

The Orspere-Samdarra is the national observatory on the subjects of mental health and social vulnerabilities, and is hosted at the Centre Hospitalier le Vinatier (Lyons). The observatory is the only one of its kind in France and offers resources not only aimed at professionals and people who are affected, but also for the general public. It is headed by Halima Zeroug-Vial, a psychiatrist, and is made up of a multidisciplinary team.

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Better understanding mental health: key points on which to act

Practical guide to mental health for vulnerable people and migrants

Realized by l'Orspere-Samdarra





Mental health

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The difficulties you faced either during your journey or on your arrival in France may have had a significant impact upon your mental health. For instance, it's possible that you may be feeling depressed, lost, alone or stressed, you may no longer be able to relax, you may experience various symptoms which aren't always easy to understand and which can even be frightening.

Although experiencing these feelings or symptoms or a malaise is often problematic in everyday life, they're normal reactions which occur when we've had to cope with difficult situations, so it's important to be aware that they're caused by the situations in which people find themselves and aren't directly linked to the people themselves.

This guide has been created to help you to gain a better understanding of both what mental health actually is, and how access to healthcare works in France. In it you'll find first-hand accounts from people living in exile in France.

This guide can also make it easier to talk about mental health, so please feel free to take it with you when you go to see the doctor, to discuss it with a social worker, with your friends, your room-mates and your host family, etc.

You'll find additional information and resources on the Orspere-Samdarra website at :

www.orspere-samdarra.com

If you'd like to show this document to someone who speaks French, you can start with this explanatory paragraph:

Ce guide est un outil à destination des personnes en situation de précarité ou migration. Il a pour objectif d'expliquer ce qu'est la santé mentale et le fonctionnement des dispositifs de soins en France. Vous pouvez retrouver une version en français de ce document à : www.orspere-samdarra.com

Un imagier à la fin de ce guide peut faciliter la communication avec les personnes allophones.

Mental health



What is it?

Different countries, cultures and people see mental health in **different ways**, so it's hard to come up with a single definition. You may hear various terms relating to it, such as "**psychological health**", "**mental health**", "**health of the mind**", "**health of the head**", or "**health of the soul**". Broadly speaking, it relates to what goes on in our heads, our minds and our thoughts. However, even though it's about the "health of the mind", our mental health is greatly influenced by our environments. Mental health is part of our overall health. It's the ability to feel at ease both with yourself and with other people. Good mental health isn't just about not being ill - just because you're not ill, that doesn't necessarily mean you feel happy, and anyway, other people may consider you to be ill even though you're actually feeling fine!

Another thing is that our mental health isn't fixed - just because you're not feeling well right now, that does not mean you'll always feel that way. Your mental health changes depending on what's going on in your life, on the environment around you, etc.

● "Symptom"? "Illness"?

A symptom is a sign which may be a manifestation of an illness or of its development. For instance, a cough might be one of the symptoms of the 'flu. For mental health, recurring "bad dreams" or nightmares may be a symptom of psychological trauma (this term will be explained later on).

An illness is a negative change to your state of health, which happens when something goes wrong with your body.

With mental health - as with physical health - there are symptoms and illnesses, but there are also solutions and remedies which can help you to get better.

● Is it a “taboo” subject?

In France, experiencing a mental health issue is a subject that can be discussed with the professionals who support you without any fear of negative repercussions.

OMAR

A REFUGEE,
EXPLAINS:

“Personally I found that talking made me feel really anxious - actually I didn't used to talk to the doctor at all. Especially with the psychiatrist I didn't talk much... When it comes to

talking about mental health, there's one thing that's really hard, and that's fear. You've already got the whole system, along with everything you experienced back home in your own country, so it's already tough... Getting your confidence back is a bit... you're

scared - you wonder whether what you tell the doctor might end up causing you problems. You really need to tell people that you're here in France [...]. When you go to see the doctor, you mustn't be scared - it's for your own good”.

Even so, a lot of people find it hard to understand and admit that they're in pain even though it's something that can happen to anyone, and - just as is the case with physical illnesses - there are solutions.

In France, it's really common for people to tell health professionals if they're not feeling well, if they've got symptoms, if they're in pain... Talking about a mental health issue with the professionals who support you isn't something to be scared of, they'll be able to help you, or give you advice.

Can your mental health problems have an impact on getting your papers?

Your medical information will not be passed on to the OFPRA or the CNDA unless you ask for this to happen. In some cases, the formalities can be adapted to

make things easier for you. Also, anyone who has major health or mental health worries which were not looked after in their own country can ask for a residence permit on healthcare grounds in France.

What kinds of situation can lead to a mental health issue?

Exile and migration mean that people have to face up to all kinds of difficult events and situations, especially with regard to what they have experienced in their countries of origin, along the migratory route to Europe, and in France. Here are a few examples:

- violence experienced both in the country of origin and on the way to and in France;
- homesickness and missing friends and family, being worried about family and friends who are still back home;
- having to live in vulnerable conditions: not having any money, not having easy access to housing, to food, living in communal accommodation, etc.;
- loneliness;
- the language barrier, cultural misunderstandings or differences;
- the asylum application process, which involves having to go back over difficult events and which can involve people doubting the word of the exile who may not be “believed”;
- the waiting and uncertainty about the future: Am I going to get my papers? What's going to happen to me?
- not understanding the administrative system you're in, which may be complex, and the difficulty in completing the formalities (e.g. at the Job Centre, health insurance, etc.);
- not being able to work due to the procedures, boredom;
- not knowing who to talk to when you've got a problem, not having access to information;
- the difficulty in learning the language, finding somewhere to live, a job, etc.

