's pain and suffering.

All of these experiences **can affect you and your fellow helpers.**



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What are the causes?

When taking on the role of a lay mental health advisor, you can potentially experience trauma **similar to direct trauma exposure**.

Despite not actually being the person who has gone through the traumatic experience, **the details, feelings, reactions and ability to cope** shared by your mentee may result in greater exposure to a **great deal of stress** which may be diagnosable as **Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD)**.

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Source : Canva

Why should you be acknowledging it first?

Sometimes, it may be complicated to realise there is something going on, and also to comprehend where the problem is coming from.

By finding the source and acknowledging it, it becomes easier to address the issue. It is therefore a first step toward prevention and recovery.

→ *Being aware of those symptoms and recognising them is a first step to the healing process.*

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The first signs of distress and emotional exhaustion:

- **Emotional symptoms**: Anxiety, apathy, depression, feeling hopeless, feeling powerless or trapped, irritability, lack of focus or forgetfulness, lack of motivation, negative thinking, nervousness, tearfulness.
- **Physical symptoms**: Fatigue, headaches, lack of appetite, nausea or upset stomach, poor sleep, sore muscles or muscle tension.
- **Performance symptoms**: difficulty completing daily tasks for responsibilities, isolation or avoidance, lower commitment, performing duties more slowly.

Case Study



Amina has been living in Germany for six years. After arriving as a migrant herself, she gradually built a stable life, learned the language and now volunteers as a peer advisor in a local support centre. She often meets newly arrived refugees and helps them settle into daily routines.

Recently, Amina began supporting Lina, a young woman who had fled conflict. Lina experiences disrupted sleep, anxiety and difficulty feeling safe in her new environment. Drawing on her own experience, Amina encourages Lina to start small with self-care. They agree on a simple routine that includes short daily walks, regular meals and a quiet evening activity like listening to music or journalling. Amina also introduces Lina to a local women's group to help reduce isolation and build a sense of connection. However, as Lina begins to share more about her experiences, Amina finds herself feeling emotionally overwhelmed. She notices that she is thinking about Lina's story outside of their meetings, feeling drained after their conversations, and struggling to switch off at the end of the day. While she wants to continue supporting Lina, Amina begins to recognise that her own well-being is being affected.

In response, Amina speaks with a coordinator at the centre, who reminds her of the importance of boundaries in peer support. They explore ways for Amina to continue her role while protecting her own well-being. Amina takes short breaks after her sessions with Lina and reconnects with her own self care practices, including meeting friends and attending a weekly yoga class. She also joins a peer reflection group for advisors, where she can share experiences and receive support.