

# MENTAL HEALTH AND THE LAW: REMOTE INSIGHTS

Diane Godfrey

# My journey

Mount Isa -  
Townsville

Student

Law Graduate

Townsville -  
Mount Isa

COVID and admission as a Lawyer

2020

North West  
Region and  
Remote QLD

Practice

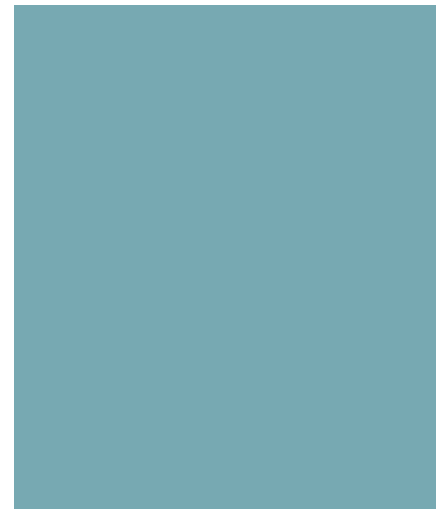
Mental Health - and connection

# A bit about me

- JCU Alumni - 2019, Bachelor of Laws (Honours), first in family to attend university, relocated solo for university
- I am one of 4 children, growing up in a lower-socioeconomic environment
- 2018 - major reconstruction surgery delayed my studies (nearly ending my career before it began)
- Early 2019 - I moved back to my hometown of Mount Isa and began work as a law graduate in a small firm (5 practitioners or less)
- Late 2019 - heart surgery that changed my life and delayed my studies slightly (PLT)
- 2020 - global pandemic that also delayed my admission by a few months as a Lawyer
- 2021 - working in a property boom for a small firm (less than 5 lawyers), managing the property law department
- 2022 - Worked for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service - remote QLD in isolated communities
- 2023 - Worked for a small start up online property law firm, after prioritizing my own mental health
- 2023 - Made the move to the coast (Cairns) and then walked away from law to teach children to swim!
- 2024 - Found my passion, working as an older persons advocate in the elder abuse space - and still working on my mental health

# Outside of the list

- I am a partner, sister, daughter and friend
- I am Kind
- I am Brave
- I am Smart
- I am funny
- I am resilient
- I am an advocate for myself and others
- I am a teacher and tutor
- I am an animal lover - pet sitting/farm sitting
- I am a student - Masters in Law (applied law)
- I am part of many communities - gym, friends, family, loved ones, alumni, professionally...
- I am more than my roles, or the sum of my qualifications
- I am more than my mental health...



# Mental Health – A professional and a friends help

- Meet Kayla, a professional in the field of psychology
- Meet Kayla my friend of many years
- A mental health first aider
- The person I asked a few simple questions to. She helped me at the beginning of my journey & in putting this all together
- Note – All information provided is general in nature, each person should seek their own medical and health advice separately.
- Reminder – information not received directly from a mental health professional is not individualized care – please consult a mental health professional or general practitioner if you need assistance.



# Details for help now:

- Please note - this presentation may raise concerns relating to your own experiences or those of the people you know.

As it is not possible to predict how people may react, please take care of your own wellbeing and note that the details for helplines have been provided on the last slide and below.

If you are a student, please contact the JCU Wellbeing Team as required.

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](https://lifeline.org.au)

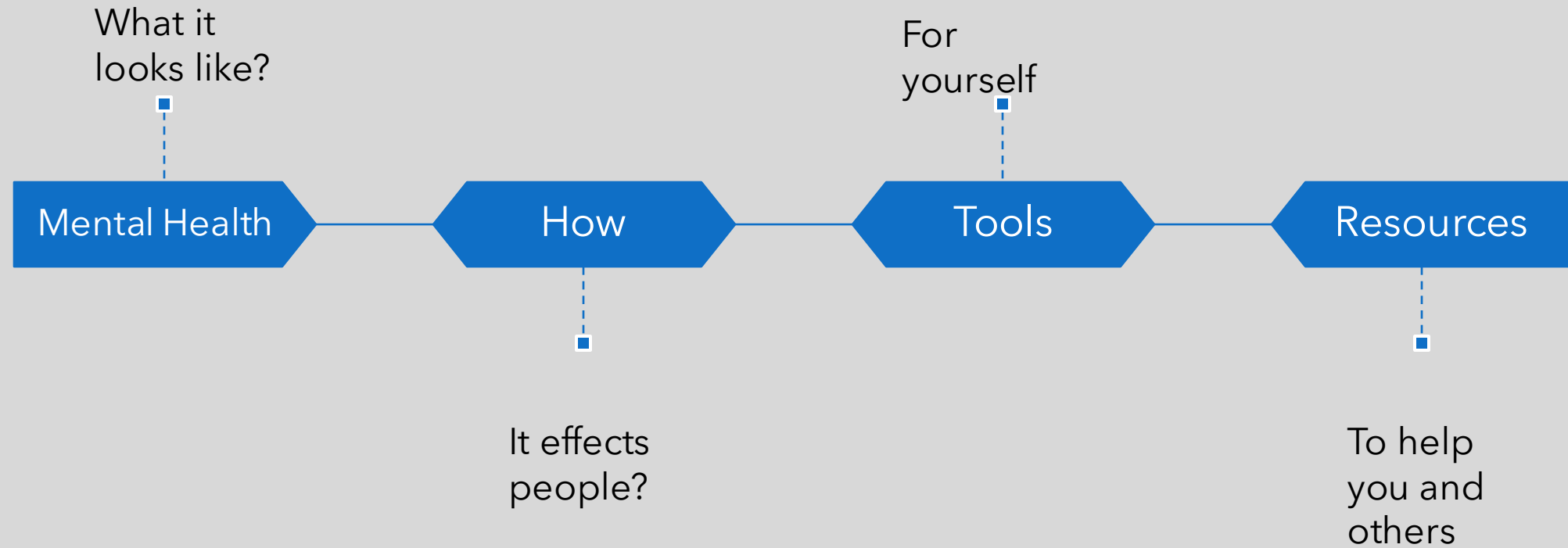
Beyond Blue: 1300 22 46 36 or [beyondblue.org.au](https://beyondblue.org.au)