These are all situations that can have a negative impact on your mental health. When you're in a complicated situation (in administrative, social and legal terms), **it's hardly surprising if it causes us pain, gives us symptoms or makes us feel lost, because it's a difficult situation.** Still, this kind of pain is often only temporary and can die down.

What kinds of mental health problem can people have?

What kinds of thing can people actually feel?

So, when we're faced with traumatic events like these, we may have various feelings and symptoms, such as:

- not feeling like doing anything at all, feeling empty or sad;
- feeling anxious, stressed, always on the alert (for instance starting at even the slightest noise);
- feeling isolated or alone;
- often going back over past events in your mind (flashbacks);
- having sleep-related problems: not being able to get to sleep, having nightmares, sleeping a lot and always feeling tired. ;
- having food-related problems - losing your appetite, being hungry all the time;
- finding it hard to concentrate, memory problems, losing track of time, not knowing where you are;
- putting yourself in danger;
- drinking too much, taking drugs;
- feeling persistent, unexplained physical pain: pain in your chest, back, stomach, headaches;
- withdrawing into yourself, feeling cut off from other people;
- feeling useless, low self-esteem;
- the feeling of being trapped, that there's no way out;
- being scared, no longer or wanting or being able to go out;
- boiling over with anger, being impulsive, nervous, irritable or aggressive;
- feeling persecuted, followed, being scared and not trusting other people;
- having negative thoughts, no longer enjoying life;
- hearing voices;
- seeing things that aren't really there;
- hearing noises;
- feeling as though you're a stranger to yourself, detached from your own body, from your own environment, as though you're watching your own life from the outside;
- wanting to kill yourself.

Some of these **symptoms** may have **physical or mental causes** - sometimes it's hard to know where the "problem" comes from and what is causing the symptoms. For instance, you might have a stomach ache because you've got a digestive problem (physical cause), but it might also be because you're stressed (psychological cause), so it's important to take both two possibilities on board.

These symptoms and feelings can be worrying because you don't understand them, as you've never felt them before or you feel as though you don't recognise yourself. You may also be afraid of feeling like that for the rest of your life.

PIERRE
A REFUGEE,
TALKS ABOUT
HIS EXPERIENCE:

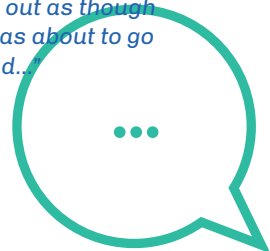
"In actual fact it's that... seeing as I didn't have any work, I didn't have any friends, I didn't speak the language... I'd lost my appetite, I couldn't even manage to feed myself! Physically I started to deteriorate and when I went to sleep I was having

nightmares... and I found myself walking in the street! Only it wasn't me! I thought I was the same as usual, but the people around me were saying "that bloke's totally lost the plot!"

SEYDOU
A ASYLUM SEEKER,
EXPLAINS:

"I wasn't sleeping, I'd lost so much

sleep over time and it started giving me headaches. At one point I could sort of see things that I couldn't quite define and understand, and it started stressing me out as though I was about to go mad...



After difficult events, **people's reactions and symptoms can be different**. They can also occur at different times (during the asylum procedure, when you get your papers) and last for varying amounts of time.

Some periods are more of a risk for mental health - these include periods involving major changes. Writing your personal account for the asylum application; obtaining or being refused refugee status; getting a flat; a growing family, etc. Different situations can upset your balance and so make you feel bad.

Experiencing a mental health issue is a huge subject - **you've got the right to say you're not OK and to talk about it.**

Mental health affects

everyone. You're not the only person who's experiencing symptoms of this kind.

Everyone has to cope with difficult situations at some point in their lives, so everyone can feel bad. These are often passing symptoms which will

fade away with time and/or support. **Depending on how long they last (especially if the symptoms persist for a while), how severe they are or their impact on your life, you may be able to get support to help you feel better.**

Frequent mental health issues

The most common mental health issues among people living in exile include the following:

● **Psychological trauma**

When someone has experienced or witnessed one or more difficult events (injuries, torture, imprisonment, threats, rapes, the deaths of loved ones, etc.) which have frightened us very badly, caused us pain and which we feel powerless to do anything about, we find it hard to "digest" them, to take them on board and to live with this "mental shock".

For instance, this can manifest itself in being unable to forget what happened - unwanted images of the event are constantly being replayed in your mind, as though you were reliving what happened. You may also have nightmares, "bad dreams" or have sleep-related problems. In order to try and forget, it is common for people to avoid anything which might remind them - refusing to take the underground if you were attacked there, or not wanting to see the sea if you had to cross it in a boat. People can also be very agitated and tense, constantly on the alert, jumpy, irritable, and getting angry easily, as though it were going to happen all over again. Some people can also feel disconnected from their feelings or from themselves, as though they were in a fog.

