

Responding to emotional distress

for support group
facilitators and peer
support crew



Crohn's
& Colitis
Australia

21 November 2024





Overview of training

- Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- Emotional impact of IBD
- Self-knowledge and insights into grief reaction
- Responding to distress and grief and anger
- Self-care



Before proceeding with the session please complete a baseline survey which will help you to compare your confidence in responding to distress before and after the training.



© Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) is a chronic disease of the digestive system. There are various types of treatment available, however there is no cure.

For many, an IBD diagnosis is a blow.

IBD can significantly impact daily life, including work, education, and social relationships.

Consequently, people with IBD may experience distress that not only affects their functioning but also the course of the disease.

More about IBD (Crohn's and ulcerative colitis) can be found here (please click the icon):



Psychological Health and IBD

People with IBD have a greater risk of experiencing more significant mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, due to the impacts of having a chronic disease.

[Click the icon below to read more.](#)



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Common emotional impacts of living with IBD

Fear: not only fear about the disease or condition itself, but also how it impacts all aspects of one's life.

Stigma: a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that society holds about people with IBD leading to people feeling bad about themselves. It can be expressed via verbal abuse, ignoring the person, questioning the existence of their illness, and negative judgments about lifestyle or treatment choices. Self-stigma refers to the negative beliefs and shame that people with IBD have about their own condition.

Loss: related to the failure to preserve or maintain what one possessed – health, identity, control, independence, financial security, changes to lifestyle/future, relationships, physical abilities.

Grief: the intense sorrow experienced after a significant loss. Grieving describes the process of emotional and life adjustment following a loss.

Anger: the intense frustration and irritability that is felt when experiencing the unfairness of having an IBD. Mood swings can be a side effect of steroids (used to reduce inflammation) and can include anger and irritability.

For more information, please refer to the pre-training reading material [p. 16](#).



Grief



Grief is a normal response to a significant loss. It is an individualised experience, and we all grieve in different ways.

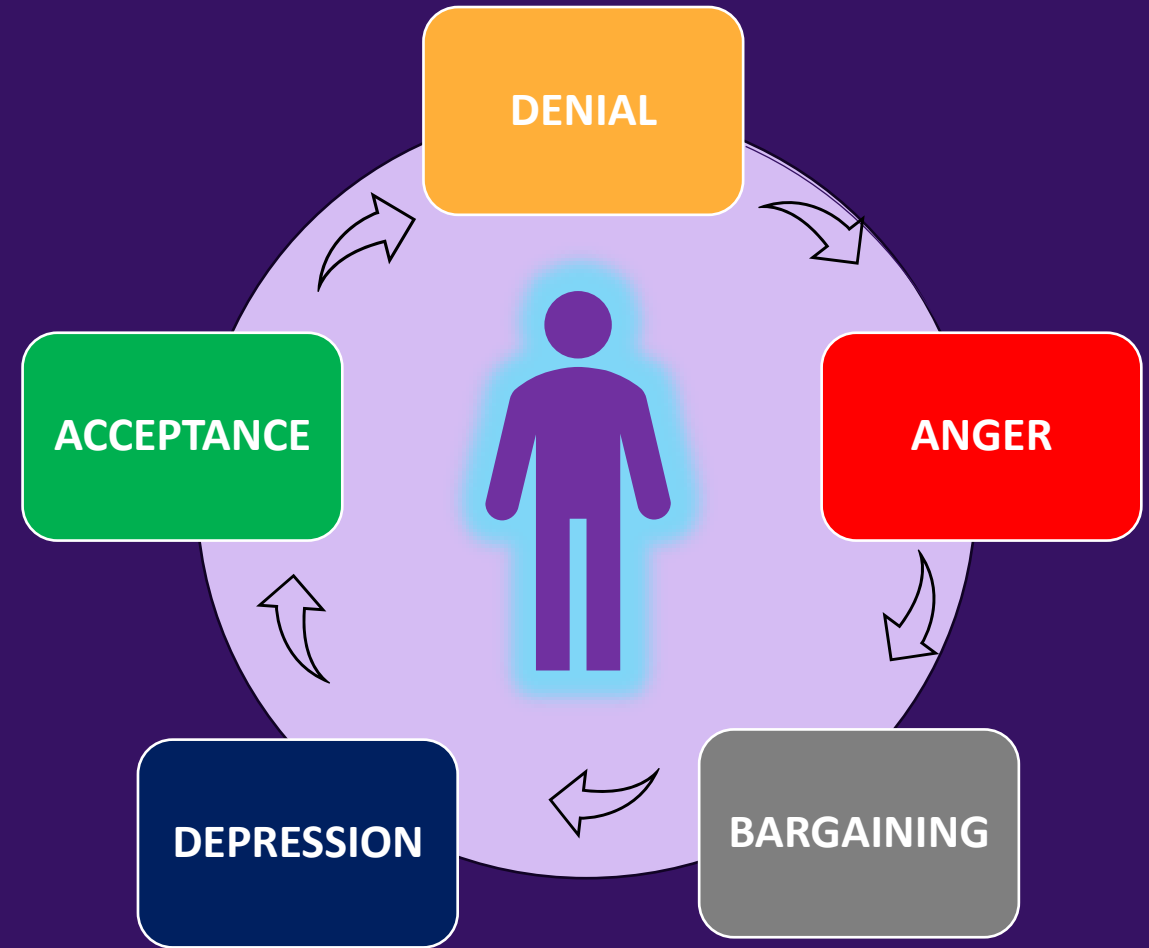
It is important to understand how someone's cultural background influences their experience and expression of grief.

