

WHILE YOU WAIT

Conversation Guide for GPs



About this resource

This is handout 1 of 3 in the "While You Wait" resource kit.

The "While You Wait" resource kit has been developed to help GPs and their patient create a plan for their first specialist mental health appointment.

GPs and Patients can use these resources in a variety of ways, the aim is to make sure that the patient has the support they need to prepare so they can get the most out of the time while waiting to see their mental health specialist.

By helping your patient fill out handout 2 you are helping them to prepare for their first appointment.

Steps in the process



Introduction

Following the assessment of a patient, developing their care plan, and making a referral to a suitable service, a challenge for GPs is working with patients to manage and minimise risk while they wait for their first appointment. This 'While You Wait Conversation Guide' has been developed to

assist GPs to navigate the risk and work with patients to make a plan following these steps:

Activity:

- 1 Identifying current strengths and supports.
- 2 Preparing for the first appointment.
- 3 Supporting a person who is uncertain about seeking mental health support.
- 4 Setting treatment goals.
- 5 Staying safe.

This guide can be used with the Making Your Time Count - handout for patients.

Introducing the plan

This is the “About me” section of the Making Your Time Count - handout for patients.

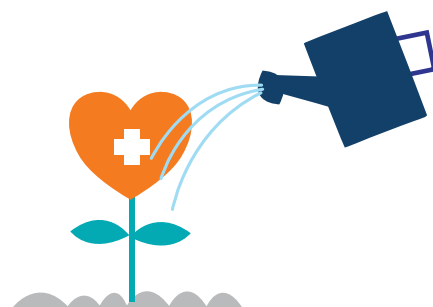
After you assess a patient, agree on a care plan, and make a referral, explain how you will work with your patient to make the most of their waiting time.

Take the time to ensure:

1. They have your contact details.
2. They know who they have been referred to.
3. They know who to contact in an emergency.
4. You discuss who you may contact in their support network and under what circumstances.

It is also an important chance to start developing treatment goals so that your patient has a realistic understanding of what to expect from treatment.

Note. It is important to explain to your patient that in the event of an emergency or if you have concerns about serious harm, you will be acting in their best interest and may need to take action not detailed in this plan.



Identifying current strengths and supports

These questions have been developed to guide you and your patient in making the most of your time while you wait. These questions have been designed to use a strengths-based approach to

help you and your client explore their strengths and supports, which they can draw upon while waiting for their first appointment.

Question in Patient Handout	Additional conversation points to develop responses
<p>1. Who do you find helpful to talk to when you're having a hard time?</p>	<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who do you find helpful to talk to when you're having a hard time? How often are you seeing these people? ▪ What opportunities are there to reconnect with these people? ▪ What might be barriers to this and how can you manage that?
<p>2. Are there any early warning signs that you might notice when your symptoms are starting to get worse?</p>	<p>Feeling distressed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are there any situations that can lead to poor mental health for you? ▪ What support can we put in place to minimise these triggers? ▪ Are there any early warning signs that you might notice when your symptoms are starting to get worse? ▪ What things have helped you in the past when you have felt distressed?
<p>3. What can you do when you notice these warning signs?</p>	

Preparing for the first appointment

In preparing for their first appointment, your patient can put together a summary of relevant health information that can be shared at their first appointment.

Suggested questions:

Question in patient handout	Additional conversation points to develop response
1. Who is part of your care team?	This could include a GP, a Peer support worker, family, friends, church or community services, or other services.
2. What is your mental health service history? (Please include dates if you remember)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ When did you receive a diagnosis? ▪ When was the last time you saw a psychiatrist? ▪ Do you have a MH plan?
3. What past treatments have you tried and what was your experience? Some things you might want to include are:	<p>Some things that you might want to include are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medication ▪ ECT ▪ Drug & alcohol services ▪ Services such as Head to Health hubs or Headspace <p>What was your experience with this intervention?</p>

Supporting a person who is uncertain about seeking mental health support

A challenge for patients is feeling uncertain about accessing mental health services and not knowing what to expect. For this reason, many patients don't respond to communications from the mental health service or skip their first appointment.

