

TAKING CARE OF MENTAL HEALTH

NOT
myself
TODAY

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

“A state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”¹

Mental health and well-being contribute to our quality of life and to our ability to enjoy it. Caring relationships, a place to call home, a supportive community, and work and leisure all contribute to mental health. However, no one’s life is perfect, so mental health is also about learning the coping skills to deal with life’s ups and downs the best we can.²

WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS? WHAT ARE MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS?

Mental illness affects people of all ages, in all kinds of jobs and at all educational levels.

Mental illness is a serious disturbance in thoughts, feelings and perceptions that is severe enough to affect day-to-day functioning.²

A mental health problem is a broader term that includes both mental illness and/or symptoms that may not be severe enough to warrant the diagnosis of a mental illness. It is important to recognize that with most mental health problems, the symptoms are not static and can improve or worsen over time.³

DID YOU KNOW?

GOOD HEALTH IS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT GOOD MENTAL HEALTH.

Mental health problems and illness are often very treatable. People can, and do, recover from even the most severe mental health problems.

Mental health problems are common. 1 in 5 Canadians will have a mental health problem or illness this year.⁴

Mental illnesses are serious medical illnesses. They cannot be overcome through “will power” and are not related to a person’s character or intelligence.⁵

People living with mental illness are no more dangerous than people who do not experience mental illness. In fact, people living with mental illness are much more likely to harm themselves or to be the victims of violence than any other group in our society.⁶

Mental illness is not a barrier to achievement. There are lots of well-known and successful individuals who lived or are living with mental illness. Just some to note: Jim Carrey; Ray Charles; Frederic Chopin; Agatha Christie; Winston Churchill; Eric Clapton; Charles Darwin; Diana, Princess of Wales; Charles Dickens; F. Scott Fitzgerald; Sigmund Freud; Audrey Hepburn; Thomas Jefferson; Elton John; Abraham Lincoln; Greg Louganis; Michelangelo; J.P. Morgan; Sir Isaac Newton; Georgia O’Keefe; Bonnie Raitt; J.K. Rowling; Paul Simon; George Stephanopoulos; Emma Thompson; Leo Tolstoy; Ted Turner; Mark Twain; Vincent van Gogh; Mike Wallace; Walt Whitman.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

- camh.ca
- cmha.ca/mental-health
- heretohelp.bc.ca
- mindyourmind.ca/illnesses
- mooddisorderscanada.ca
- partnersformh.ca/resources
- phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/index-eng.php

SOURCES

- 1 World Health Organization
- 2 Quick Facts: Mental Illness & Addiction in Canada. Mood Disorders Society of Canada
- 3 Mental Health First Aid (mentalhealthfirstaid.ca)
- 4 Kessler, R. C., Chiu, W.T., Demler, O., Merikangas, K.R., Walters, E.E. (2005). Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of 12-month DSM-IV disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62 (6), 617-627.
- 5 National Alliance on Mental Illness (nami.org)
- 6 Canadian Mental Health Association (cmha.ca)

HOW CAN YOU BE A MENTAL HEALTH CHAMPION IN THE WORKPLACE?

SUPPORT A COLLEAGUE

We all have mental health. A person's mental health can get better or worse over time and in response to events in one's life. When someone is experiencing poor mental health, they may just keep it to themselves for fear of being shamed, judged or discriminated against. But, it is vital that people experiencing mental health challenges get help sooner versus later.

Each of us have a role to play in supporting those facing challenges with their mental health – from being more open in talking about mental health to being more aware of the signs and symptoms of mental illness, to encouraging the person to seek help.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR¹

People who are experiencing a mental health problems or illness may feel and behave out of character. You or others may notice a change in mood and behaviour.

Some examples of changes in behaviour that might indicate that the person is experiencing mental health issues include:

- Consistent late arrivals or frequent absences.
- Lack of co-operation or a general inability to work with colleagues and/or withdrawal.
- Decreased productivity.
- Increased accidents or safety problems.
- Frequent complaints of fatigue or unexplained pains.
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions or remembering things.
- Making excuses for missed deadlines or poor work.
- Decreased interest or involvement in one's work.
- Working excessive overtime over a prolonged period.
- Expressions of strange or grandiose ideas.
- Displays of anger or blaming of others.

It is important to note that people behaving in these ways may be simply having a bad day or week, or they may be working through a difficult time in their lives that is temporary. A pattern that continues for a longer period, however, may indicate an underlying mental health problem.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?¹

The first step is asking.

If you have noticed signs and symptoms and are concerned about the person's health, don't be afraid to ask them how they are feeling or demonstrate that you care in other ways. Examples might include, "I've noticed that lately you have been behaving differently, is everything okay?" or "How are things going with you?" Try to ask open-ended questions rather than questions that will most likely get a "Yes" or "No" response.