When faced with mental shocks (threats, accidents, violence, the experience of war, etc.), anyone may experience these kinds of symptom and it's totally normal. However, if they don't fade away, you need to seek support from health professionals. The symptoms can be exhausting and frightening, but there are various solutions which have been proven to achieve good results when it comes to dealing with psychological trauma.

● **Stress**

This is a normal reaction when we have to cope with ordeals or difficult situations. When you're under a lot of stress, you may experience physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle pain, dizziness, nausea, sleep disorders, intense tiredness, or eating disorders.

● **Anxiety and anxiety disorders**

Anxiety is an emotion of concern and anguish and it's something that everyone experiences. Whether consciously or not, it's to do with waiting for a future danger or problem to occur. When this feeling is repeated, becomes established on a long-term basis, is invasive or affects someone's quality of life, support may be necessary.

● **Depression**

Depression makes you feel sad, empty, tired, you don't feel like doing anything at all, or you just don't have the energy, even for your favourite activities. You may have negative thoughts, feeling lonely, useless and that life is meaningless. This often goes hand-in-hand with not eating or sleeping properly. Anyone can suffer from depression but professionals can help you with it.

● **Addictions**

People can become dependent upon all kinds of substance - some of them legal in France, others not - including alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, medicines, etc. When you use them regularly, you may start to withdraw from other activities (for instance, you might stop going to see your friends, playing sport, cooking, etc.) and spend more and more time and energy on using the substances, which is also because you don't feel well when you're not using.



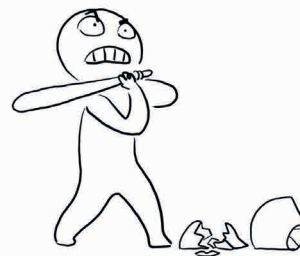
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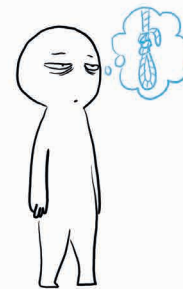
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(APATHIE)



(VIOLENCE)



(SUICIDAIRE)



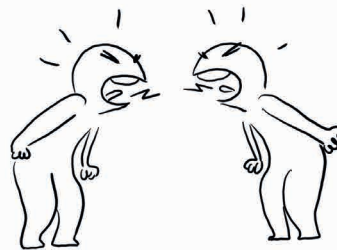
(DÉSORIENTATION)



(ADDICTIONS)



(COLÈRE)



(DISPUTES)

Here we've tried to illustrate a number of symptoms that you might experience.

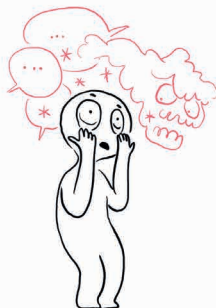
Please feel free to use these images at consultations with the healthcare professional.



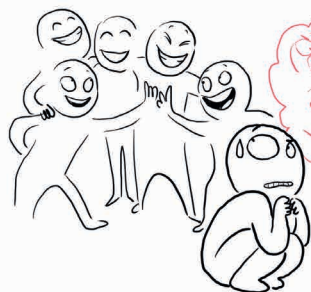
(MAUX)



(ÉPUISEMENT)



(HALLUCINATIONS)



(PARANOÏA)



(ISOLEMENT)



(ENURESIE)



(IDÉES NOIRÉS)



(DÉTACHEMENT)



(APPRENTISSAGE)



(TRISTESSE)



(TROUBLE DE L'ALIMENTATION)

HASSAN

A REFUGEE,
TELLS HIS
STORY:

*"I drink and then
I fall asleep. If I*

*don't drink, I can't
get to sleep, I move
around a lot every
night, and it's not
good. It's really
tough. I do it to
forget my problems,*

*but it's no good
because they're
still the same the
next day". ...*



People can sometimes feel a really strong desire to use and find it hard to control their consumption or to stop themselves from using, even though it can have a negative impact on their lives and even if they want to stop. There are numerous specialist services (including reception centres providing support to help drug users reduce their risks - CARUUD) and treatment centres providing addiction support and prevention (CSAPA) or your GP can help you to stop using (including illegal substances), without this causing you any legal problems.

● **Psychiatric disorders**

There are also long-term disorders which can have a major impact on people's lives, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorders and autism. These are also disorders where appropriate support and treatment can help people to live with the symptoms.

If you're dealing with difficulties of this kind, there are solutions and professionals to help you. Please feel free to talk about this.

How can you get mental health support in France?

Who can help you?

Although friends, family and compatriots can offer support, the help of a professional is complementary and may be necessary. Talking about your mental health can help you to feel better! A lot of people consult psychologists and psychiatrists in France - it's very common and nothing to be ashamed of. If you don't want to go to see a mental health specialist, you can discuss this with the people who are already supporting you, such as:

● **Social workers**

They're not medically-trained, but they can very often provide a lot of mental health support. They'll be able to help you access treatment, tell you how things work around where you live and offer guidance of the kind you actually need.

● **Nurses**

They can sometimes come to the accommodation centres. They work at hospitals and treatment sites and can be your first points of contact. They have a good knowledge of mental health issues and will be able to support you.

