

Episode 4: Caring for Each Other

This podcast is brought to you by Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre, Better Place Australia, and South Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network.

Host: Malahat Kamali: Hello and welcome to a new episode of the mental health podcast series. I am Malahat Kamali hosting a new program for you. A human is a social being and social communication is his/her instinctive necessity. Our communication with family, friends, and community is like a divine gift that gives us the opportunity to love and be loved. Today's podcast's content is about the effective principles of supporting and sympathizing with those around us. We are pleased to have two honoured guests, both of whom have experience and knowledge in the field of mental health and social services. Our guests are Ms. Parveen Meazoy and Mr. Atiq Abid. Currently, Ms. Parveen is a team leader and senior psychology consultant with Foundation House. She completed his bachelor's degree in the field of social arts, and she obtained her master's degree in the field of social affairs and holds an associate degree in the field of psychotherapy and psychological development of children and adolescents.

She has been working as a trauma counsellor or psychological counsellor for the last 9 years and provides support to those who faced trauma or psychological torture. In addition, Ms. Meazoy has provided significant services in the field of mental health for various schools with immigrant and refugee children, their families, and school personnel. Ms. Parveen is leading a team of mental health counsellors that address the mental health issues of newly arrived Afghans in Australia after the recent collapse in Afghanistan. Ms. Parveen is an original Afghan Australian citizen who uses her experiences and professional knowledge comprehensively and effectively for people in need. As mentioned, Ms. Parveen is working with Foundation House. Foundation House is an organization that provides services to immigrants with mental health issues and traumatized. This organisation provides psychological counselling services and legal representation for immigrants who have experienced trauma or were mentally tortured. Foundation House is a non-governmental and non-profit, and neutralised in terms of religion and politics. Mr. Atiq Abid was born in Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh, and left Afghanistan in 2001, and after four years of immigration in Pakistan, he started a new life in Melbourne, Australia. Mr. Abid completed his studies in social development services and has held various roles in the field of social services and mental health with Beyond Blue, AMES Australia, Salvation

Army, Centre for National Culture, Eastern Regional Mental Health Association, and the City of Casey. And for now, he is involved in providing services in mental health with the Organisation of family life. He made a significant contribution to a research project on family planning and sexual health. Most welcome guests.

Welcome dear guests.

Malahat Kamali:

My first question is referred to Ms. Parveen, because this question is more relevant to your working field. Can you tell us what adverse effects immigration or displacement can have on mental health and social relationships?

Parveen Meazoy:

It may have many effects. From the very beginning of the immigration journey, the torture and problems that a person faces mostly cause negative effects, so As a result, a person may be terrified, feel defeated, or feel concerned and worried, but this is totally normal, since at first, when people newly migrated here, they went through a shock period, for example, and then entered in a Honey Moon period for a while, because in the initial time, the person's hope is very high, and no matter how much they planned, they are still not ready for the new life. They can't anticipate what kind of life a person would have when they move there, and they face culture shock, As a result, when they arrive, they frequently discover that there are hurdles, including linguistic difficulties cultural, and difficulties in finding work, particularly for individuals who had high-status jobs back home. They realise that in this new environment, their education needs time to be recognised to the same degree, which discourages them for a while. However, if this discouragement persists, it may lead to depression, which causes the person to become resentful of their circumstances and experience a sense of numbness. If this condition worsens, he eventually loses hope. Its consequences on social interactions include, for instance, the person's desire to withdraw from society if they are depressed or traumatised, and Even parents may avoid their kids if their minds are too preoccupied. They are emotionally absent but still physically there, which makes it challenging for them to care for their children at times.

Malahat Kamali:

You've made some extremely crucial points, some of which we may have all encountered during our immigration experiences. Thank you, Ms. Parveen. What indications, Mr. Atiq, should we look for in our friends and those around us that someone has a mental illness and needs support and care?

Mr. Atiq:

I'd like to thank you and say hello to everyone watching. Because mental health and mental disorders are viewed as social stigmas and individuals are ashamed to discuss their mental troubles, these indications and symptoms are typically not well known in our society when it comes to mental health. The World Health Organisation defines mental health as mental calmness and well-being, which means that someone with mental health can realise their inner capabilities, be able to deal with their daily worries and concerns and manage them effectively. They can also play an effective role in society as a member of the community.