Listen and keep an open mind.

Be patient and listen to the person's fears and concerns, and take them seriously – try not to be dismissive of their experiences and feelings. Avoid interrupting and stay focused on them. Be sure to listen non-judgmentally. Offer options and suggestions rather than giving advice.

If you are worried about a friend or colleague who might be struggling, there are ways to help.

Here are five basic actions of Mental Health First Aid, a training program offered by the Mental Health Commission of Canada:

- 1. Evaluate the situation to decide how best to help.**
This does not refer to clinical assessments used by professionals. Might the person harm themselves or are they experiencing extreme distress? Confidentiality does not apply when a person is at risk of harming themselves or others. If the person is at risk of suicide or harm, seek professional help – this could include securing emergency medical services, calling 911 or contacting a mental health professional.
- 2. Listen non-judgmentally:** use verbal and non-verbal cues that enable the person to talk freely and comfortably about their problems.
- 3. Give reassurance and information:** help the person feel hope, that they have a real medical condition that can be treated, and encourage them to seek help.
- 4. Encourage the person to get appropriate help** and reach out to others who can provide assistance.
- 5. Encourage other supports** through self-care or by having them reach out to their personal supports or social networks such as family, friends, colleagues, etc.

DO YOUR PART TO TACKLE STIGMA

Stigma refers to negative attitudes (prejudice) and negative behaviour (discrimination) toward people with mental health problems or mental illness. Stigma means having fixed ideas and judgments about people, as well as fearing and avoiding what we don't understand.

The stigma attached to mental health problems presents a serious barrier to diagnosis and treatment, as well as acceptance in the community.²

To help combat stigma, educate yourself about mental health and mental illness. Participating in Not Myself Today is a great start!

Be sure to put the person first and avoid generalizing and using labels. Be aware of the language you use. For example, words like “crazy” and “mental” are not helpful. These types of words are hurtful and make it harder for those living with mental health challenges to reach out for help.

A helpful criteria to use is called **STOP**. Use the **STOP** criteria below to recognize attitudes and actions that support the stigma of mental health conditions. Ask yourself if what you hear, read or experience:

Stereotypes people with mental health conditions (that is, assumes they are all alike rather than individuals)?

Trivializes or belittles people with mental health conditions and/or the condition itself?

Offends people with mental health conditions by insulting them?

Patronizes people with mental health conditions by treating them as if they were not as good as other people?

If so, then, speak up and call it out. Help the person realize how their words affect people facing mental health challenges.³

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

- heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/supporting-a-friend-or-family-member-with-a-mental-illness
- ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/stigma-and-discrimination
- workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/pdf/Helping_troubled_coworkers.pdf
- workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/newsletter/working-through-it-weekly-emails

SOURCES

- 1 Mental Health First Aid (mentalhealthfirstaid.ca)
- 2 Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (camh.ca/en/education/about/camh_publications/Pages/stigma.aspx)
- 3 ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/stigma-and-discrimination

WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR OWN MENTAL HEALTH

Supporting your own mental health and well-being can mean different things to different people. The list below is just meant to help get you started:

Take care of your physical health:

- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Seek natural light every day.
- Give yourself enough time for sleep.
- Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water.
- Avoid or limit your intake of alcohol, caffeine, drugs and tobacco.
- Stay active and exercise – find physical activities that you enjoy, even if it is just a 15-minute walk at lunch-time.

Take some time to do something that you love to do:

- Engage in a favourite hobby, like painting, playing a musical instrument, reading, etc.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a favourite TV show or movie.
- Hang out with friends.
- Be socially active – share and create positive relationships.

Know and respect your limits:

- Take time to recharge your batteries – take breaks and take time to care for yourself.

- Establish boundaries between your work and home life (e.g. certain times that you won't be available, or taking a break from your mobile device).
- Be aware of any changes in your habits, attitudes and moods, especially if they exist over several weeks or longer.

Other ideas:

- Write in a journal.
- Find ways to use humour.
- Find ways for creative self-expression.
- Learn how to meditate, using deep breathing, practicing yoga, praying.
- Spend time in nature.
- Join/attend a club.
- Volunteer and/or help others.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

- cmha.bc.ca/get-informed/mental-health-information/improving-mh
- cmha.ca/mental_health/mental-health-for-life
- heretohelp.bc.ca/factsheet/tips-for-good-mental-health
- mooddisorderscanada.ca/page/workplace
- workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

SOURCES

- 1 Canadian Mental Health Association (cmha.ca)
- 2 Mental Health First Aid (mentalhealthfirstaid.ca)
- 3 Partners for Mental Health (partnersformh.ca)
- 4 Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com)

