

Youth Connections Ottawa

Implementation guide

A toolkit for implementation of the Youth Connections
Ottawa peer-to-peer program



Également disponible en français sous le titre : Connexions Jeunesse Ottawa – Guide de mise en œuvre
Trousse pour la mise en œuvre du programme d'entraide par les pairs Connexions Jeunesse Ottawa

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Land acknowledgement

Ottawa Public Health's Mental Health and Addictions and Substance Use Health Teams honours the Algonquin Anishinabe people, on whose unceded traditional territory the City of Ottawa is located. It is a privilege to live, work and play as a guest within the traditional lands that have been nurtured by the Algonquin Nations for millennia. We extend this respect to all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples, their elders, their ancestors and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

We acknowledge the impact and legacy of colonization and the ongoing systemic racism on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also recognize the effects that stigma has on the mental health and the addictions and substance use health of Indigenous communities. We are strongly committed to public health actions that promote reconciliation and the health of First Nations Inuit and Métis people. We pledge to continue to take action to combat stigma and health inequities in our communities.

We promise to work with Indigenous organizations to support Urban Indigenous youth by fostering safer spaces, supporting the development of youth led activities to decrease stigma, increase resilience and improve capacity.

Project partners

This guide is a collaboration between Ottawa Public Health (OPH), the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), the Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB), le Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est (CECCE), and le Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO). The guide was originally published in 2019 and was updated in 2023.

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Ottawa Public Health (OPH) would like to thank the following partners for their contributions:

- School Boards:
 - Ottawa Carleton District School Board
 - Ottawa Catholic School Board
 - Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est
 - Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario
- School Mental Health Ontario (formerly School Mental Health-ASSIST)
- CHEO's Youth Net
- Ottawa Police Services
- Rideauwood Addiction & Family Services
- Centre LeCAP
- Accurate Creative



Purpose of the implementation guide

This guide is intended to provide you, the implementation leader, with helpful information about the YCO program and also training resources, tips and tools to help you implement this program within your school or your community.

The YCO program can be customized for the needs of Ottawa's many diverse communities. We encourage you to collaborate with youth and provide them with opportunities to select and develop activities for the group based on the specific needs within your school or community.



If you or someone
you know needs
help right now please



Call 911 or your local emergency number.



Visit your local hospital's emergency department.



Call or text the Suicide Crisis Helpline at 9-8-8.



In Ottawa:

If you have a youth aged 17 and under in crisis, contact the [Youth Services 24/7 Crisis Line](#) or online Crisis Chat (24 hours a day/7 days a week) at 613-260-2360 or if in Eastern Ontario, toll-free at 1-877-377-7775.

If you are over 16 years of age and are in crisis, contact the [Mental Health Crisis Line](#) (24 hours a day/7 days a week) at 613-722-6914 or if outside Ottawa, toll-free at 1-866-996-0991.

Across Canada:

Children and youth can contact [Kid's Help Phone](#) (24 hours a day/7 days a week) toll-free at 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.



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Introduction

Ottawa Public Health (OPH), together with Ottawa school boards, youth and community partners have developed Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO), a comprehensive, coordinated program for youth engagement and a peer-to-peer approach for use in schools and community groups in Ottawa. This program provides flexibility as it can be customized for the needs of many diverse communities.

Using the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario's (RNAO) [Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champion](#) (YMHAC) toolkit, OPH has utilized and adapted this peer-based mental health program for use in the Ottawa region. YCO incorporates the [Foundations for a Healthy School Approach](#) into its content and will be used to support existing and emerging peer-to-peer groups in schools and in the community. OPH recognizes the importance of inter-sectorial partnerships and therefore, support from various community partners has been and will continue to be vital to the success and sustainability of the program.

Please refer to the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario's (RNAO) [YMHAC toolkit](#) for more information about the development and supporting evidence behind the program.

