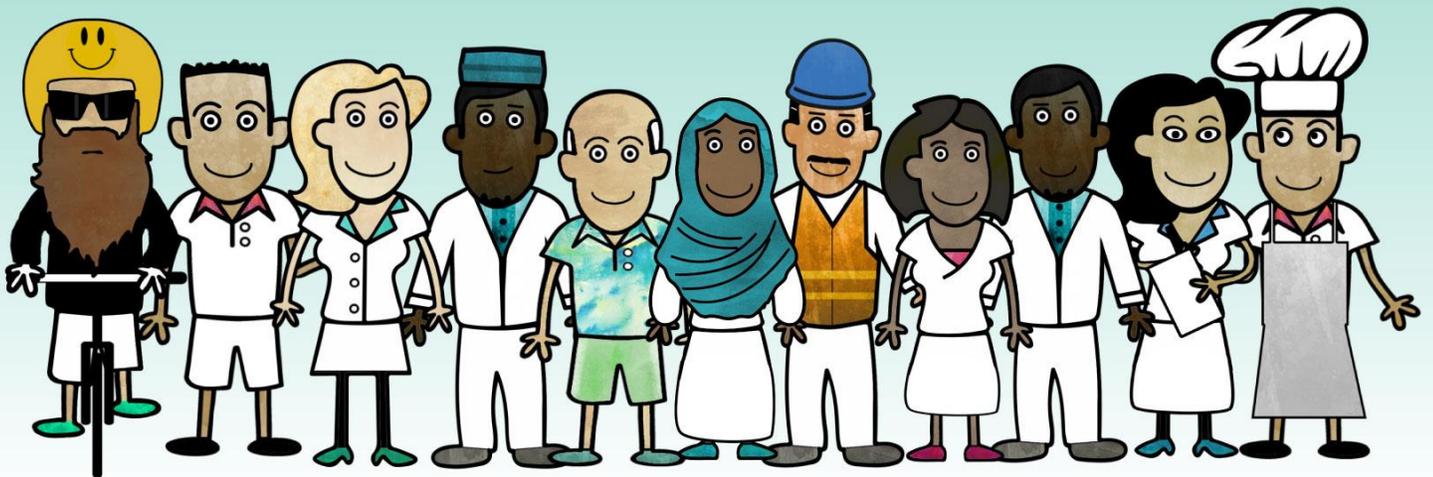




Mental Health = Health



have **THAT** talk



Mental Health = Health

Mental health describes a person's state of well-being. Individuals with good mental health are able to manage their stress, work well, and help their community. Mental illness is a diagnosed disorder that affects the way a person thinks, feels or behaves. People can experience positive and poor mental health at different times in their life, with or without a mental illness. Positive mental health protects people from the stress of everyday life. It can reduce the risk of developing poor mental health and mental illness.

Everyone has the ability to experience good mental health. Think of your mental health in the same way you think of your physical health. Many stressful situations can negatively impact your mental health, such as divorce, a new school, living in a new country, adapting to a new culture, experiencing war or injustice, and experiencing discrimination and racism. Just as a person's life experiences and circumstances change, so do their moods, thoughts, and sense of well-being. A person's mental health can change over a lifetime.

Different cultures have varying ways of understanding mental health and mental illness. Individual beliefs influence how people think, feel and relate to others who are facing mental health challenges. Sometimes these beliefs can help people, or they can cause them to feel ashamed. When people feel ashamed, they are less likely to ask for help.

Key Messages

- Talking about mental health can help decrease stigma and encourage people to ask for help sooner.
- Look for ways to connect with your family, friends and community.
- Consider volunteering, supporting someone in need, or joining an activity at a community centre.
- Talk to someone you trust about your mental health challenges, like a family member, friend or professional. Get help early.

Stigma

Stigma is a set of negative beliefs, judgements, and behaviours towards a group of people. Many people face stigma because of their race, religion, gender, sexuality, economic situation and a variety of other things. Stigma prevents people from asking for help and receiving the support they need.