● **The General Practitioner**

Any doctor you choose can become your "GP". Feel free to speak to him or her about the way you're feeling - s/he will be able to give you a treatment to relieve the symptoms if that seems necessary or else will be able to refer you to a mental health professional. **mentale**, ce sont les psychologues et les psychiatres :

The GP is a doctor who is declared to the health insurance system as your regular doctor who is aware of your circumstances.



In France, there are professionals - **psychologists and psychiatrists** - who deal specifically with mental health:

● **Psychologists**

They provide psychological support by means of interviews based upon discussion and talking, using various tools and methods. They aren't doctors, and this means that they can't prescribe any medicines. They may work within organisations attached to a hospital or independently, for charities or other organisations (for instance at the local mission, at school, etc.) When they work independently, their fees aren't covered by the health insurance system (so you'll usually have to pay for consultations).

Independent professionals are self-employed and work at practices in towns or at clinics. Psychiatrists' fees are covered



● **Psychiatrists**

These are doctors who have chosen to specialise in psychiatry in order to treat and prevent psychiatric disorders. They can prescribe medicines and refer people to be admitted to hospital, and some of them also offer various forms of **psychotherapy**. Most of them work at a hospital and independently. Independent consultations are paid for by the health insurance system so in theory you won't have to pay anything.

Both psychologists and psychiatrists may offer "**forms of psychotherapy**", which means you can talk to the professional about how you're feelings, the things that are worrying you and your experiences, and then you work together to try to find ways of improving the situation.

The healthcare system and the various organisations which can offer support

The health insurance system

In France, everyone who has legal status but no financial income can access healthcare (including mental healthcare) without paying thanks to a system called "**health insurance**", to which those citizens who are in work make contributions.

In order to be eligible, you need to have made an application to the Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie (CPAM - Primary Health Insurance Fund). You'll then get a "**Carte Vitale**" or a **certificate** which you'll need to show at each medical appointment. If you don't have legal status, you're still entitled to Aide Médicale d'État (AME - State Medical Aid) so that you can obtain treatment either from a general practitioner or specialist, or at a hospital. The health insurance system also manages this scheme. You'll have an AME card but not a Carte Vitale, and your rights will be more limited.

Carte Vitale and certificate: these contain various kinds of information, such as your own identity and the identities of any children under the age of sixteen you may have, your health insurance number, along with your health insurance entitlement. They do not contain any information about your state of health or about.



The healthcare system

In France, the site on which most mental healthcare services are provided under one umbrella is the hospital (general or specialising in psychiatry), which has various health organisations attached to it. Outside of the hospital, there are also many psychologists or psychiatrists working **independently in private practices**. You can find a list of independent psychiatrists in health directory on the www.ameli.fr website.

Also, although this varies from one region to another, you can sometimes find psychologists and psychiatrists working at social and specialist organisations.

Feel free to talk to local charities, social workers or your doctor to find out exactly how it works in your own region or town.

Would like to see a psychologist/psychiatrist

SERVICES DE L'HÔPITAL

Centres médico-psychologiques (CMP)

These allow you to consult a mental health professional (psychiatrists, psychologists,

"I've not claimed any entitlement." "I can't access healthcare at the CMP." "My living conditions are vulnerable and I'm in financial difficulties." These are specialist services for vulnerable people. A number of these work with migrants.

Les Équipes Mobiles

Psychiatrie Précarité (EMPP – Mobile Psychiatric Teams for Vulnerable People):

The teams are made up of psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses and social workers. They come to wherever you live, and sometimes have people on duty for hostels, in the street, Emergencies: in the event of an emergency call the fire brigade on 18.

in squats or else they may see you on their own premises.

Psychiatric Permanences

d'Accès aux Soins de Santé (PASS - Twenty-Four Hour Healthcare Clinics): The teams offer support geared towards medical, psychological or social treatment.

INDEPENDENTLY/AT THEIR PRACTICE

Independent psychologist: Their fees are not refunded by the health insurance system, so you usually have to pay for consultations. Some supplementary health insurers (mutual benefit societies) may refund a part of the cost.

Independent psychiatrist: The cost of consultations is refunded by the health insurance system. Some independent psychiatrists may ask for more money, but if you have Protection Universelle Maladie (Puma - Universal Illness Protection) or the Aide Médicale d'État (AME - State Medical Aid), consultations are theoretically free of charge.

WITHIN SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS

Il peut y avoir des consultations gratuites de psychologues et psychiatres dans des centres sociaux, dans des centres communaux d'action sociale (CCAS), à l'école, à la mission locale, dans les services d'accompagnement pour personnes victimes de violences.

AT SPECIALIST ORGANISATIONS

Cross-cultural consultations, specialising in looking after migrants For instance, these can be found in Nantes, Bobigny, Avicennes and Lyons, for instance.

Centres Régionaux Psychotrauma (CRP – Regional Psychiatric Trauma Centres): They support anyone who has experienced traumas - in Lyons, Tours, Lille, Toulouse, Paris, Bobigny, Strasbourg, Nice, Dijon, Poitiers and Bordeaux.

There are a few organisations which specialise in working with migrants, vulnerable people or those who have experienced severe trauma, e.g.

