



METH *and*
MENTAL HEALTH



This resource was developed in consultation with people who are currently using or have previously used substances and participating in the Rock Solid Methamphetamine Peer Education Program.

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What does good mental health look like?

Good mental health looks different for everybody. It is more about how you feel about yourself and less about how you are viewed by others.

It's normal to be unhappy sometimes, to worry sometimes, to get angry or grieve when someone leaves. As complex beings, an array of emotions can be healthy and doesn't signal that your mental health isn't 'good'. However, it is important to recognise when you begin to feel out of control.





Here are some signals to help you identify when you are experiencing 'good' mental health. (These are general signs – we are all unique!)

- Looking after your physical health (eating and sleeping regularly, staying hydrated and leaving the house regularly). A mind can't be healthy if its home is crumbling around it.
- Regular self-care – Brushing your teeth, showering, phoning a friend, allowing time to relax etc.
- Maintaining social connections with people that help you feel supported.
- Organisation – feeling like you are on top of things and in control of your immediate needs.
- Enforcing boundaries – Knowing what you need/don't need and being able to communicate this.
- Feeling like you are 'in the moment' – Being aware and mindful of what is happening in the 'here' and 'now'.
- Recognising and being able to name your feelings.
- Coping with change/recognising that some things are out of our control and accepting that. We cannot always control our surroundings, but we can control how we react to our surroundings.

Meth and Mental Health

When using meth people can experience a number of symptoms of poor mental health. Symptoms may only last a short period of time and may stop when a person reduces, or ceases use of the drug.

Other factors that can affect mental health when using meth include not getting enough sleep, not eating enough food and being dehydrated. The brain requires food, water and sleep to properly function, so a lack of these things can contribute to symptoms of poor mental health.

Other users may experience symptoms of poor mental health due to underlying or pre-existing mental health conditions that a person may have before they started using meth. These symptoms are likely to increase and become more serious when a person is using gear.

It is important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions that may occur when using meth, to keep you and your peers mentally healthy, happy and safe!





How does meth work on the brain?

Meth is a stimulant drug, this means it speeds up the messages between the brain and the body.

Meth prompts the release of three chemicals in a person's brain:

- **Dopamine** - the 'feel good' chemical that is associated with pleasure and reward.
- **Serotonin** - the chemical that affects mood and memory, and is associated with feelings of well-being and happiness.
- **Noradrenaline** - the fight or flight chemical.

Potential Effects of Meth on Mental Health

Short term effects

- Increased euphoria (high)
- Insomnia - where you may struggle to sleep or stay asleep.
- Irritability
- Mood swings
- Aggression
- Panic attacks / anxiety
- Come down - feelings of depression, irritability, exhaustion

Long term effects

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Poor memory
- Paranoia
- Dysthymia - lack of energy and enthusiasm
- Anhedonia - where you may feel as though you are unable to feel pleasure from activities you would have previously enjoyed
- Psychotic disorders – Psychosis



Meth and Psychosis



Psychosis is a mental health issue where people can lose touch with reality. Psychosis is usually temporary but some people can have symptoms for a long time.

Psychosis can happen to anyone, from someone's first time using meth to someone who has been using for a longer period of time.

Once a person experiences psychosis they may experience prolonged poor mental health and ongoing or recurring episodes of psychosis.

Symptoms



Someone who is experiencing an episode of psychosis can experience a range of delusions, hallucinations and/or obsessive-compulsive behaviours. This person may be confused about what's going on and might not understand what others are doing and why they are doing it.

- **Auditory Hallucinations** - hearing voices.
- **Tactile Hallucinations** - feeling things in or under the skin.
- **Visual Hallucinations** - seeing things that aren't there.
- **Delusions** - holding a fixed false belief that won't be changed even when confronted with evidence.
- **Thought Disorder** - jumping from one topic to another without any logical connection.

Tips for helping reduce the likelihood of poor mental health and psychosis when using meth:

- Getting enough sleep - our brains need time to rest and recover!
- Taking a break between using - it can be hard to take breaks when you are using meth. Having a plan can help. Plan which days you will use and which days you will take a break. This will give your brain some time to rest.
- Using less frequently.
- Keep hydrated - you may need more water in hotter weather, especially when engaging in exercise (working, dancing, sex).
- Managing the comedown – feelings experienced are usually only temporary and will pass!
- Nutrition – it is important to eat nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables every day. Even if you don't feel hungry try to eat regularly.



