

FACT SHEET

RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO RELATIONSHIP-RELATED DISTRESS



A practical guide for Community Engagement Points

OVERVIEW

- Healthy relationships contribute to a person's sense of safety, belonging and wellbeing.
- When relationships become strained, this can affect mood, confidence, decision-making and daily functioning.
- Distress may arise from conflict, communication difficulties, emotional disconnection, breakups, family tension or feeling unsupported.
- Relationship challenges can impact sleep, concentration, motivation and social participation.
- People may feel stuck, overwhelmed, guilty or unsure about how to move forward.
- Because relationship struggles can feel private or shameful, many people hide what they're going through.
- Relationship-related distress can build gradually and may not be spoken about directly.
- Not all relationship concerns require a formal service response.
- Sometimes the most powerful support is simply being noticed, listened to and met with compassion.

WHO THIS IS FOR

This fact sheet is for any Community Engagement Point that may come into contact with people experiencing distress due to relationship challenges.

This includes, but isn't limited to:

- Sporting clubs and recreational groups
- Community centres and neighbourhood houses
- Workplaces and HR teams
- Faith communities and cultural groups
- Libraries and community hubs
- Parents' groups and early childhood programs
- Social clubs and volunteer organisations
- Clubs, cafés and local hangouts
- Youth services and education settings

As a Community Engagement Point (CEP), you may be in a unique position to notice early signs of relationship-related distress.

We are building a Network of Community Engagement Points (local people and places) who can offer a compassionate first response and, when needed, connect people with further support.

Anywhere people naturally spend their time — and naturally share what's on their mind — may become a moment of support.



Network of Community Engagement Points (NetCEP) is a program that enables trusted people and places, like community centres, sports clubs, and local businesses — to offer a compassionate first response when someone is having a tough time. Read more at www.netcep.com.au.



WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

Relationship-related distress doesn't always look the same. Some people may share openly, while others show signs in subtle or indirect ways.

As a Community Engagement Point, you might notice:

- Low mood, irritability, anxiety or increased withdrawal
- Trouble concentrating, disrupted sleep or appearing overwhelmed
- Heightened emotional reactions — tearfulness, frustration or agitation
- Expressions of hopelessness like “I can't do this anymore” or “What's the point?”
- Frequent complaints about a partner, or mention of ongoing conflict at home
- Reduced participation in activities they previously enjoyed
- Signs of stress around managing work, family life or responsibilities

Any of these may signal that a person is carrying the weight of relationship difficulties beneath the surface.

HOW CAN YOU HELP

Your role is not to fix the relationship or offer advice — but to provide a grounded, supportive presence.

You can:

- Offer a listening ear without judgement
- Acknowledge how challenging the situation feels for them
- Reassure them that they're not alone in what they're experiencing
- Keep it practical and simple — you don't need details of the relationship
- Offer options, not instructions
- If they're open to it, connect them with the local Short-Term Support Team (STST) for free, confidential, short-term support
- Remind them that seeking support is a sign of strength and care

Early recognition and a warm response can help someone feel understood and better able to navigate a difficult time.

IN PRACTICE

AT THE LOCAL NETBALL CLUB

1

Anna, who manages the local netball club, notices that Jess — one of the regular players — has been quieter than usual and has missed several games.

When Jess does attend, she seems upset and mentions ongoing arguments at home.

2

Anna doesn't try to give relationship advice. Instead, she sits with Jess after training and listens without judgement.

She reassures Jess that it's completely understandable to feel shaken by conflict and reminds her that she's not facing this alone. Jess says talking it through has helped her feel a little lighter.

3

Anna checks whether Jess would like extra support. Jess isn't ready for a referral, but Anna lets her know she can connect her to the

Short-Term Support Team (STST) at the Mareeba Community Centre anytime things feel heavier. Jess leaves feeling supported and aware that a safe pathway exists if she needs it later.