Talking about your emotions in a safe environment can help to process and reduce the intense emotions and distress that accompany grief.

This is why ongoing participation in a support group or talking to a peer is so important.

© 5 stages of grief - Kübler-Ross model

- Grief is very personal.
- It is not linear and may not follow the order: *denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance*.
- You may miss a stage, come back to it later or repeat stages.



More on grief:



Your own grief process

Understanding your own post-diagnosis grief can assist you with providing emotional support to your peers.

Self-Knowledge: QUESTION 1

What stages of the grief process did you experience?

Consider:

- The triggers for the stages
- The order of the stages
- Whether you missed one or more stages
- What helped you to move through each stage

[Link to worksheet to answer the question and prompts above](#)



© Responding to distress/grief

Sometimes people who are grieving can be quite distressed.

Self-Knowledge: QUESTION 2

What is it about dealing with distressed and/or grieving people that you find most challenging?

Consider:

- Expectations of self and / or the distressed person?
- Feeling helpless to improve the situation?
- Lack of practice because it doesn't happen that often?
- Lack of confidence in being able to respond effectively to the situation?
- Other?

Download your worksheet here:



© Responding to distress/grief

Thinking about a time when you were with someone who was very upset and distressed and how you supported them can help to remind you of the skills you possess that are useful in dealing with such a situations.

Self-Knowledge: QUESTION 3

When were you last with someone who was very upset and distressed?

Consider:

- What was your role?
- What did you find difficult about this situation?
- What did you do?
- What was the outcome?
- What have you learned about what you did that was effective and what you could have done differently?

Download your worksheet here:



© Self-knowledge: Processing your learnings

Based on what you have learned from your reflections from Questions 1– 3, answer the following questions.



Self-knowledge: QUESTION 4

- Do you think you need to do anything to improve your skills and /or confidence in supporting people who are grieving and distressed?
- What ideas do you have for improvement and who can help you?

Download your worksheet here:





Responding to distress / grief

You have had the opportunity to increase your self-knowledge and awareness of the grief stages you experienced, what helped to move through the stages, and what skills you possess in supporting others who are grieving. The following information is a summary of what people find helpful when they are grieving:

- Warm and open communication and space to express their emotions.
- Opportunities to come to understand their emotions and the grief process
- Opportunities to have a break from their responsibilities.
- Someone to check in with them.
- Not being judged.
- Being listened to instead of being advised.
- Having their grief acknowledged and not diminished.
- Not hearing about your distress/grief unless it is relevant and appropriate.



Responding to distress / grief

In providing support, it helps if you:

- Consider how the person's cultural background may influence their expression of distress / emotions and how you respond to their distress (ask them if you are unsure).
- Speak calmly and softly.
- You may need to repeat what you are saying several times so the person 'hears' it; this may make you feel like you sound like a 'broken record'.
- Provide space and time and be patient.



Responding to distress / grief

In providing support, it helps if you:

- Acknowledge their emotions are normal given what they're experiencing.
- Allow the person to decide whether they stay in the group.
- Allow the person to decide whether they want to speak more about what's distressing them.
- If the person feels understood and heard, it will enable them to feel safe emotionally. *

* please see next slide



* Feeling safe emotionally

A situation where you feel safe to express emotions and the confidence to take risks and not be judged, and where you feel able to express your true self.

Responding to distress / grief

It can be useful to:

Provide practical assistance and/or information about support lines – **helpline and nurse line, and other CCA resources.**

Identify meaningful connections – family, other people with lived experience of IBD.

Provide basic information about:

- stress and grief reactions using Kubler-Ross' model.
- ways of coping that you or other group members have found useful.

Assist with decision making, help them to prioritise problems and solutions.