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Responding to Psychosis

It's important to remember when someone is experiencing psychosis, it feels very real to them. Often people can feel scared and overwhelmed.

If you think one of your peers is showing signs of psychosis:

- Approach them slowly and with confidence.
- Use a one-to-one person approach, be aware of space and body language.
- Convey the message you are there to assist/help.
- Avoid confrontation and arguments as it can escalate behaviour.
- Allow the person to express their concerns and listen.
- Move them to a less stimulating environment such as a quiet and safe space if possible (seek permission first).
- Encourage them not to use more meth, especially in the short term. It may make things worse and lead to toxicity/ overdose.

Always make sure that you:

- Approach them slowly and with confidence.
- Keep your mates safe - look after and stay with them.
- Use a cool, wet towel or compress on the back of the neck to cool them down.
- Keep language simple and speak calmly and clearly.
- Seek medical assistance. Dial 000 (Triple Zero) if you're unsure.
- Encourage them to keep up their fluid intake, approximately 500 to 600mL per hour if active.
- **Don't dismiss delusional thoughts; remember it's real for them.**

Meth and Schizophrenia



Schizophrenia is a mental health condition where people may have an altered experience of reality. Some of the things a person with schizophrenia may experience can include: hearing and seeing things that aren't really there (hallucinations), holding fixed false beliefs (delusions) and distorted thinking.

These symptoms can be similar to what someone may experience with drug related psychosis. A person with schizophrenia may use meth to help manage or cope with their symptoms.

Some important things to remember if you have been diagnosed with schizophrenia and are using methamphetamine:

- Take a regular break between using - it can be hard to take breaks when you are using meth. Having a plan can help. Plan which days you will use and which days you will take a break.
- Set phone reminders for medications - when you've been going for a few days it can be easy to lose track of time.
- Talk to your doctor - have an honest conversation with your doctor about your meth use, as some medications for schizophrenia may cause an adverse reaction when using meth.
- Speak to your doctor about getting a mental health care plan - this helps identify what type of health care you may need and set some goals to work towards.
- Use around people you trust - when you're going to get on make sure you're with someone you trust, if you feel comfortable let this person know about your schizophrenia and tell them you're going to use. That way this person can help keep you safe!



Meth and Insomnia

Meth can often disturb people's sleep patterns especially when someone can be up for a few days straight. This is also known as insomnia, a condition where people can't fall asleep or struggle to stay asleep. The longer a person goes without sleep, the higher the chance of them experiencing mental health issues, including psychosis.

Some tips to help get some sleep:

- Try and get some sleep where possible
- If you find it hard to get to sleep, try to relax and get some rest. Take off your shoes and lie down in a quiet dark space.
- Lie down in a dark room with no distractions. Phones, lights and TV can be distracting and stimulating. Turning off devices can help.
- Avoid using other substances to help get to sleep. Using other substances to help you get to sleep can increase risk of overdose. Using opioids and benzos can lead to overdose and death, especially when used together!

If you do use, tell someone what you have used and to keep an eye on you. Try using smaller amounts as your body may be run down from using gear. Carry naloxone (the drug that reverses opioid overdose) with you and tell people that you have it.



Meth and Anhedonia

It is common for people to feel low or down for a few days after using meth which is usually referred to as the come down or crash period. This is caused by the reduction in the 'feel good chemical' in the brain known as dopamine.

When someone uses meth, their brain releases extremely high levels of dopamine. During the crash period, these levels can drop lower than normal. For some people, feeling down may last longer than the come down period.

When a person stops or decreases their meth use they may find that they no longer enjoy the things and activities they did previously, they may feel down and sad, this is known as **anhedonia**.

These feelings of sadness, not enjoying day to day activities, can stick around for up to 18 months, depending on how much and how long the person has been using. When people are experiencing anhedonia, they may be more tempted to use again, to help them feel more 'normal'.

It is important for the person and the people around them to understand that this is a normal part of meth withdrawal and that it will pass with time.

When people are using meth, sometimes relationships can break down with friends, partners and family. This can lead to feeling lonely and isolated which can impact on a person's wellbeing.



Tips for managing mental health when using meth:

Mindfulness and Meditation are practices that allow you to slow racing thoughts and calm your mind and body. Try taking your shoes off and feeling the sand or grass beneath your feet. What does it feel like, smell like? Find a space that you enjoy, this could be a dark room, outside, on the lawn in the sun. Practice being still. It can be hard to quieten your mind, that's ok! Try for a minute to start, and build up over time.

