

A Resource Book
for Good Mental Health

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Taking Care of Yourself and Your Family

John Ashfield PhD

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PUBLISHING

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INTRODUCTION

Initially, this book was compiled for use by people in rural and remote areas of Australia who have little or no useful access to the kinds of counselling and psychotherapy support that people in urban centres can generally take for granted. While the book targets rural and remote Australians, it's also helpful for other people as well. Some people may be unable to access local mental health services due to the location and cost of these services, or due to work commitments and a lack of time. This book provides useful information and practical strategies to help promote good mental health for everyone.

Given the vast area of rural Australia, and the limited resources of community mental health services, it has proven difficult to focus effectively on measures of preventative mental health, as well as responding to the demands of mental health crises and people with longstanding mental disorders.

General medical practitioners are often frustrated in responding to the mental health needs of their patients, because they sometimes have little choice but to prescribe medication to control symptoms for which they would prefer to recommend psychological therapy, if it were available. Likewise, where a combination of medication and psychological therapy is needed, the former is often all that can be provided.

This book is not intended as a substitute for psychological therapy (or psychotherapy), or formal mental health assessment. But it does aim to provide an additional resource for prevention, early detection, intervention, self-help, and education in relation to some common mental health issues and mental disorders. Its design takes account of the known resourcefulness, self-reliance and resilience of many people who live in our often harsh and isolating rural and remote areas.

The topics covered in the book were chosen because they have been found to be the most recurrent themes encountered by doctors and other human service providers.

The intended uses of the book include:

- A source of basic information about a range of mental health and related issues.
- A guide for helping others, or prompting them to seek assistance, in the event of a mental health issue.
- A resource of strategies and self-help therapies that have been adapted from some widely used and documented standard psychological therapies.
- A resource that can be photocopied and self-help therapies that doctors can use as handouts for their patients.
- A resource for use in *basic* community mental health education.
- A resource for health and human service workers.

The content of the book is organised so that readers are not required to read any more information than they need or interests them. Problem identification checklists are placed at the beginning of relevant sections so that, even if no other part of the section is read, the checklist may be.

A number of the self-help resources (such as Structured Problem-Solving) are provided in more than one section, to avoid readers having to refer to another part of the book in addition to the section they are reading.

Language, practical examples, and some of the diagrams used have been selected in order to be gender inclusive, or ‘user friendly’ for men as well as women.

It is hoped that the information and resources of this book will not only stimulate interest and concern about mental health issues, but will contribute something to the capacity of Australians to take care of their own and each other’s mental health – often despite limited professional services and support.