

Hind, Catherine Lisa (2017) Emotional support guide.
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Project Case Study

Title of Case Study: **Emotional Support Guide.**

What is the project/ campaign/program?

The emotional support guide is an electronic resource which can be used by people when helping individuals in distress. The project provides guidance on how to approach people, respond in an appropriate way and enables staff to minimise their own personal stress. The first part is a question and answer section which provides an explanation of emotional support, its importance and raises awareness around distress, self-harm and suicide. The second part provides practical guidance on how to support someone during "difficult" conversations from beginning to end, including how to approach suicide and self-harm in a non-judgemental way. The third section includes alternative coping strategies for people who self harm, contact details and guidance about looking after an individual's own wellbeing when caring for others.

What led to the project being set up?

As well as studying to be a nurse I have been a listening volunteer with the Samaritans for nearly 3 years. Through my nurse training, work as an SQA and volunteering providing effective emotional support for people in distress is something I feel passionately about.

I had noticed an uncertainty from people about how to approach distress which comes, not from reluctance to help but misconceptions and anxieties around despair. I wanted people to feel more confident in approaching distressing conversations especially around suicide and self-harm and change perceptions around these issues.

What were the key aims of the campaign?

The key aim of the campaign is to transform the "myths" surrounding distress, suicide and self-harm. It aims to challenge the common misconceptions around these topics and highlight the impact of these ideas may have on the person in distress. It also aims to change the language that is used around distress. Looking at the negative emphasis on risk and move towards a more positive approach around recovery and empowerment of the individual. The guide is not designed to train people to be counsellors rather it intends to give them the confidence to approach someone in distress, help them open up and support people to access further support.

What were the key stages in setting up and running this project?

I started by approaching the SQA lead about my ideas. They were very supportive, agreeing it was a great idea and they were also keen to establish links with Samaritans. I have also been supported every step of the way by the pathway lead for mental health nursing at University of Cumbria

I also approached the director of my local Samaritans branch. She loved the idea and offered me her support and guidance with the tone of the project. We agreed that providing individuals with a non-judgemental empathic approach could help them to understand their own difficulties.

Originally the guide was written just for health care professionals, however it became apparent that it would benefit other people such as teachers and student facing academic staff.

What were the positive changes?

The most positive change has been how much my work has highlighted the importance of positive emotional support for patients within health care and beyond. I have received a lot of positive feedback through placements, academic staff and other students and have definitely highlighted a need for resources such as this to be available to "untrained" staff, such as support workers.

The project has also raised awareness around the subjects of self-harm and suicide themselves. That it is not just the remit of mental health services but can be experienced in many different areas and can in many cases be significantly reduced if approached in the right way

What lessons were learnt from this process and how has it been embedded in clinical practice?

With the move towards more parity in healthcare this project is a timely addition to the new links being established between mental and physical health services. The importance of good communication and effective support is embedded in all the codes of conduct for many professionals. This project provides a simple, easy to use guide that can be utilized in many areas when dealing with distress.