Examples of negative beliefs and practices towards people living with a mental health challenge include:

- Describing them as not being normal or using words like “psycho” or “crazy”.
- Blaming them for their mental health challenges and making them feel ashamed.
- Telling them things like “you just need to get over it. You could if you wanted to”.
- Being afraid of someone with a mental illness.
- Avoiding or excluding a person with a mental illness.

What can you do to reduce stigma?

- Use respectful language and avoid hurtful and labeling words like “psycho” or “crazy”.
- Reach out to others who are struggling. Encourage them to get help.
- Develop healthy relationships with people in your life who have mental health challenges.
- Speak positively about the situation to provide hope.
- Reach out for help from family, friends, religious/cultural leaders or professionals.
- Correct myths, rumours and stereotypes you hear or see.
- Explore your own feelings and biases about mental health and mental illness and think about how these thoughts impact those living with mental health challenges.
- Learn more about mental illness by checking out trusted websites like the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), [the Mental Health Commission of Canada](#), and the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#).

Helping Others

If someone shares their mental health concerns with you, it is important for you to listen, be supportive and encourage them to get help. You do not 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

English

- [Addressing Stigma](#)
- [People-First Language](#)
- [Facts about Mental Health](#)
- [Ottawa Public Health Stigma Course](#)

French

- [Lutte contre la stigmatisation](#)
- [Le vocabulaire centré sur la personne](#)
- [Faits saillants sur la santé mentale et la maladie mentale](#)
- [Formation en ligne de la santé publique d'ottawa sur la stigmatisation](#)

Activity 1: My mental health, it's good to talk about it.

Goal

- To understand what mental health is.
- To understand the importance of talking about mental health.

Messages

- Stigma refers to negative attitudes (prejudice) and negative behaviours (discrimination) towards people.
- Stigma prevents people from telling those closest to them that they are struggling. This takes away vital support that is needed to get help and stay well.
- We all have a role to play in reducing stigma in our community.
- Getting help early and talking to someone you trust about your mental health challenges, like a family member, friend or professional is important.

Time

- 20-30 minutes.

Supplies

- Video: [“Mental Health = Health”](#)
- Flip chart paper and markers.

Activity

- View the video: *“Mental Health = Health”*
- Write the following on a flip chart paper: “Mental health, it’s good to talk about it.”
- Split participants into groups of two or three and provide them with paper and markers. Ask the groups to brainstorm what good mental health means to them.
- Ask each small group to share their definition with the larger group. Highlight the key elements of each one. Write their answers on your flip chart paper.
- Divide the participants into two groups. Ask one group to write: “Ideas to help someone talk about their mental health”. Ask the second group to write: “Things we do that stop people from talking about their mental health”.
- Ask each group to share their ideas with the larger group. Highlight the key elements of each one and listen to the participants’ comments. Write their answers on your flip chart paper.
- Provide participants with resources for places they can find support in the community. You can find resources at:
ottawapublichealth.ca/MentalHealthandWellness

Remember

Negative beliefs about people with mental illness can make them feel judged and ashamed. This is stigma. Stigma can cause people to be afraid of talking about their mental health. It can stop them from getting the help that they need.

Possible answers

What does good mental health mean to you?

- Feeling good about yourself.
- Balance in all aspects of your life.
- Being happy, being able to move past your worries.
- Having good relationships with other people.
- Having a sense of belonging to a community.

Ideas to help someone talk about their mental health and things we do that stop others from talking about their mental health:

Ideas to help someone talk about their mental health:	Things we do that stop others from talking about their mental health:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helping them feel safe and able to trust you.• Actively listening to what they say.• Not judging them.• Accepting that their feelings are normal.• Having a positive relationship.• Helping them find resources or support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not listening to them.• Gossiping.• Dismissing what they say and feel as unimportant.• Talking about people who live with mental illnesses as being “crazy” or “weird”.• Not wanting to spend time with them.