About the Youth Connections Ottawa program

Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) is a peer-to-peer program which aims to contribute to positive mental health and substance use health of Ottawa youth. YCO uses a peer-to-peer approach, where peer leaders are supported by adult allies to learn about mental health and substance use health and then encouraged to develop activities, events and initiatives for their peers. This program recognizes that youth are often more receptive to messaging that comes from their peers. These peer leaders have their own knowledge based on lived and living experience and can help ensure that the program is delivered in a way other youth can relate to.

Evidence has shown that many youth have faced mental health and substance use health challenges that were exacerbated by the pandemic. There was an increase in mental and emotional problems and youth have reported using substances to cope with these challenges. Additionally, many youth reported not knowing where to turn for support with their mental health and emotional health and reported a fair or poor ability to cope with a problem or a crisis. Many Ontario students reported using substances to relax, feel better or fit in. For the most current data reporting on the well-being of Ottawa youth, visit ottawapublichealth.ca/wellnessdashboard. For the most current data reporting on the well-being of Ontario youth visit [Ontario Student Drug Use and Mental Health Survey \(OSDUHS\) | CAMH](https://www.ontario.ca/govt/ontario-student-drug-use-and-mental-health-survey).

The YCO youth engagement approach recognizes that schools and communities are diverse and includes flexibility so that the needs of the group can be addressed effectively.

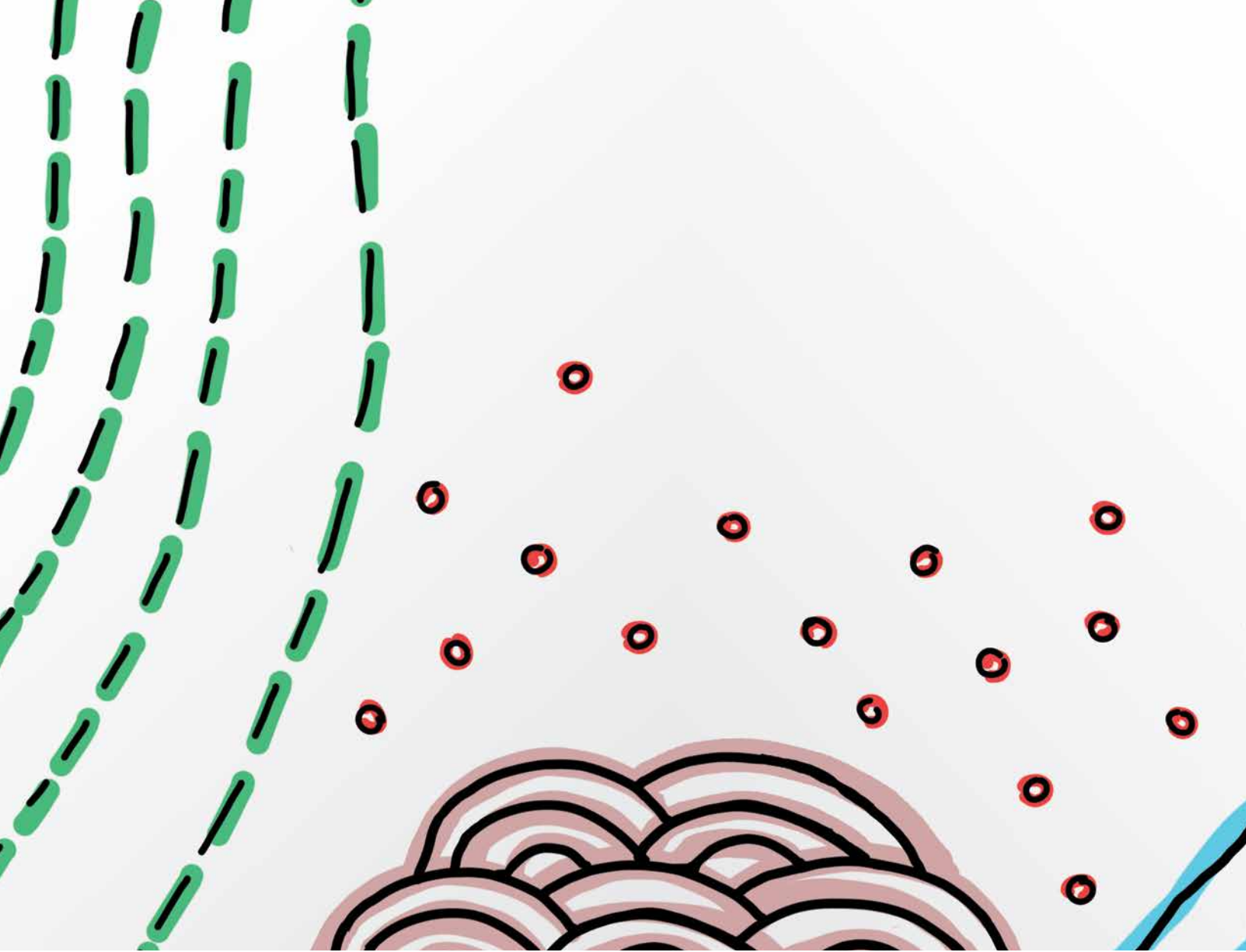
By using the YCO program you can help contribute to a supportive and resilient school and community environment for youth. This peer-to-peer program aims to meaningfully engage and empower youth to enhance their knowledge of mental health and increase positive behaviours and strategies for well-being.

