

# Guidance: Engaging With People Experiencing Mental Health Difficulties

A brief guide to help you engage positively and constructively with people experiencing mental health difficulties

## Do...

- ...be calm, alert, and kind
- ...be aware of your own limitations – and stay within them.
- ...be aware of the risks that might arise in a pastoral encounter, especially when alone – choose your space carefully.
- ...take note of the parable of the Good Samaritan – proactively available and helpful, but he didn't do it all.
- ...know the statutory or skilled support services available locally, and have contacts to hand\*.
- ...ensure that you have appropriate basic awareness of conditions, listening skills, and services - undertake Mental Health First Aid awareness training and then refer to the handbook!
- ...pray - say "I will keep you in my prayers", or offer a brief prayer if they would welcome that.

*\*These could include GP surgeries; NHS Mental Health Care Crisis Team and other services; charities such as Samaritans, Mind or Farming Community Network; Diocesan safeguarding team; and specialist support/care services relating to bereavement, bullying, homelessness and housing, LGBT+, racism, relationships, substance misuse & other addictions, young or elderly people, etc, and the Diocesan Healing and Deliverance team accessible via your local clergy.*

## Don't...

- ...do any harm to yourself or others
- ...talk about your own experiences – they are not relevant or helpful!
- ...offer facile reassurance - they can suggest you haven't understood or are minimising gravity.
- ...attempt to provide a course of therapy, even if you have professional qualifications in the field\*.
- ...undertake deliverance ministry on your own – refer immediately to the Diocesan specialist team and their mental health professionals.
- ...try to proselytise or 'convert' a vulnerable person, or proactively to discuss faith in the context of mental ill health – limit your advice to practical signposting unless specifically asked.
- ...put yourself at risk of harm from others' behaviour if they are in a disordered, disinhibited or overstimulated mental state.
- ...take on what you cannot handle – be clear about the limits of what you can give and the circumstances in which you can give it.
- ...try to do it alone – make sure you have a mentor or know where to seek help if needed.

*\* While listening and support is one of the roles of clergy in any pastoral situation you should not be operating as a lone practitioner. You are not covered by any kind of liability insurance if things go wrong.*

## Remember:

- the importance of non-judgemental, empathetic listening.
- that you do not have access to a person's medical history and so will not have the full picture.
- that signposting to professional help is as valid for mental health as for any other health difficulty.
- to enquire whether someone is on medication and/or has existing support.
- to signpost back into appropriate existing and engaged services and support.
- the police can remove someone to a place of safety in an emergency.
- there is no substitute for common sense in a pastoral encounter.
- the ELASS model (*below*)