- Regular exercise.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Preparing for the comedown period - remind yourself that during a comedown your brain is deprived of those feel good chemicals and this feeling of sadness may be due to the comedown. This can be temporary and pass.
- Speak to a counsellor or psychologist.
- If you feel comfortable, speak to a family member or friend.
- Speak to your doctor, they may be able to prescribe medications like an antidepressant. It's important to be honest with your doctor about your meth use as some medications can interact with methamphetamine.



If you're worried about someone feeling down it's important to know there is help and support out there. Please see the referrals at the back of the booklet.

Feeling anxious and down?

Feeling anxious is something most people will experience at some point in their lives. This can involve feelings of uneasiness, worry, stress and nervousness. It can also cause physical effects like nausea, dizziness, dry mouth, tension and an upset stomach.

Some of these symptoms include:

- Sweating,
- Shaking,
- Racing heart,
- Shortness of breath,
- Tight chest,
- Nausea,
- Feeling dizzy,
- Light headed or faint,
- Feeling tingling or numb.

These feelings can sometimes feel similar to a heart attack and may leave people feeling worried or nervous and this can also start to happen when the gear wears off. If these symptoms last a longer period of time, speak to a doctor.



Some tips to help manage feeling anxious:

- Getting enough sleep – important for the brain to recover!
- Managing breathing: breath in through the nose, out through the mouth feeling the rise and fall of your chest.
- Relaxing techniques such as mindfulness or meditation.
- Avoid caffeine – particularly when someone is getting on.
- Regular exercise.
- Take regular breaks between using.
- Speak to your doctor – make sure you have honest conversations about your meth use, as some medications may be harmful when used with meth.
- Speak to a professional.

When coming down from meth or experiencing feelings of anhedonia (feeling low) or anxiousness it can be overwhelming. It can be hard to remember the supports and skills you have to help get you through.

Write down some of these skills and supports:

- Call the ADSS line, they listen to me
- Call a friend, as they just sit with me
- People i can talk to or call when i feel down

- People I can trust to help me when I am feeling paranoid
- Activities I know help keep me calm (e.g. make a cup of tea, drawing, spend some time outside)

Referrals for Meth and Mental Health

Remember if someone's life is in danger call 000 (Triple Zero)

ADSS

A confidential, non-judgmental telephone counselling, information and referral service for anyone seeking help for their own or another person's alcohol or drug use.

Metro (08) 9442 5000 | **Country** 1800 198 024

Online chat service www.mhc.wa.gov.au/about-us/our-services

Beyond Blue

Free 24 hour confidential telephone support line and online chat service.

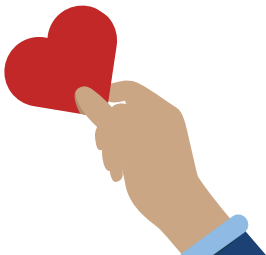
Phone 1300 224 636

Online chat service www.beyondblue.org.au

Suicide Call Back Service

A national 24/7 telehealth provider that offers free phone and online counselling for people living in Australia.

Phone 1300 659 467





Lifeline

Free 24/7 crisis support

Phone 13 11 14

Online chat service (7pm – midnight)

www.lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat

Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL)

Emergency response line for people experiencing a mental health emergency.

Metro 1300 555 788

Peel 1800 676 822

Regional 1800 522 002

Health Direct

General health information and advice

Phone 1800 022 222

Q-Life

National anonymous LGBTI peer support and referral service.

Phone 1800 184 527

Remember!

Peer Educators are doing a great job providing support and education to people who use meth. Sometimes this can be hard. Remember you can call ADSS for professional support in your role as a Peer Educator.



The Rock Solid program

The Rock Solid Program is a peer education program aimed at reducing some of the harms that can be associated with methamphetamine use.

Peer Educators are usually someone who has a large network of people who use or may be at risk of using methamphetamine.

Peer Educators are trained on harm reduction strategies and asked to share these during their normal social interactions.

Peer Educators then record these interactions in a diary, which is collected each month.

Want to know more?

If you are interested in becoming a peer educator, please contact the Project Officer on 0427 495 597 or alternatively (08) 9482 0000.

You can find more information about the Rock Solid program at www.waac.com.au/rocksolid