Responding to distress / grief

If someone is very distressed and you are worried about their safety:

- Check that they have someone with them or can contact someone to be with them
- Provide them with the following helpline information *if it is not an emergency*:
1800 138 029 Crohn's and Colitis Helpline (Helpline Coordinator) and Nurseline (IBD Nurse)
- *If it is an emergency*, provide them with the following 24/7 crisis line numbers:
13 11 14 Lifeline
1300 22 4636 Beyond Blue
1300 659 467 Suicide Call Back Service

© Responding to distress / grief

When appropriate, remind people of some of the positive consequences of grief:

- A heightened appreciation of life
- Closer relationships with others
- New possibilities and opportunities in life
- Increased awareness of personal strength

If you are a support group facilitator, engage other members of the group to provide support.



Responding to anger

Anger is one of Kubler-Ross' stages of grief and is a common emotional response to a diagnosis of IBD. Given this, it is to be expected that you will experience expressions of anger by people newly diagnosed, or when flare-ups cause significant interruptions into their daily life and functioning.

Many people find dealing with a person who is angry is more difficult than responding to other emotions.



© ANGER de-escalation strategies

Some techniques to use when exposed to high levels of anger:

DO

- Appear as calm as possible
- Use a modulated and soft tone of voice
- Treat the person with dignity and respect
- Let them vent - it is important for an angry person to feel heard and understood
- Avoid interrupting or trying to cut them off
- Set limits on their behaviour if you are feeling unsafe



© ANGER de-escalation strategies

DO

- Ask more specific questions like “Help me to understand what you are angry about ...” rather than “how are you feeling?”
- Summarise and reflect back what the trigger is, as it shows that you have listened, and helps to diffuse their anger
- Apologise for the issue that has resulted in their anger
- Clarify with them what they have already done to resolve the anger and/or find a solution
- Help them to look at what else they can do by using words and phrases that de-escalate, such as
 - I wonder if...
 - let’s try...
 - it seems like...
 - maybe you can...

© ANGER de-escalation strategies

DO NOT

- Get angry or emotional
- Escape by ending the communication as fast as possible, unless you are feeling unsafe
- Respond to abusive questions or insults ... ignore them
- Be defensive or take their anger personally
- Be judgemental
- Touch - as agitated people may misinterpret physical contact as hostile or threatening
- Argue or try to convince ... give choices, not explanations
- Maintain constant eye contact; allow the person to break their gaze and look away

Impact on the group

As a support group facilitator:

- Be aware of the impact that a distressed group member can have on the other group members
- Follow up with each of the group members to check on whether they were impacted by the stressed member
- Focus on promoting the wellbeing of your group
- Consider whether it would be useful to follow up with the group at your next meeting about how they are

Impact on you – importance of self-care

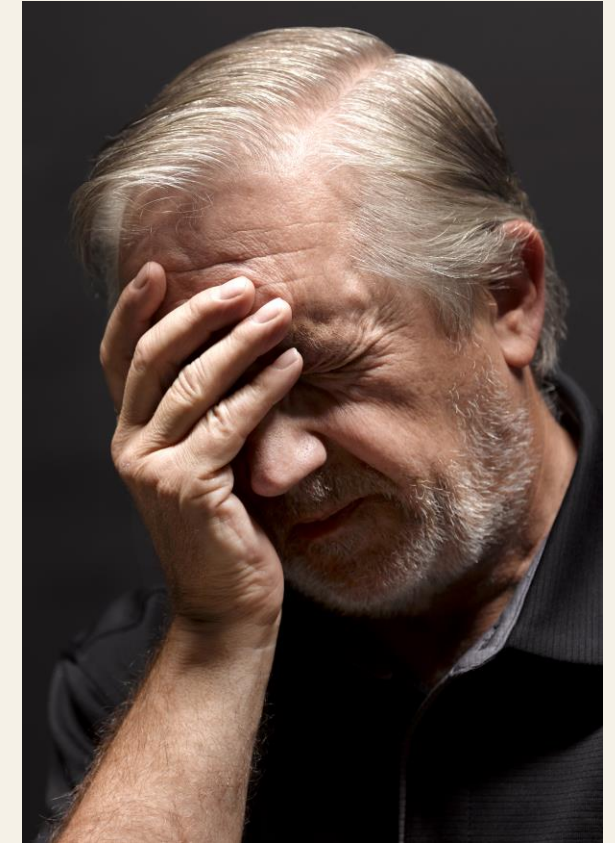
- Responding to distressed, grieving and angry people can be exhausting and self-care is very important
- You will be better able to deal with situations involving distressed people if you build resilience by incorporating self-care strategies into your daily and/or weekly routine
- It is important to engage in self-reflection so that you recognise when a situation has increased your stress levels so that you ensure that you look after yourself
- Following a situation involving a distressed person, make sure that you check in on how you are feeling. One way to do this is to rate your stress level from 0 (most relaxed ever) to 10 (most stressed ever)
- Stress can often lead to unhealthy eating, so be mindful of ensuring you have a balanced and nutritional diet



Impact on you

Remember that the following services are available to you should you feel isolated and needing some support.