Adapted with permission from, *My Life, It's Cool to Talk About It: Educational Activities Guide*, Canadian Mental Health Association: Montreal Branch, 2013.

Activity 2: Reducing Stigma

Goal

- To learn how to reduce stigma for people living with mental health challenges.

Messages

- Stigma is a set of negative beliefs, prejudices and negative behaviours toward groups of people. There are many reasons that people face stigma. These include their race, religion, gender, sexuality and economic situation.
- Stigma often prevents a person living with a mental health challenge from asking for help. It can also stop them from receiving the support they need.
- Culture can influence how we understand mental health. The influences can be positive and negative.
- Talking positively about mental health can decrease stigma.

Time

- 30 minutes.

Supplies

- Video: [*"Mental Health = Health"*](#)
- Flip chart paper and markers.

Activity

- View the video: *"Mental Health = Health"*
- Read each of the following statements to the group:
 1. Mental health and mental illness are the same thing.
 2. Mental illnesses only affect certain people.
 3. People do not recover from mental health problems.
 4. Most people will be affected by a mental illness at some point in their lives.
 5. All cultures view mental health and mental illness in the same way.
 6. We have some control over our mental health.
- Ask the group to think about each statement. Then, ask them to share and discuss whether they believe each statement is "true" or "false." This will help start a conversation about stigma.
- When everyone has had a chance to discuss, share the "Myths and Facts about mental health and mental illness" document (found below).
- Review each statement once more, but this time, with the answers.
- Write the definition of stigma on a flip chart paper (found in the "messages" section above).
- Ask the participants:
 - "Did you learn or notice anything about these statements today?"
 - "Were you surprised by any of the information? If so, why?"
 - "How does stigma affect people living with a mental illness?"

- “What could you do to reduce stigma where you live, work and play?”
- Write their responses on flip chart paper.

Possible Answers

How does stigma affect people living with mental illness?

- They may feel afraid, ashamed, angry, misunderstood, alone and excluded.
- Stigma makes it hard for them to reach out for help or accept help.
- Stigma can delay them getting the help and support they need.

What could you do to reduce stigma where you live, work and play?

- Try not to use hurtful and labeling words like “psycho” or “crazy”.
- Reach out to someone who you think might be struggling and encourage them to get help.
- Learn more about mental illnesses by checking out trusted websites like the [Canadian Mental Health Association](#), the [Mental Health Commission of Canada](#) and the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health](#).
- Develop healthy relationships with people in your life who have mental health challenges and illnesses.
- Share the impacts of stigma with your family, friends and community.

Myths and Facts about Mental Health and Mental Illness

1) **Mental health and mental illness are the same thing (False).**

- Mental health describes a person's state of well-being. Individuals with good mental health are able to manage their stress, work well, and help their community. Different communities have different ways of understanding and talking about mental health.
- Mental health can change over a lifetime. It is related to the environments where people live, learn, work and play. Individuals can experience positive mental health, with or without a mental illness. They can also experience poor mental health with or without a mental illness.
- Positive mental health protects people from the stress of everyday life. It can reduce the risk of developing poor mental health and mental illness.

2) **Mental illnesses only affect certain people (False).**

- Mental illnesses can affect anyone. They can impact people of all ages, incomes, social status, religion, and ethnicities.
- Sometimes, if a person is experiencing symptoms of their mental illness, how they are feeling, thinking and behaving may be different from what is normal for them.

3) **People do not recover from mental health problems (False).**

- People can recover from mental health problems. Getting help is important. Sometimes people need the support of a counsellor, a social worker, a physician, a psychologist or a psychiatrist. They may also need the help and support of friends and family and the understanding of co-workers or classmates.
- Sometimes embarrassment or fear of rejection stops people from getting the help they need. Many people experience mental health problems in their lives. With help they are able to recover and have full, happy lives.

4) **People with mental health challenges should deal with it on their own (False).**

- When people are having trouble with their physical health, they often go to the doctor or ask others for help. Unfortunately, because of stigma, many people do not ask for help with their mental health. Mental health challenges can be related to how the brain is working. It is important to get help and support from a professional, or others, such as trusted friends, family, and people in your community.