With support from adult allies, youth are equipped with knowledge to break down barriers like stigma and risk factors, encourage appropriate help-seeking and understand how to seek reliable information. As groups come together, they will learn about:

- Self-help, how to help a friend and help-seeking behaviours
- Mental health and well-being
- Stigma
- Substance use health
- Addictions
- The negative and positive effects of technology and social media
- Advocacy
- Leadership

Preparing youth to lead helps to build their skills, boost resilience and contributes to positive mental health for themselves and their community.





Program overview

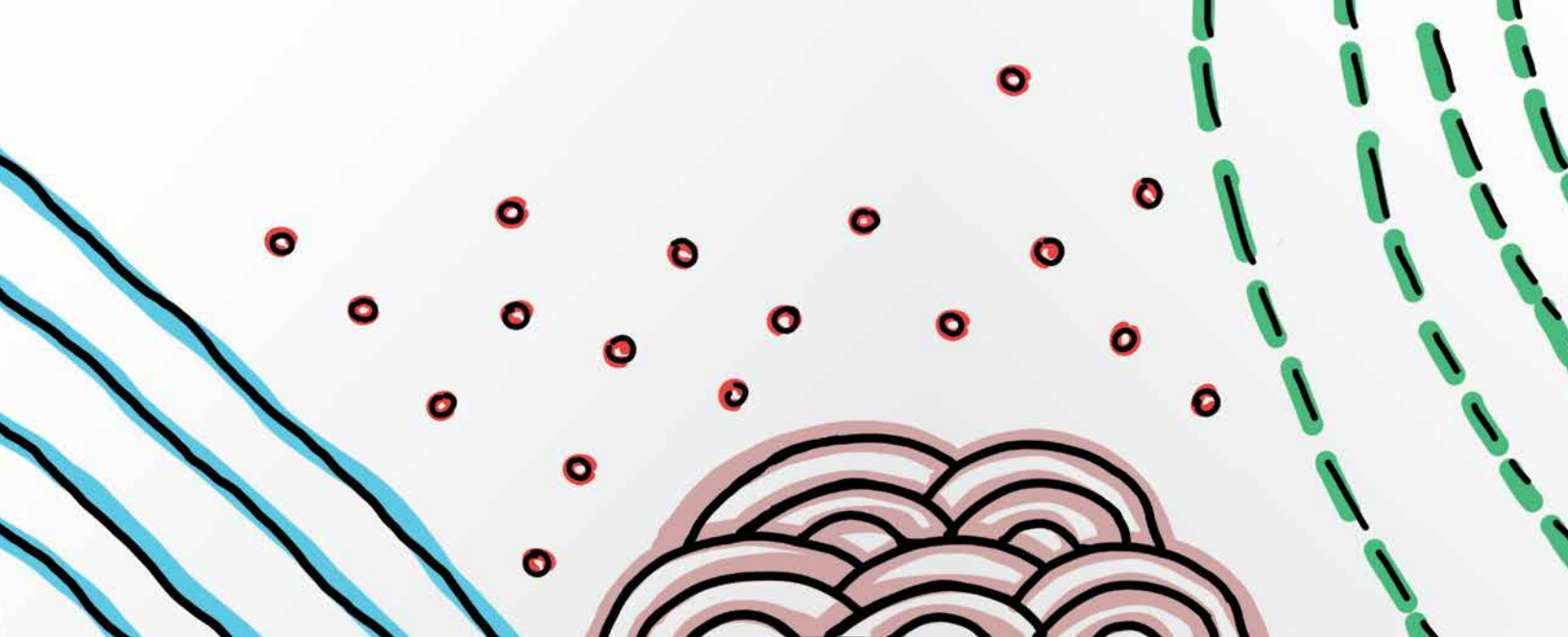
Drawing on a multi-partner and multi-component model to support a peer-to-peer approach, peer leaders will plan and implement youth engagement activities within their schools and communities.

Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) incorporates five main components:

1. Training for implementation leaders to implement and support YCO in schools and communities.
2. Training for adult allies.
3. Training for peer leaders (with adult allies).
4. Develop peer leaders.
5. Collaboration, networking, support and capacity-building among YCO participants.

YCO involves training and education, whereby youth groups will gain hands on support and mutual learning opportunities. Adult allies will participate in a half-day orientation provided by implementation leaders.

Following that, training for peer leaders together with their adult allies will occur. This joint training will consist of orientation training, team building, campaign ideas and activity planning.



The goals of YCO are to:

- Motivate, engage and equip youth with the skills for peer-to-peer outreach within their schools and communities.
- Increase resilience and promote help-seeking behaviour among youth in a safe and positive manner.
- Increase knowledge on issues related to mental health, substance use health and technology use and social media.
- Prevent and reduce stigma related to mental health and substance use health.

Overall, YCO aims to engage youth to implement fun, insightful, safe and health promoting activities by youth for youth across Ottawa.

The objectives of YCO are to:

- Raise awareness about the Mental Health Continuum* and the Spectrum of Substance Use** to support overall well-being of youth and decrease stigma related to mental illness and challenges related to substance use.
- Increase awareness of the positive and negative effects of recreational screen time and promote being mindful while using technology.
- Provide adult allies with the training and curriculum needed to engage and support youth in peer-to-peer outreach and campaign planning.
- Develop leadership and advocacy skills of participating youth.
- Engage peer leaders to develop, implement and evaluate creative youth engagement strategies to promote mental health, substance use health, mindful use of technology and reduce stigma.
- Provide opportunities for professionals to collaborate with youth to implement initiatives that promote health and wellbeing while reducing stigma in their local schools and communities.

*The Mental Health Continuum explains that people can have positive or negative mental health with or without a diagnosed mental illness. See [Appendix 3](#) for more.

**The Spectrum of Substance Use is inclusive of everyone, those who consume substances and those who do not, and recognizes that a Substance Use Disorder is a complex health condition. See [Appendix 4](#) for more.

Adapted from: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

Program roles and responsibilities

Youth Connections Ottawa coordinator

- Ottawa Public Health (OPH) staff.

Implementation leaders

- School board staff or community staff

Adult allies

- School educators, youth workers, community agencies

Invited adult allies

- OPH staff, Rideauwood/Le CAP counsellors, faith leaders, and community leaders

Peer leaders

- Youth participants

1

Implementation leaders

Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) is about working alongside youth to develop fun and engaging activities that promote positive mental health and well-being. YCO will help to build skills that can be used throughout the lifespan.