13YARN 13 92 76

Men's Helpline 1300 78 99 78

Black Dog Institute: [blackdoginstitute.com.au](https://blackdoginstitute.com.au)

# Today's Goal:





# What does Mental Health Look Like?

## By Definition - World Health Organization:

- **Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.**
- **Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a complex continuum, which is experienced differently from one person to the next, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.**

# What did my signs and symptoms look like? (for me)

- Anxiety
- Stress
- Less sleep
- No exercise - too busy, too tired, too much
- Lack of confidence
- Less eating
- Being more reserved



# What did my signs and symptoms look like? (to others)

- Walking on eggshells
- Not being motivated to prioritize my health
- Used work as an excuse to not do things
- Avoided social interaction at times – Saturdays at the office
- Being so strung out after the on-call phone that I would struggle to relax
- Distanced myself from friends (self-preservation) and family
- Stuck in my own head
- I hyper-focused on the bad or not ideal things
- Friends were concerned for a long time – I wasn't ready to see what was happening

# What did it look like? A professional/MHFA view

- Stressed
- Tired
- Impacts on personal relationships - mental health was coming between you and partner
- Trying to find things to help, but never committed to a solution
- Sometimes the things to help were broader on motivation and wellbeing but not mental well-being
- Not physically looking well
- Not seeing the bigger picture (knew something was wrong, but could not identify the issue)
- Couldn't see the Forrest for the trees (stress being the trees, Forrest being the big issue with my health/mental health)
- Reliant on short term coping mechanisms (iced coffee or alcohol)
- Didn't really understand the broader issues around mental health

# How did it affect me?

- Poor habits
- Unhealthy relationships with alcohol and food
- Strain on my personal life (relationships, family and friends)
- Lost self-confidence and belief
- Lost your passion for my work
- Self-Doubt
- Less desire to continue in my career
- I felt stuck in the mud
- I didn't understand how to say I needed help, or what that would look like.

# How did it affect my work?

- Variations to my client engagement - stress leave and health impacts
- Challenges in an already remote environment became more extreme
- Access to supports - online - helped
- My band-width for matter management and productivity was much smaller
- I was less productive and struggled to focus on the matters before me
- Being more remote - management was not as able to step in as easily, so I would often appear in Courts on days that I was struggling on a health/mental health level.
- I really did not enjoy the challenges, that drew me to the job
- I wanted to isolate myself - not engage with family or friends outside work

# Tools – Step 1 – Take the first step!

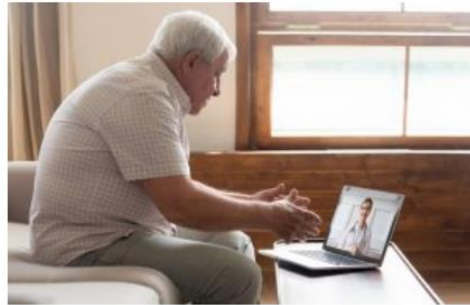
- Speak to a professional – Mental Health Care Plan
- Admit that something's not right
- Be honest
- Take a support person if you feel you won't tell a doctor what's happening effectively or won't know how to say it
- Know that it's the hardest step

## How do I get a mental health care plan?

To speak to a doctor about getting a mental health care plan, you should:

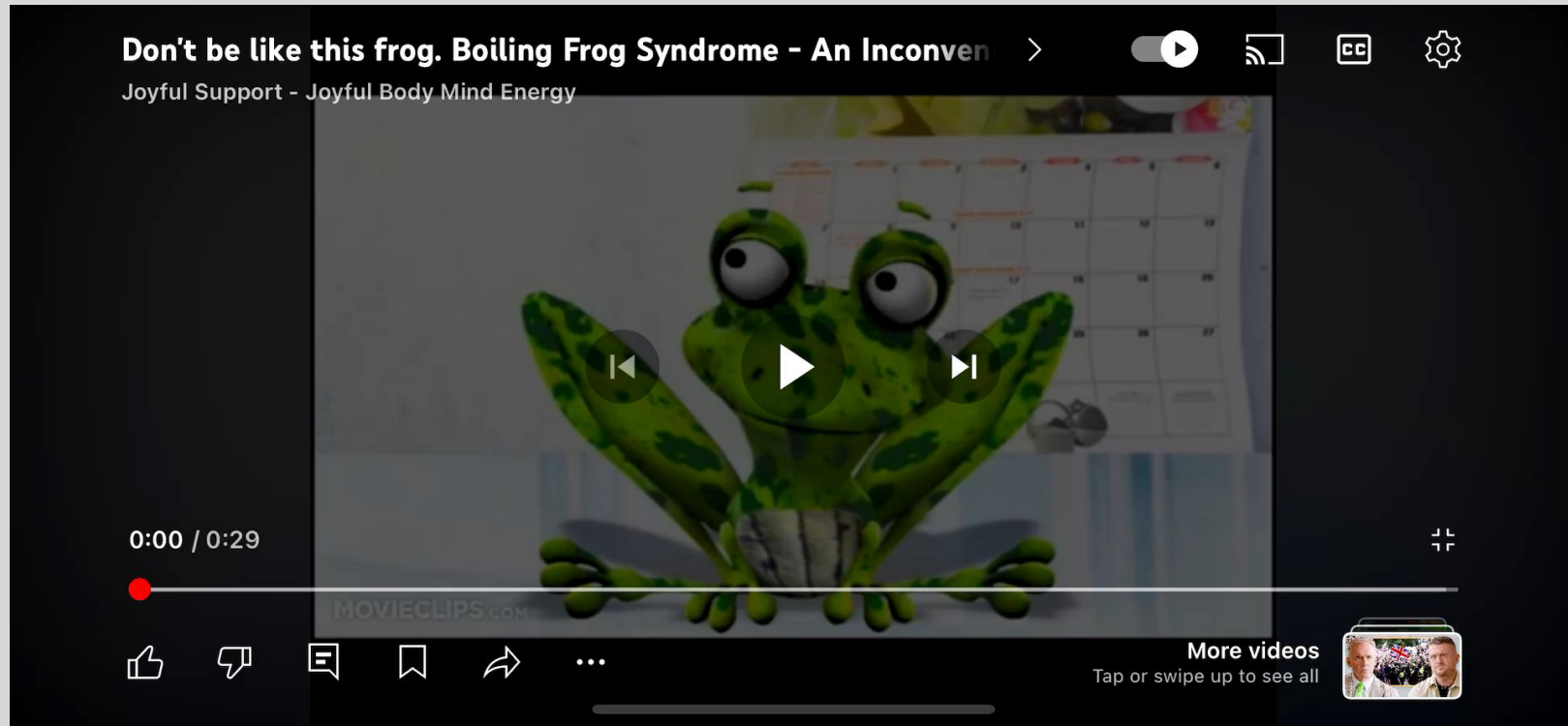
1. make an appointment with your GP, requesting a longer appointment time if possible,
2. tell your doctor about your mental health concerns, and
3. provide detailed answers to the questions your doctor asks you

Based on your responses, your doctor can then work with you to develop your mental health care plan. They may also recommend other resources if they decide a plan is not the best solution for your situation.



# Let's talk about Frogs... Be less like Fred

- [https://youtu.be/mNqQLw6\\_7Vk?si=K7klID](https://youtu.be/mNqQLw6_7Vk?si=K7klID)  
[AenzWWHiT1](#)



# Step 2 – Set boundaries and goals

## **Suggestions from a professional:**

- Don't add extra habits, try and capitalize on what you already enjoy.
- Focus your mind on things outside of work where you can
- Do try and get in what you can – find what works for you and start there. Start small and build up to it.

## **Suggestions from lived experience:**

- Not as extreme as quitting all that you know
- Can be simple – walking out at 5pm and booking to try a class (gym, arts, wine making)
- By setting limits on work commitments and allowing time for relaxation, hobbies, and family, lawyers can reduce stress, maintain a healthier work-life balance, and ultimately mitigate the risk of burnout.
- Habit stack – and see how it helps you
- Find that purpose – whatever it looks like

# Step 3 – Work those muscles!

- Not just the body – brain as well!
- Educate yourself & try something new
- Establish your support networks –join a gym, lean on that hobby group or book club...
- Peer support and mentoring groups can be a great resource – reach out to your district law association or society
- Ask your mentors for advice
- Don't push that network away – remember that they may see something's not right and want to help...
- Find your purpose
- Being known for what you do- identity
- Turn to the Resources

# Resources:

- The Calm App
- Smiling Mind
- Audible – audiobooks
- Library memberships
- QLS
- EAP – Access to supports
- Ask Izzy
- Black Dog Institute
- Call Ya Mate Movement – See a professional, have a heart, send it around! #callyamate

# Resources:

- Self Care Planning - <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Importance-of-selfcare-planning.pdf>
- 4 Step guide

# WHAT THE RECOVERY PHASE LOOKED LIKE



ONLINE  
SELF-HELP