5) **Most people will be affected by a mental illness at some point in their lives (True).**

- Mental illness is a diagnosable illness that affects our thoughts, feelings and actions. In Canada, one in five people will experience a mental illness in any given year. Mental illness not only affects the person living with the illness, but it

also can affect their family, friends and community who care about their well-being.

6) All cultures view mental health and mental illness in the same way (False).

- Mental illnesses affect people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures.
- Mental illness, like any other illness, is diagnosed by a doctor and treated by a healthcare professional. Cultural beliefs shape our understanding of mental health and mental illness. For example, some believe that mental illness is a curse or punishment from God or is caused by evil spirits. These beliefs are stigmatizing. Stigma makes it harder to ask for support. This is important because the sooner someone gets help, the better their outcome.

7) We have some control over our mental health (True).

- Life is full of changes that can cause stress and affect our mental health.
- We cannot always control these challenges in life, but we can control how we respond and take care of our mental health. Here are some ideas:
 - Taking care of our health.
 - Understanding that our feelings are normal.
 - Developing positive and realistic ways of thinking about ourselves and the world around us.
 - Talking to others we trust about our mental health.
 - Making sure we have a network of friends and family for support.
 - Reaching out for help when we are struggling.

Adapted from Ottawa Public Health. Youth Connections Ottawa – implementation guide: A toolkit for implementation of the Youth Connections Ottawa peer-to-peer program. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health; 2023

Activity 3: Resilience Toolkit & Making a Resilience Action Plan

Goal

- To learn new resilience skills.
- To plan ways for you to increase your resilience.

Messages

- Resilience is our ability to work through life's challenges in positive ways. It helps us thrive and reach our full potential, even when times are tough.
- Resilience can make the difference between feeling overwhelmed by a challenge and using the experience as a learning opportunity.
- You can learn to be resilient at any age.
- Strong social connections, community bonds and friendships, and a sense of belonging can increase a person's resilience.

Time

- 25 minutes (depending on the size of the group).

Supplies

- Video: [*"Building Resilience"*](#).
- Print one *"My Resilience Toolkit"* and one *"Resilience Action Plan"* for each participant.
- Flip chart paper, markers and pens.

Activity A: How Resilient am I?

- View the video: *"Building Resilience"*.
- Give each participant a copy of the *"My Resilience Toolkit"*.
- Ask participants to check off the resilience skills they regularly take part in.
- Ask participants to share ideas of other skills that can increase resilience and add them to the "other skills I can try" section.
- Ask if anyone wants to share their thoughts.
- Remind participants that there are many other ways to build resilience. The skills listed in this activity are just to help someone get started. Some skills may be helpful, while others might not. Don't be afraid to try new things to see what works for you!

Possible Answers

- Happy to know that these skills can improve resilience.
- Surprised by the effectiveness of these skills but willing to try them in the future.

My Resilience Toolkit

Resilience is our ability to work through life’s challenges in positive ways. It helps us thrive and reach our full potential, even when times are tough. It can make the difference between feeling overwhelmed by a challenge and using the experience as a learning opportunity.

Check “yes” or “no” to the resilience skills listed that you regularly take part in when you’re having a hard time. Don’t be discouraged or alarmed if you don’t have many checked off. Save this list and try some of these skills for yourself. Come back to it in a few weeks and reflect on how they made you feel.

Resilience Skills	Yes	No
When life gets tough, I can meet with people from my community or other people I enjoy being around.		
I believe I can learn from difficult times.		
When I am under stress, I can talk to someone I trust, like a family member, friend, religious/community leader, health professional, or other.		
When life gets busy or stressful, I try to make time for myself by meditating, reflecting on what I am thankful for, or doing other activities that bring me peace.		
I cope well with change.		
I know that I can call 211 to find programs and services available in my city and community.		
After a stressful event, I am able to let go and move forward by using positive self-talk and being kind to myself.		
I try to focus on the positives and the things I can control.		
Other skills I can try:		

Activity B: Making a Resilience Action Plan

- View the video: [“Building Resilience”](#)
- Ask the participants to brainstorm some ways to build resilience. Write their answers on a flip chart paper.
- Give each participant a copy of the “*Resilience Action Plan*”.
- Ask them to think of one challenge they are facing and to answer each of the questions.