- **In Paris:** Le Comede, Primo Levi, the Centre Minkowska, Le Chêne et L'Hibiscus, Parcours d'Exil;
- **In Montpellier:** The Centre Frantz Fanon;
- **In Marseilles:** The Centre Osiris;
- **In Lyons:** The Centre Essor;
- **In St Etienne:** Le Comede;
- **In Strasbourg:** Parole Sans Frontières.
- **In Bordeaux:** the Association Accompagnement Psychologique et Médiation Interculturelle (AMI) ;
- **At Médecins du Monde's Centres d'Accueil de Soins et d'Orientation (CASO – Healthcare Reception and Guidance Centres) in a number of towns**
- **In Le Havre:** Terra Psy;
- **In Rennes:** The Louis Guilloux network;

What difficulties might you come across in seeing a psychologist or psychiatrist?

● In reality, it can be difficult to gain access to treatment:

- waiting times to get a first appointment can be very long;
- access to professional interpreters is sometimes complicated;
- some professionals may refuse to see you. If something of this kind happens due to the type of healthcare cover you have (e.g. the AME), due to your ethnic origin or sexual orientation, this is called discrimination, and it is illegal and punishable under the law in France. You can report any such refusal of treatment to bodies including the Défenseur des Droits (by telephone, post and online), and also to the Ordre des Médecins (the doctors' organisation) and to the Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie (CPAM - Primary Health Insurance Fund).

Défenseur des droits
09 69 39 00 00
www.defenseurdesdroits.fr

Feel free to approach local charities, and don't be put off - sometimes it doesn't take much to get things working properly.

What should you do in the event of a psychiatric emergency?

● Examples of a psychiatric emergency might include:

- Unbearable pain which makes someone wish they were no longer alive, self-harm or even commit suicide;
- A feeling of rage or anger which is so all-pervasive that you feel as though you've lost control, and as though you might hurt other people or even kill someone.



Wherever you live, there is always an emergency service. It may be part of the general hospital, or attached directly to the psychiatric hospital. If you're really unwell, or if you're with someone who is really unwell, and you've got no other obvious way of getting help, you can go to A&E or call the fire brigade (by dialling 📞 **18**). A&E departments are open twenty-four hours a day and are open to everyone, regardless of their administrative status.

If someone is a danger either to him or herself or to other people, you should not remain alone with him or her. You should call the fire brigade 📞 (**18**) who will know how to help you. Sometimes, a doctor might decide to admit the patient to hospital for treatment even if this is against the patient's wishes.

In addition to this, you should be aware that you can call 📞 **112** from a mobile telephone in all European countries for medical emergencies, criminal offences and hazardous situations. People who are deaf or hard of hearing can send texts to 📞 **114**.

These telephone numbers can be used free of charge even if you've got no credit on your telephone.

You can see a healthcare professional

How does it work?

The healthcare professional will talk with you about anything that's causing you a problem and what might be done to make things better. Although s/he won't be able to find any solutions for you, by seeing things from the outside and asking questions, along with his or her knowledge of mental health issues, s/he will be able to help you to increase your options and help you find the resources you need yourself. The professional may sometimes use various methods to help get a discussion going, such as drawings, music, etc.

Feel free to talk to the healthcare professional about your social and/or legal circumstances (for instance, telling him or her whether you live on the streets, if you're sharing a flat with a lot of other people, if you don't have any money, etc.) It's important for you to pass on this information so that s/he can get a good understanding of your circumstances and offer you the most appropriate solutions.

● As an individual, in a group, with your family and as a couple

As well as individual consultations, there are groups sessions held at some organisations. The discussions with the participants take place in a secure setting and can make it easier to talk about common issues and work together to look for ways to help you feel better. The treatments may also be offered for families or couples.

● How long does a consultation last?

It depends on the professional, but consultations usually last between thirty minutes and an hour, although they may last longer when it is a family consultation.

● How often do I go? How long will it last?

Appointments may be every fortnight, every month, or a bit further apart, depending upon what seems most suitable and depending upon the professional's own availability. The course of treatment may be short and only set up for two or three sessions, but sometimes it can last for several years; this also depends on what you want and what you need.

YOU HAVE RIGHTS!

- You can change healthcare professional;
- The patient-healthcare professional relationship needs to be consensual; if you don't trust him or her, or if you don't want to talk about certain things, you're under no obligation.

I've got to tell a stranger my life story?

Talking to someone I don't even know about myself is a bit weird...

The fact that you find yourself face-to-face with someone you don't know, talking about really private, personal things, may seem strange. Some people feel as though the questions they're asked are an intrusion or nosiness. Even if it feels weird to you, it's a good thing to give it a go, so don't be put off at the first interview! In many cases the main things that'll help you get something out of the treatment are the sense of trust and kindness - you need to feel comfortable with the professional you see.

SAFIA

WHO IS
VULNERABLE,
EXPLAINS:

« *Actually, I'd rather tell my life story to someone I trust, someone who's not going to say anything, who won't judge, someone neutral, in fact* »

If you don't feel comfortable with the person you're seeing, that doesn't necessarily mean that psychological interviews aren't for you - it may just be that the time's not right, or this isn't the right person for you - so please feel free to try again.