Usually, mental disorder symptoms are both obvious and non-obvious, and perhaps we need to pay more attention and care to recognise these symptoms in our networks. For instance, you may notice some signs like isolation or aloneness, memory loss, lack of sleep, lack of appetite, difficulties learning, lack of concentration, stress, worries, and constant worries. A person may experience stress four out of the seven days of the week, which is unusual. They may also experience feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and hopelessness. They may also experience difficulties in communicating with others, neglect their personal hygiene, alcohol and drug addiction, and various types of physical pain. These are red flags warning us that this individual may have mental health problems, and we should take them seriously.

Malahat Kamali:

Thank you. In this regard, there's a model called "**are you ok**" that is honoured once a year. We hear about it. Could you kindly explain what "**are you ok**" means as well as how we may use the are you ok model to successfully start a conversation with friends or family members?

Mr. Atiq:

Australia's "are you ok" day, observed annually on the second Thursday in September, serves as a reminder for people to be aware of one another. Since

Loneliness and isolation are more prevalent in Australia, it is important that we remember to think of and be with one another throughout the year. The day's focus is mental health, so it is important that we remember to be aware of one another. If we wish to initiate a discussion with someone using the "are you ok" framework and we see that someone in our immediate vicinity requires sympathy and emotional support, it is preferable to do so at a suitable time and place with calmness and compassion. In order to get them to talk, we should ask them questions such, "How are you, how are you doing?" Mention it and ask whether everything is well. Why do you seem so silent lately? Are you alright, we see a difference in your condition? We initiate the discussion; if they choose not to speak, you don't need to emphasise it, but make it plain that they are significant to you, that you care about them, and that you are available whenever they need to speak. Remind them that you merely want to be of assistance and that you are not alone in experiencing this tough moment. Additionally, if they feel more comfortable doing so, you can encourage them to contact them. See if there is anyone else you can talk to or who can assist you. If the person is interested in speaking with us, we will listen to their discussion objectively and without passing judgement. We will also take all they have to say seriously in order to assess and comprehend most of their difficulties. We will never pass judgement on the person's condition or the reason why it occurred to them. We value their thoughts and sharing their tales in order to build greater trust. Give them some time if they go quietly in between conversations; don't rush them. Generally, when they describe how they feel, encourage them to share what's going on inside of them. And for their comfort, repeat a few lines. It demonstrates that you paid close attention to what they had to say. Ask how I can assist you and how they can help themselves and encourage them to take action. Encourage them to visit a professional service centre if their depression persists for longer than two weeks. If they require information or assistance getting connected, I will find it for them and assist in connecting. After one or two weeks, you can call or visit them to see if they've improved. If I notice that they haven't taken any action, we won't pass any judgement on them.

Malahat Kamali:

Atiq and many thanks. How, Ms. Parveen, can we be a good listener when someone wants to talk to us about their mental health issues and how can we show them that we care so that they would trust us?

Parveen Meazoy:

This was extremely effectively stated by Mr. Atiq. Most of the time, according to what I have seen in my professional and personal life, people in our culture want to take charge and offer assistance right away. For instance, if someone wants to express their emotions or tell us about their troubles, we will usually move fast to assist that person. Instead, we must be patient and go cautiously so that the individual may feel secure and know that all of our experiences are being kept secret and heard. This is doable if we remain composed, but we also want to respond, offer assistance, and act right away. Mr. Atiq did a great job of explaining this problem. We ought to make an effort to accommodate others. Another thing I've noticed is that it's common among our people to feel close to God and to tell someone to be grateful for having come to such a place. However, if someone is depressed and believes they are worthless, then when we say these things to them quickly, they feel guilty, which prevents them from expressing their feelings to others. His privacy is invaded as a result of this. If we have any judgements, we should attempt to keep them to ourselves. We also shouldn't act as though someone else's situation isn't as big of a deal as it actually is because it is.

Malahat Kamali:

Very well done, Mr. Atiq In the event that we have concerns about someone who may wish to end their life, how can we assist them? Aside from our assistance, what community resources are accessible to them?

Mr. Atiq:

As Ms. Parveen stated, we must take these matters seriously and refrain from saying things like "it's just a thought," "trust me," and other such phrases. Assume that if you encounter someone who is contemplating suicide and wants to terminate his life, it will be a challenging, frightening, and stressful emergency. Professionals in this situation have a training programme called Assist. Because we work in this industry, we had different viewpoints on suicide

before this training, but now that we've completed it, we're better able to comprehend the person and the circumstance, how to interact with those who have a propensity for suicide, and how to assist them. Help, of course, entails directing those in need to organisations with expertise in suicide prevention, as you or we are unable to take any action if you are not qualified. For instance, if someone close to you is planning to kill themselves, it is not necessary for you to be a medical or mental health specialist; what is vital is that you, as a regular person, may call and communicate with this person, ultimately saving his or her life.

