Did you know that 42% of Canadians were not sure if they would socialize with a friend who has a mental illness? We also know that the sooner someone gets help, the better their outcome.
How to Talk About Your Mental Health

Why talk about your mental health?
Did you know that 42% of Canadians were not sure if they would socialize with a friend who has a mental illness?¹ We know that the sooner someone gets help, the better their outcome. If someone can talk or get support to talk about their mental health, the sooner they can start getting better.

How to make it easier to talk about your mental health.
You might start by talking to a person with whom you are close, trust and are comfortable sharing your thoughts. In some communities and families, mental illnesses are not talked about - this may make it even harder to talk about how you are feeling. In that case, you can speak to a health care professional, go to a walk-in counseling clinic or call a help line.

Remember: There are some good support groups and blogs online, but not all people will be kind if you post your feelings on social media. Please be aware of this and only post online when you are ready and have good social supports.

How to help someone who wants to talk about their mental health.
If someone shares their mental health concerns with you, it’s important for you to listen, be supportive and encourage them to get help. You don’t have to know all the answers and it is not your role to fix everything. Your role is to help the person get the help they need.

Additional Resources
Resources are hyperlinked. If printing this activity guide, please review resources online.

Websites

English:
- Bell Let’s Talk
- Kids Help Phone
- Talking About Mental Illness – A Guide for Developing an Awareness Program for Youth

French:
- Bell Cause pour la cause
- Jeunesse j’écoute
- Parlons de la maladie mentale - Guide d’élaboration d’un programme de sensibilisation à l’intention des jeunes

Activity 1: Getting Started

Goal
- To learn how to talk to someone about your mental health.
- To learn what to do if someone shares their mental health challenges with you.

Messages
- When talking about your own mental health, you don’t need to say everything at once. You can ask the person if you can talk to them again.
- Some people may not respond in the way you were expecting. They may not know what to say or how to be the most supportive. You can try talking to them at another time.
- You can ALWAYS talk to a health care professional, a helpline or go to a mental health walk-in counselling clinic to talk to someone.

Time
- 20-30 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

Supplies
- Video: How to Talk About Your Mental Health
- Flip chart paper and markers

Facilitator Steps
1. Watch the video: How to Talk About Your Mental Health
2. In a large or small group, ask the participants:
   a. “How could you tell that Juan was stressed and worried?”
   b. “Why do you think Juan talked to Marco?”
   c. “How could Marco help Juan feel comfortable to talk about his mental health?”
   d. What else does the group notice?

Possible Participants’ Answers
a. Not sleeping well, acting different, not eating or eating more, acting not like himself
b. Juan trusts Marco.
   - Marco has shared things with Juan in the past.
   - They have known each other for a while.
   - Juan feels like Marco has been there for Juan in the past.

   c. Marco can:
   - Listen
   - Be respectful
   - Not judge
   - Offer to find help or go with Juan to get help.

   d. Marco offers to help. He does not give a list of “answers”.

For more resources: haveTHATtalk.ca
Everybody needs help sometimes and nobody has all the answers. Sometimes we can help others by being supportive and listening. Other times, we can help by connecting them to people with more training skills.
Activity 2: Knowing Your Community Resources

Goal
• To learn about mental health resources and services in Ottawa.

Messages
• It is important to know about mental health resources in Ottawa so you or someone you
know can get help when needed.

Time
• 15-20 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

Supplies
• Video: How to Talk About Your Mental Health
• One Mental Health and Substance Use Resource List found at haveTHATtalk.ca - printout
  for each participant
• Flip chart paper and markers

Facilitator Steps
1. Watch the video: How to Talk About Your Mental Health
2. Divide the participants into groups of 2-3.
3. Hand each participant the Mental Health and Substance Use Resource List
4. Write the following scenarios on flip chart paper. One paper for each scenario (You can also
  create your own scenario using ideas from the group).

Scenarios
a. Your sister is concerned about her child’s mental health.
b. Your colleague at work got laid off.
c. Your friend has stopped going to class and is having a hard time getting out of bed in the
  morning.
d. Your father recently lost his partner.

5. Assign one scenario to each group.
6. Ask participants to identify resources that would be helpful in their scenario.
7. Ask participants to share their answers and add to the flip chart papers.
8. Add any other resources that did not come up in the discussion.

Possible Participants’ Answers
• See community resources listed on haveTHATtalk.ca
• Other possibilities include family and friends, teachers and coaches, spiritual leaders and health care professionals

For more resources: haveTHATtalk.ca
There is help available for everyone.
Activity 3: Taking Action

Goal
- To identify support people and strategies that can help you when going through challenges

Messages
- We can all learn ways to help ourselves through challenges.
- There are many community mental health resources in Ottawa.
- Get to know where you and others can find help.

Time
- 10-15 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

Supplies
- Video: How to Talk About Your Mental Health
- One “Newfoundland Dog” activity sheet for each participant. (page 13)

Facilitator Steps
1. Watch the video: How to Talk About Your Mental Health
2. Say to participants: “Newfoundland dogs are often used to rescue people struggling in the water. At some point in our lives, we’ll need help from others”.
4. Say to participants “When you are struggling, there are things you can do, and people you can turn to, to help you feel better.” Ask participants to think about:
   - things they can do to deal with their struggles and feel better
   - people in their lives who can help them
5. Ask participants to fill in the activity sheet.

Possible Participants’ Answers
Things you can do for yourself:
Positive self-talk, talking to others, and positive coping skills like being active, getting enough sleep, making healthy food choices and relaxation.

People who can help:
Family, friends from school, health care professionals, club leaders and religious leaders. Support from community resources and organizations.

Remind participants about the Mental Health and Substance Use Resource List found at haveTHATtalk.ca

It’s good to know who to reach out to when you need help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you will feel better.