- 1800 138 029 Crohn's and Colitis Helpline (Helpline Coordinator) and Nurseline (IBD Nurse)
- **Crisis lines**
 - 13 11 14 Lifeline
 - 1300 22 4636 Beyond Blue
 - 1300 659 467 Suicide Call Back Service



Stress

Stress is the adaptive response to any demand made upon a person. It requires adjustment to re-establish a normal balance.

Stressors related to everyday living:

- Conflict
- Boredom
- Deadlines
- Loss
- IBD
- Dealing with difficult / challenging situations
- Frustration
- Danger
- Physical stress possibly related to
- Lifestyle changes

© Self-knowledge: Stress management

Self-knowledge: QUESTION 5 (1)

In the context of the information contained in this training, and your own self-knowledge, think about how you experience stress by considering the following

1. What causes you stress i.e. what are your stress triggers?



Signs and symptoms of stress

Mental

Trouble thinking clearly
Memory problems
Difficulty concentrating

Poor judgement
Anxious or racing thoughts
Constant worrying

Emotional

Moodiness
Easily upset or hurt
Irritability or short temper
Agitation, unable to relax or keep still

Feeling overwhelmed
Sense of loneliness and isolation
Depression or general unhappiness



Signs and symptoms of stress

Physical

Muscle tightness, aches and pains
Headaches, trembling, sweating
Difficulty sleeping, dreams, nightmares

Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
Nausea, dizziness

Behavioural

Eating more or less
Sleeping too much or too little
Isolating yourself from others

Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
Nervous habits e.g., nail biting, pacing

Self-knowledge: Stress management



Self-knowledge: QUESTION 5 (2)

In the context of the information contained in this training, and your own self-knowledge, think about how you experience stress by considering the following:

2. What are your signs that you are stressed?



Stress management

Assess and manage your stress levels after responding to a Person who is emotionally distressed – rate yourself on the 10-point scale

If you have scored 5 or more on the scale, make sure you engage your self-care plan

- Eat, sleep and exercise in a healthy manner
- Do things you enjoy
- Spend time with people whose company you value
- Discuss with someone that you trust
- Share your experience with the Volunteer Coordinator or another Peer Connect or Support Group Facilitator



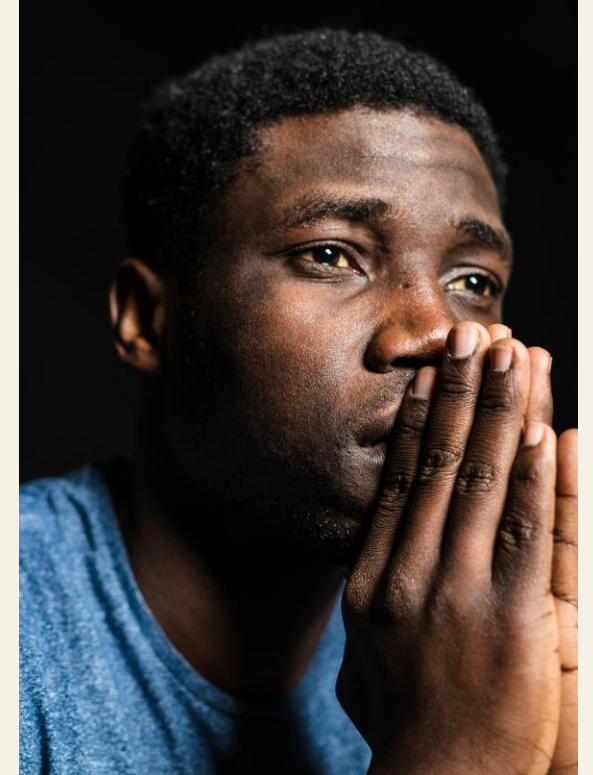


Self-knowledge: Stress management

Self-knowledge: QUESTION 5 (3)

In the context of the information contained in this training, and your own self-knowledge, think about how you manage stress by considering the following:

3. What are your strategies for managing your stress?





**Thank you for completing this training.
Please feel free to provide us with any feedback, so that the
content can be modified to better suit your needs.
If you would like to assess your increased knowledge and/or
confidence in responding to distressed people, please follow
the link to a short questionnaire:**

Click here