If the first interview worries you, you can ask the social worker or a friend to go with you if that'll help to reassure you.

I don't trust the healthcare professional...

Healthcare professionals are subject to "professional confidentiality", they can't share any personal information about you without your agreement, with social workers, government bodies (Prefecture, OFPRA, CNDA), or the police. When there is a professional interpreter at the interview to translate your discussions with the healthcare professional, s/he is also subject to professional confidentiality. **Feel free to talk about this again at the start of the consultation if it worries you.**

Professional confidentiality: nothing you say can be repeated to anyone else without your agreement.



What do I say to him or her? Do I tell him or her everything?

The person you're seeing is a mental health professional, s/he is used to hearing things that are private, so you don't need to be afraid or ashamed of anything you might say. It doesn't matter if you don't know what to say, s/he will help you, by asking questions, etc.

Even so, **you're under no obligation! You don't have to answer the questions and you can talk only about what you want to discuss.**

ESHETE

A REFUGEE, TALKS ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE:

"Actually you do need someone! It's not just medicine, I think you need to communicate with

people... it's a relief! For instance, if I'm not feeling great, I can talk to you and it really cheers me up, it makes me forget all my problems! If I stay out in the street, or in my bedroom, if I'm not communi-

cating with anyone... well, it's hardly surprising if I go mad, is it? We need to communicate! We need someone who'll help us, who'll support us".

This is somewhere you can talk, a space you can use however you like.

The doctor or psychiatrist can prescribe medicines for you

There are various medicines that can help you overcome mental health problems, they may be prescribed for a while in order to relieve the symptoms when they're too overwhelming. For instance, this is what happens when you can't get to sleep or when you're having dark thoughts.

Taking medicines is always a serious matter. It's really important for you to understand why your doctor has prescribed them for you and how you should take them. Ask the doctor - several times, if necessary - to make sure you understand your treatment properly. **You must stick to the prescribed doses and take the treatment for as long as the doctor tells you to.**

It's important to tell the doctor if you're homeless or living in an insecure environment, or if you don't have any money to pay for the medicines. That way s/he can make sure that you're given the right treatment...

If there are any side effects, if you notice any significant changes that worry you, if you don't get on with the medicine or if it's not effective, you should have no hesitation in going back and telling the doctor about this. **Don't change the doses yourself and don't stop taking the medicine without letting your doctor know.** You can often try another equivalent medicine.

The treatment is individual and tailored to your circumstances, **so you mustn't give your medicines to anyone else. Never take a treatment prescribed for someone else, or a medicine you've bought on the street - you'll be putting your life in danger because it might not be suitable for your needs and it could also cause you other serious health problems.**

Medicines can help, but it's also important to be able to talk, discuss things, communicate, have people around you, get involved in activities, etc. **Medicines on their own aren't enough.**

Depending on your health insurance entitlement and the type of medicine, you may be able to claim a full refund, or you may have to pay. If you have any problems getting your medicines, talk to whoever prescribed them for you and go to a Permanence d'Accès aux Soins de Santé (PASS - twenty-four healthcare clinic).

If you don't speak French

It's tough being in a country where you don't understand the language, as it makes it hard to tell people what's wrong, to talk about it and be understood.

Some services and organisations in France use interpreters - this is someone who speaks at least two languages fluently and who can be called in to translate a discussion between two people who don't have a common language.

Professional **interpreters** (in France, they are freelancers or part of an interpreting association) are bound by confidentiality, so they can't repeat what has been said during discussions with healthcare professionals. They aren't supposed to express their own political, ethnic or religious opinions. The interpreter may either be at the consultation with the healthcare professional, or else s/he may translate over the telephone or via videoconferencing.

The interpreter is not a trained healthcare professional, but will be able to make it easier for yourself and the professional to understand one another. S/he will also be on the lookout for any misunderstandings relating to the way we think about treatment, what it means to be treated, what a psychologist, a psychiatrist, etc.

In France, there are various charity organisations and hospital departments that work with professional interpreting associations and can offer you an interpreter's assistance during your consultation **free** of charge. If this is not the case, you're entitled to ask for it.

In practice, the following scenarios are the ones most likely to come up:

- **you're asked to come to your medical consultation and to bring someone who can translate with you. Even if you're with someone you trust, you may feel uncomfortable talking about private things in front of this person, you may be afraid s/he'll tell other people your story, that you'll be judged, etc. So please talk to the person and clarify what you expect both from him or her and from the consultation.**
- **Asking your family to translate may cause you problems, and especially children, particularly with mental health consultations;**
- **Some compatriots may sell you their translation services, but this isn't really the best solution unless they're professional interpreters.**

In all cases:

- you have the right to say if you don't feel comfortable with the interpreter;
- you have the right to choose not to have an interpreter;
- you have the right to ask for a professional interpreter;
- you have the right to ask the interpreter questions: for whom does s/he work?
- feel free to ask the interpreter to repeat things and to ask questions if you don't understand or if you're not sure that you've understood properly.

If there's a problem, feel free to point it out to the healthcare professional, especially if you can't understand the interpreter properly.

How can you look after your mental health?

As well as the professionals and organisations specialising in mental health, there are a number of things which may help you to get better.

What can you do to make yourself feel better?