Possible Answers

- Eating healthy, getting enough sleep and doing something that I enjoy.
- Being okay with not doing everything perfectly.
- Knowing my strengths and what has helped me in the past.

What tools and support do I have in my life to me help build my resilience?

- Call 211 to find programs and services available in your city and community.
- Meet with people from your community or country of origin.
- Talk to someone you trust. It can be a family member, friend, religious/community leader or a health professional.

What new things can I try to help me overcome my challenge and recover?

- Practicing deep breathing and mindfulness.
- Being active and listening to music.
- Being thankful for the good things in my life.
- Connecting with the community (cooking, sharing a meal).

Resilience Action Plan

Answer the questions below and think of ideas to help you build your resilience. Set a date for when you will put your plan into action.

Question	Ideas
What is one challenge I am facing today?	
How do I feel? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry • Frustrated • Sad • Other feelings... 	
What can I do to cope with my feelings? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get together with friends and family. • Talk to a health professional. • Get out and be active. • Breathe deeply. • Other ideas... 	
What helped me cope or get through a challenging time in the past?	
What tools do I have in my life to help build my resilience?	
What new thing can I try to overcome my challenges and recover?	

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health; Canadian Mental Health Association; Canadian Public Health Association; Mental Illness Caregivers Association; Military Family Services. (2016). Mental Health Caregiver Guide: A guide for caregivers of persons living with mental illness or experiencing mental health challenges. ON: Ottawa Public Health.

Adapted from: Keltly Mental Health Resource Centre (KMHRC). (n.d.). How to Problem Solve. Retrieved from: https://keltymentalhealth.ca/sites/default/files/documents/toolkit_for_families_-_how_to_problem_solve.pdf

Activity 4: Add to Your Resilience

Goal

- To learn a practical way to increase your resilience using deep breathing and mindfulness.

Messages

- Deep breathing and mindfulness can help ease stress.¹
- These skills can help you become more resilient.

Time

- 10-20 minutes for deep breathing and mindfulness exercise.

Supplies

- Video: *“Building Resilience.”*
- *“Take Time to Breathe Deeply”* script (below).

Activity

- View the video: *“Building Resilience.”*
- Make the room as comfortable as possible (e.g., turn down the lights or play relaxing music).
- Read the *“Take Time to Breathe”* script (below).
- Ask participants how the activity made them feel.

Possible Answers

- Some participants might find these activities difficult. Remind participants that it takes time and practice to learn new skills.
- Some participants may feel relaxed and less stressed, while others might not feel a difference. Some may feel more stressed because they couldn't stop their thoughts from wandering. This is normal and improves with practice.

“Take Time to Breathe Deeply” Script

- Sit comfortably, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed.
- Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
- Inhale through your nose. The hand below your rib cage should move out. The hand on your chest should stay as still as possible.
- Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale through your mouth. The hand on your upper chest should stay as still as possible.
- Practice deep breathing for one minute. As participants do this, ask them to think about the things in their environment they can feel, see, hear, smell and taste.
- Let them know that focusing on their senses can help to stop them from worrying about other problems going on in their life, and can support them with them being

- more “in the moment.”
- Explain that deep breathing can be used any time they need a short break. This is a good way to take a “time out” from a situation and relax.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health Workplace Health. (2015). Balancing Work and Home Session Learning Plan: Diaphragmatic Breathing
1 Madhav Goyal, MD; Sonal Singh, MD; Erica M. S. Sibinga, MD; et al., (2014). Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-being: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Jama Internal Medicine*. Retrieved from:
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1809754>