



Mental Health First Aid: **REACT**

RECOGNISE symptoms of health difficulties

One of the easiest ways to do this is to know your mates well—any change in their usual behaviour is often the first sign of a health problem.

Other symptoms of difficulties can include physical reactions like nausea, sweating or shaking; thinking reactions like poor concentration or negativity; behavioural changes like disrupted sleep, excessive drinking/smoking or increased aggression; and emotional reactions like sadness, anger or anxiety.

ENGAGE the person

After you've recognised any of the symptoms, engage with your mate.

Talk to them – for example, you might say “I've noticed X, Y and Z, are you ok?”

Have this conversation in a private environment if possible, just be yourself and listen to them.

ACTIVELY listen

Once you have engaged with your mate, you need to actively listen. Active listening involves both hearing and accurately understanding what the speaker has said. Your job during this step is to listen to your mate, reflect back what you are hearing and clarify any differences (“so it sounds like you're feeling angry because of XYZ, am I right?”).

Allow your mate time to vent if need be, and don't be afraid to allow some silence in your conversation— sometimes people need silence in order to think. This is not the time to argue with them, tell them you know how they feel, or try to solve their problems. Simply listen, reflect and clarify.

CHECK suicide risk and risk of harm to others

If, after engaging and actively listening, you are at all concerned that your mate is at risk of suicide, self-harm or harm to other people, you need to ask them about it directly. For example, ask your mate, “Have you been thinking about suicide?”

If they're considering suicide or self-harm they must be taken to a doctor for assessment. If they're considering harming others, the police need to be involved. In both cases, you need to remove any threats where it's safe to do so. You should never agree to keep secrets or leave them alone if they are in crisis.

TAKE action

If your mate is not suicidal or homicidal, and you are no longer concerned about their health, you might choose to simply monitor them. However, if you think they would benefit from support, there are numerous avenues of referral that you can access.

Remember, mates don't ignore their mate who is struggling, or think that someone else will help them. Be a mate in both the good and the bad times— use the REACT Mental Health First Aid strategy if ever you're concerned about a mate's mental health.

Talk to a mental health professional or call the NZDF confidential help line (0800 693348) for advice if you are concerned about someone.