Although we understand that the ideas below may seem strange or a bit pointless in relation to how unwell you may be feeling, following these suggestions on a daily basis can support you and have a real impact, please feel free to give them a try!

● Talking things through

- feel free to talk to people you trust (whether they're professionals, people you share a house with, friends, volunteers, etc.) about how you're feeling. It may do you good to get things off your chest;
- you can also seek support from your the people around you - there may be other migrants who've felt - or are still feeling - the same as you, so feel free to talk things over with them.

ADEL,
A REFUGEE,
EXPLAINS:

"Sometimes you feel like having someone

you can talk your problems over with to make you feel better. Sometimes you need someone you can talk to, to comfort

you and say "No my friend, don't worry, things'll work out. So if we could have that, it might really help".

● Talking things over and trying things out

- You can try drawing on what you've experienced - what helps you to relax, what comforts you? What sort of things do you enjoy doing? What did you used to enjoy doing? May that's something you can do here as well? Qu'est-ce que vous aimiez faire avant ? Peut-être que vous pouvez aussi le faire ici ?

- Writing, drawing, making things, singing, dancing, etc. are all activities which can sometimes do you good and help you see things more clearly, so please feel free to give them a try! Go for a walk! Even in the cities there are often parks and play areas for children which are open to everyone and where you can go for a walk.

- Do things you enjoy, such as sport, music, manual activities, reading, gardening, a bit of DIY. Or if you're religious you can go to church/the mosque/the temple/etc.

● Try some communal activities

- Feel free to join in with the activities organised by your accommodation centre, your neighbourhood, charity organisations or social

centres. Taking part can do you good and give you a chance to meet new people.



- If you can't work, you can sometimes volunteer for various charity organisations.

- Find out about the activities organised by the town - there may be exhibitions or free concerts.

- You can also take part in communal activities based around well-being, such as yoga, meditation, discussion groups, sport, etc.

- If you want to meet new people, feel free to ask your neighbours to go for a walk, do your shopping together, cook, take part in an activity, etc.

PIERRE,
A REFUGEE,
TALKS ABOUT
HIS EXPERIENCE :

« I wasn't in good shape either physically or mentally... but thanks to the charity's workshops

we all got together to do things together. We set up a football team, and did loads of stuff together - I've got to say that it gave me a real boost! It really did help to take me up a gear... I was totally depressed

and gradually, thanks to those activities, and also after I started working with charity organisations and I started to enjoy life again, it really helped me! »



● Establishing and maintaining a routine

- Trying to keep to a regular pace that makes you feel good can help you to stay in good mental health - try to eat and sleep at regular times and to go out and do things during the day. You can also organise a schedule of activities and things to do, which can help to give your week a bit of structure.
- Even if don't have anything in particular to do, try to go out (go to the park, to the football ground, to the cinema, for walks, etc.)

Some of these activities will probably calm you down whereas others won't, and there'll be some that'll make you feel better one day but not the next - the idea is to find out what works for you.

Don't put yourself under any pressure and don't lose hope!

Practical exercises that you can try

These suggestions for exercises to calm you down may not suit you, so if you find that this is the case, feel free to stop at any time.



Gradual relaxation

(by d'Edmund Jacobson)

As you breathe in, clench your fists. Clench them as hard as you can. Keep your fists clenched for a few seconds and notice the sensation in your hand. As you breathe out, relax your hand and your fingers... The whole of your hand releases the tension gradually. Relax all the muscles. Observe and enjoy the relaxation. Be aware of all the sensations you feel. This exercise can be done with each part of the body - the arms, legs, etc.

Anti-panic breathing exercise

(by Emmanuel Contamin)

A specific breathing exercise to use if you feel overwhelmed by your emotions:

1. Breathe in through your nose for three seconds.
2. Hold your breath for four seconds.
3. Breathe out through your mouth for five seconds.

Here as you breathe, you focus on the breathing out because this is what helps you to relax. You should only do it two or three times (otherwise it can make you dizzy), then start breathing normally again. If necessary, you can do this anti-panic breathing exercise once or twice.

There are a number of applications offering free relaxation and breathing programmes in different languages - feel free to look online.

The 5-4-3-2-1 routine to calm you down

(By B. Ericsson, L. Isebaert et Y. Dolan)

Name things out loud:

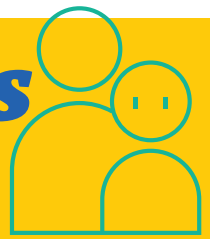
Five things that you can see (e.g. a pen, the white wall, someone walking in the street, the clouds in the sky, the wood of the chair, etc.). With each of them you repeat "I can see..."

Five things that you can hear (e.g. the noise of the cars in the street, the birds, the silence in the room, the sound of your own voice, noise from the neighbours, etc.). With each of them you repeat "I can hear..."

Five things that you can feel either inside or "with" your body" (e.g. feeling yourself breathing, your arm against the chair, your feet inside your shoes, your hand against your leg, you can feel that you're sitting on the chair, etc.). With each of them you repeat "I can feel..."

Keep on naming four things that you can see, four things that you can hear, four things that you can feel (either other things or the same ones), then continue the same exercise with three things, two things and then one thing.