You can help a patient by explaining to them what they can expect from treatment - include practical and other considerations:

- Make sure the patient is provided with

information using their preferred way of receiving information (e.g., written/verbal/visual, English/other language, with/without a support person).

- Make sure the patient is provided with a list of recommended intervention options (including the option of no intervention) and encourage the patient to contribute their own options, ideas, solutions, and expectations. This might include interventions such as culturally relevant activities, or self-care strategies.

- Ensure the patient can express any concerns or fears about the options (e.g., cost, travel, previous positive or negative experiences).
- Check in to ensure the patient has

understood the information provided and ensure enough time for any questions from the patient (or carer/family member).

Treatment goals

Setting clear expectations for you and your patient about their first appointment can ensure that you continue the recovery journey together. One way to do this is to develop treatment goals.

Treatment goals may be related to:

- Develop healthy habits
- Get involved in the community

- Practice self-care
- Improve or build relationships with friends and family

When setting goals, it is important to ensure that these are focused on the strengths of the patient and their recovery journey. Using SMART goals is one way you can achieve this:

S

Specific - Is the goal clear?

M

Measurable - How will you know when the goal is completed?

A

Achievable - Is the goal realistic?

R

Relevant - Will this goal make a difference to your mental wellbeing?

T

Time based - When will this goal be completed by?

Suggested resources

Fact sheets and e-mental health tools can help with managing distress, supporting self-care, and understanding more about mental health conditions and treatment. This can help a person manage while waiting for treatment, as well as get more out of it when they begin treatment.

Fact sheets

Here are some trusted sources for fact sheets:

Beyond Blue: beyondblue.org.au/get-support/resource-library

Black Dog Institute: blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/fact-sheets

Sane Australia: sane.org/information-stories/facts-and-guides

E-mental health tools

These directories will point you to a wide range of reputable, evidence-based online programs and apps:

Head to Health: headtohealth.gov.au

eMHprac: emhprac.org.au

Choose a resource that meets your patient's needs. For example,

- if your client is Aboriginal, or from a CALD community, look for fact sheets and resources developed for these communities on Head to Health and eMHprac.
- if your client has been diagnosed with another condition, such as being on the autism or ADHD spectrum or having an intellectual disability you can look for resources developed by peak bodies such as [Aspect Australia](#) or the [Council for Intellectual Disability](#).

Staying safe

It is important to communicate with your patient that if their situation changes, they should reach out for assistance.

A safety plan is for a patient who discloses suicidal thoughts or intent, and may also be appropriate where the patient:

- Has expressed limited reasons to live or is highly distressed.
- Has limited to no formal and informal support networks/connections.
- Is highly lethargic, unmotivated, disengaged.
- Has experienced significant loss (relationship, financial, employment etc.)
- Is experiencing a personal sense of loss of power or being trapped circumstances.

The safety plan considers and incorporates:

- The precipitating details that contributed to the risks identified and immediate actions to manage and mitigate the identified risks. The combination of factors that perpetuate the risk recurring and therapeutic plans to treat/address the underlying causes.
- Formal supports available to the person: GP, mental health clinician, or other formal service.
- Informal supports available to the person: family, friends, colleagues, teammates.
- Drug and alcohol concerns present for the person.
- Previous attempts/bereavement.
- Crisis contact details.

Suggested resources

There are several resources you can access to help create a safety plan for you patient. We have included details of Beyond Now below, the preferred safety planning tool of the Towards Zero Suicides Initiative in Central and Eastern Sydney. GPs can use their preferred template.

Beyond Now

Beyond Blue developed the Beyond Now App to help you make a safety plan to support patients through times of sadness or grief. Patients can access it on their phones and carry it with them to access anywhere and anytime.

The app guides patients through the app with suggestions at each stage if they get stuck. Patients can work through this process by themselves, but may be better if a family member, an Elder, a health professional or support person works with them to make their plan. They can update it anytime and easily share it with others if they want.