Because most people who attempt suicide do so because they are too lonely and feel like they no longer belong in society, if someone is around, there is a chance that they may be saved.

Since we just covered how to approach such a person by utilizing the "are you ok" framework, you should speak with such a person in a setting that is appropriate and, once you suspect that they are considering suicide, ask them directly. Do you have suicidal thoughts? And be ready for the affirmative response so that it won't come as a surprise to you. At this moment, show some empathy, refrain from passing judgement, stand by them, treat the situation seriously, and pay attention to what they have to say. Make sure he is aware of your presence and the fact that you are there to support him.

Ask them how long they have been feeling suicidal, whether they have ever had this thinking before, and whether they have ever intended to commit suicide because those who have are more likely to do so. For instance, find out how and when they intended to take their own lives. Have they so far taken any action? Or was it restricted to the level of planning and thought? What or who prevented him from attempting suicide? This crucial moment—referred to as a turning point—is incredibly significant.

Can somebody assist you? These enquiries are crucial since we can put him or her in touch with a helpful person. If the danger of suicide is significant, you should not disregard their safety and protection and should dial 000 for emergency social services or 131114 for the lifeline service, which is specifically for suicide prevention. Considering that you and I might not be extremely competent, we are unable to offer professional services. We can take them to the GP so the GP can build a strategy to enhance their mental health after they

realise there is no urgent threat, i.e., there is no suicide risk. The easiest way to get in touch with a psychiatrist is through your doctor, who can also recommend that you join in social programmes to help your patient's mental health.

Malahat Kamali:

Thank you, Mr. Atiq. We have discussed the mental health of people around us so far, Ms. Parveen. Based on your professional and personal experiences, how essential do you think it is for us to take care of our own mental health? What steps do we need to take to do this?

Parveen Meazoy:

The first step is accepting that we need to take care of ourselves. Most of the time, we care for others, including our family, wife, children, mother, and father, but we don't take care of ourselves. First, we must acknowledge the importance of setting aside time for ourselves. I'll use a mobile phone as an example because it stops working when it runs out of power. Even if we notice that our phone has 10% charge left, we rush to plug it in, which means that we are just like mobile phones and must determine whether we have enough energy. For instance, we should assess our level of emotional energy, ability, and capacity to determine whether we can help others or whether we first need to take care of ourselves. Afghan women do not set out time for themselves since they are so preoccupied with their children. Therefore, the symptoms might be visible in a person's physical body if we don't take time for ourselves or don't worry about our mental health. We refer to all these sensations as psycho-somatic pains since the primary cause of them is mental. Some people claim that they suffer headaches, physical pain, and stomach aches without knowing the causes. These patients are unaware of the condition until they see their doctor, who then informs them that they have anxiety, worry, and sadness. Therefore, we must take care of ourselves before the issue reaches that stage. Our mental health is crucial, and we must stop it before it worsens. As an example, we must save our energy and consider our abilities, such as: at what point has my capacity been reached? Let's be conscious of our emotions if even I can feel weak. For instance, if I yell at my kids today because I'm upset and I see that I'm also upset with my wife, my kids, or my co-workers, we should recognise that there is a reason for it. We need to know ourselves and what we're experiencing, knowing who we are and how we feel allows us to create a strategy for ourselves that will help us

feel at ease or calm. Each person's version of this strategy will be unique. For instance, one person may find success in the gym, another may find success in running, while still another may choose to sleep well while listening to music. It involves reflecting on how we feel, what makes us scared, angry, or nervous, and then what makes us calm and happy. For someone, listening to music, reading a book, or, more generally, writing down his feelings are all examples of activities that could be categorised as self-care. If someone doesn't have time—especially Afghan women—they should set aside 10 minutes during the day or night to listen to music, drink some tea, and declare that this is their personal time. Most people in families lack limits, which makes it difficult for me to convince myself that this is my time and that I should spend it for myself. However, Afghans are accustomed to serving others, particularly their own families. We should establish boundaries with our partners, our kids, and everyone else in our lives. This indicates that I will handle some tasks but not all of them, and you should take care of the remaining ones. Another thing I saw is that Afghan mums tend to devote a lot of time to their family, and most of the time their kids grow up to be completely reliant on them. The parents first feel great, but eventually, they start to feel exhausted. Boundaries are crucial in life as a result.

Malahat Kamali:

Important details that are directly relevant to the lives of our Afghans were brought up by you. We would like to wish Parveen Jan and Atiq Jan continued success in both their personal and professional lives and would want to thank you for taking part in this podcast and for your insightful and informative chats. Until the next program, bye.