Specific ideas



For children and teenagers

Your children can also be affected by mental health problems and there are various signs to look out for:

- if they're having trouble getting to sleep;
- if they're refusing to eat;
- if they're socially isolated - they don't have any friends, they're aggressive with other people (e.g. biting), they don't look at you;
- if they seem sad;
- if they're restless and lack concentration;
- if they find it hard to speak French and to learn at school; parler français et pour apprendre à l'école;
- if they're having any difficulties growing up properly and feeling comfortable with their bodies;
- if they keep on wetting or soiling themselves or the bed at night and sometimes even during the daytime - or start doing it again - even though they're no longer small children.

There are organisations and professionals offering free support for children and teenagers, such as:

- Centres Médico Psychologiques (CMP - Medical and Psychological Centre) for children and adolescents: these are attached to a hospital, and you can see nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists.
- Centres Médico Psycho Pédagogique (CMPP - Educational Psychology Medical Centres): they offer consultations and monitoring for children and teenagers aged from 0 to 20.

- **Protection Maternelle et Infantile (PMI - Mother and Child Protection)** for children aged under 6: they offer consultations, collective initiatives, initiatives for pregnant women, for children and in the field of family planning and education.
- **Aide Sociale à l'Enfance (ASE - Child Welfare Service):** this service can offer material, educational and psychological support for underage children and their families
- **Maisons des Adolescents (centres for teenagers):** these are places where teenagers and their families can go for support.
- **drop-in centres for young people under the age of 25.**
- Independent child psychologists and psychiatrists.
- Psychologists, nurses, social workers and doctors who are part of the national education system.

Feel free to ask for the contact details of organisations near you.

As for adults, there are all kinds of activities which can help children and teenagers to feel better, such as school, where they can play and meet other children, the crèche and day-care for babies, play centres, friends, family, etc.

What about women?

Migrant or vulnerable women may face additional difficulties.

There is an anonymous national freephone number for women who've been the victims of violence: **3919, "Violences Femmes Info"**. You'll find someone to listen and refer you to specialist charity and other organisations near you.

There are specific national women's support charities and other organisations in France and you'll find local branches near where you live, e.g.

- **Family planning centres**, which are open to all, free of charge for people who are underage or don't have health insurance. A team of health and social work professionals will be able to give you information and advice about emotional and sexual life, medical consultations to issue contraception, screening for sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy tests, support on either continuing with or having a Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy (VTP).
- **Centres d'Information sur les Droits des Femmes et des Familles (CIDFF - Women and Family Information Centres)** provide information, guidance and support to help women to claim their rights.
- **The national GAMS federation** is committed to combating all forms of violence against women and girls, and especially female genital mutilation, forced and/or early marriage, and other practices which are harmful to the health of women and girls.

There may also be mental health professionals at these charities and organisations. If not, these organisations will be able to refer you to local professionals.

Other specific resources

There is a huge number of charity organisations in France, these organisations vary depending upon the issues or needs you come across. So, for instance, there are charity organisations and support groups for people with alcohol problems, charities fighting homophobia, specific support schemes for autistic people, for the victims of sexual violence, etc. These resources can also support you so feel free to find out more.

Additional resources

GLOSSARY

AME: Aide Médicale d'État (State Medical Aid)

ASE: Aide Sociale à l'Enfance (Child Welfare)

CAARUD: Centres d'Accueil et d'Accompagnement à la Réduction des risques pour Usagers de Drogues (Support and Harm Reduction Centres for Drug Users)

CCAS: Centre Communal d'Action Sociale (Communal Social Action Centre)

CIDFF: Centres d'Informations sur les Droits des Femmes et des Familles (CIDFF - Women and Family Rights Information Centres)

CMP: Centre Médico-Psychologique (Medical and Psychological Centre)

CMPP: Centre Médico Psycho Pédagogique (Educational Psychology Medical Centre)

CNDA: Cour Nationale du Droit d'Asile (National Court for the Right of Asylum)

CPAM: Caisse Primaire d'Assurance Maladie (Primary Health Insurance Fund)

CSAPA: Centre de Soins, d'Accompagnement et de Prévention en Addictologie (Addiction Treatment, Support and Prevention Centre)

EMPP: Équipe Mobile Psychiatrie Précarité (Mobile Psychiatric Team for Vulnerable People)

OFPRA: Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides (French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons).

PASS: Psychiatric Permanences d'Accès aux Soins de Santé (PASS - Twenty-Four Hour Healthcare Clinics)

PMI: Protection Maternelle et Infantile (Mother and Child Protection)

USEFUL NUMBERS

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Emergencies | 112 |
| SAMU (emergency medical services): | 15 |
| Police | 17 |
| Fire Brigade | 18 |
| Samu Social | 115 |
| Allo Enfance en Danger (children's helpline) | 119 |
| Violence against women | 3919 |
| France Victime | 16 006 |
| Défenseur des Droits | |
| SOS Homophobie (homophobia) | 0 810 108 135 |
| SOS Viols (rape) | 0 800 05 95 95 |
| Drug info service | 0 800 23 13 13 |
| Smoking info service | 39 89 |
| Alcohol info service | 0980 980 930 |

To find out more: You'll find additional resources on the Orspere-Samdarra website at www.orspere-samdarra.com