

CTA Help-Seeking

What is Help-Seeking?

Help-seeking refers to the act of reaching out for support when one is experiencing distress. This help can be sought from someone close to us - a friend or a family member - or mental health professional.

Children and adolescents experience ups and downs in their life from time to time. However, seeking help is more difficult when they are at their lowest. To start with, we may not even know that we are experiencing a problem that requires help. If we do manage to realize that, we may find it difficult to talk about our concerns due to the fear of rejection and judgment. At times, we may be surrounded by people but still have no idea about how to communicate those concerns or we may remain unaware of the professional support that is available out there and how that can be utilized.

There are many barriers to help-seeking, some are personal while the rest can be found in the environment. In this guide, we will discuss why help-seeking is important and things you can do to receive support.

Why is help-seeking important?

One UNICEF survey reported that only 41% of Indian children and adolescents (13-17 years) are likely to seek help compared to the global average (21 countries surveyed) of 83%.

If you are experiencing distress, many people around you might be going through something similar. However, just like you, they may not open up and seek help because they continue to believe that they are the odd ones out. People also mask their feelings due to the stigma-labeling and misrepresentation of people who suffer from symptoms of psychosocial disabilities or mental illness in the media.

However, upon finding a reliable source of support, someone who makes us feel safe and heard, we can slowly let go of the fear of judgment, shame, embarrassment, rejection, and so on. We can choose to be vulnerable with that person by talking about our feelings and thoughts. We get to normalize distress and understand that it is okay to be not okay, and things will get eventually better.

This process may allow us to accept that there is a problem. The person or professional we are seeking support from can offer a fresh perspective on our situation. They may also offer us a space wherein we both can explore solutions together and decide what works for us, and what does not.

Some of us are not aware of the benefits of help-seeking. We may continue to ignore our feelings and rely on things or activities which distract us from our problems or pain. Distraction may help temporarily but it does not address the root cause of the problem. Eventually, the distress will build up and it may put you at risk of serious mental illness and consequent hospitalization. Thus, seeking help and receiving the support you need early on is very important because that enables you to positively cope with your life's struggles.

In that sense, help-seeking behaviors are a protective factor. It protects us from deteriorating mental health and strengthens your circle of support. It balances out the negative impact loneliness and other risk factors can have on you.

How to seek help?

Identify the warning signs

- Warning signs indicate that our mental health is deteriorating and we might have to reach out to a friend or a health professional as soon as possible.
- Some of the warning signs are:
 - Feeling sad and withdrawn from pleasurable activities, hobbies, or things you liked to do before.
 - Disturbances in sleep and appetite: Sleeping too much or too little. Similarly, you may not be having enough food or have much more than usual.
 - Extreme fear, worry, or anxiety that gets in the way of your work or social life.
 - Feeling very much anxious around people or at certain places.
 - Feelings of suicide and self-harm.
 - Unable to stop using drugs or alcohol.
- If you think that you are experiencing any of the aforementioned signs or symptoms, you can contact a general physician or a psychologist.

Look for Information

- You can use the internet to look for the following resources for your mental health:
 - Support Helplines: These are run by trained volunteers who have experience in providing support to people in distress. Not all helplines run 24/7 and some may not be able to receive your calls.
 - Doctors or counselors nearby: Health professionals that are close to where you live. You can also choose to see an HP from another city if there is a lack of mental health services where you live. There are online platforms like Practo and Lybrate that can help you find a health professional of your choice.
 - Support groups: Dedicated to people who would like to support and be supported. There are various support groups for specific mental health issues, and some of them may conduct meetings and interactions online. Such spaces allow you to meet and relate with people who might also be having the same life issues as yours.

Take small steps

- Reach out to a friend or a family member when you are experiencing distress
 - Talk to someone you can trust. Someone who does not judge or criticize you. If they make you feel safe and heard, you can seek support through a phone call,

- text messaging, or meeting them in real life.
 - You can start the conversation by saying "I haven't felt right lately, can I talk about it?"
 - However, please don't mind if they set some boundaries with you. It gives them the space they need and allows them to support you better.
- Schedule your first appointment with a health professional
 - A health professional (HP) can be a counselor, a psychologist, and/or a general physician.
 - If you are unable to look for information or schedule an appointment, you can seek your friend's support for the same.
 - An HP may:
 - offer you the space you need to talk about your feelings and thoughts.
 - evaluate your physical and mental health.
 - Refer you to other such health professionals such as a psychiatrist or a clinical psychologist.
- Make a call to a support helpline.

Be kind to yourself

- Don't let feelings of shame and embarrassment come your way when you are voicing your concerns to a friend or a counselor.
- Realize that your recovery does not have to be perfect. There will be ups and downs here as well.
- Mental ill-health or mental illness is more prevalent than we think and it's not your fault. Be self-compassionate and treat yourself kindly.

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