Implementation leaders will work to guide YCO programs within their schools and communities by being the YCO content expert. This guide will provide you with the knowledge and content that is required to successfully run a YCO program.

Understanding your role as implementation leader

Implementation leaders:

- Are responsible for training the adult allies and supporting the joint adult ally and peer leaders training.
- Assist with the operations of the program, including providing in-school or community training and support.
- Support schools and community groups with events.
- Use meaningful youth engagement principles and practices.
- Demonstrate interest in initiatives that promote health and well-being.
- Are a resource to the school or community group for knowledge transfer on health topics relevant to the youth groups.
- Participate in evaluation activities.

How to use this implementation guide

The YCO implementation guide contains information and activities for implementation leaders to use when training adult allies and peer leaders. Reading the YCO implementation guide, along with reviewing, observing and carrying out the various activities within the guide, will help increase the confidence and facilitation skills needed to provide subsequent training.

As you read this guide, you will notice four core roles for the different YCO participants:

1. YCO coordinator
2. Implementation leaders
3. Adult allies
4. Peer leaders

We encourage you to become familiar with these roles and their responsibilities (see YCO roles and responsibilities on page 19).

There are three tiers of training for YCO:

1. Training for implementation leaders to provide the necessary skills needed to train and support adult allies and peer leaders.
2. Adult ally orientation and training to provide knowledge and tools for adult allies to support and work with peer leaders.
3. Peer leaders joint training with invited adult allies, to provide knowledge and tools to peer leaders to implement YCO within their school or community.

It is recommended to complete the peer leader training with the adult allies present. This will allow them to build a rapport as they work together to develop a YCO program within their school or community.



Implementation leader training

This training will be facilitated by the YCO coordinator. Objectives for this training include:

- a.** Learning about the YCO program.
- b.** Learning about best practices in meaningful youth engagement.
- c.** Capacity building to develop facilitation skills to deliver subsequent trainings and orientation to adult allies and peer leaders.
- d.** Support to engage peer leaders to develop, implement and evaluate youth engagement activities.

Next steps for implementation leaders

Included in the guide are detailed instructions and activities to include in both the adult ally and peer leader trainings, as well as information on how to begin a YCO program within your school or community.

Take time to familiarize yourself with the YCO implementation guide which provides you with the information needed to set-up a YCO program. Once you are familiar with the content you can recruit and train adult allies and peer leaders.

2

Adult allies

Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) aims to engage youth to implement fun, insightful, safe and health-promoting activities by youth for youth across Ottawa.

By using the YCO program, adult allies can help contribute to a supportive and resilient school and community environment for youth. This peer-to-peer program aims to shift attitudes and behaviours through youth empowerment and advocacy.

As groups come together, they will learn about:

- Self-help
- How to help a friend and help-seeking behaviours
- Mental health and well-being
- Addictions and substance use health
- Stigma
- Advocacy
- Leadership

With support from partners in education and health experts, youth are equipped with the knowledge to break down barriers like stigma and risk factors, increase self-help interventions, facilitate recognition, encourage appropriate help-seeking skills and understand how to seek reliable information. Preparing youth to lead not only builds capacity and boosts resilience but results in greater mental health advocacy.

Understanding the role of adult allies

Adult allies are made up of champions for youth and directly support the program at the school or community level (i.e., school educators, health promoters, community organization staff, etc.).

Adult allies may also include faith leaders, community leaders, youth outreach workers, external school partners or others who can attend and assist with planning meetings.

Adult allies will:

- Oversee the operational support of the program and its integration within schools and communities.
- Support the recruitment of the peer leaders.
- Support the compensation of peer leaders with community involvement hours, certificates etc.
- Attend and assist with the peer leaders training workshop.
- Use meaningful youth engagement principles and practices, as well as demonstrate interest in promoting mental health and substance use health best practices throughout YCO.
- Use their knowledge of the populations of youth they work with to customize the program to meet the needs of the community.
- Collaborate with the implementation leaders to mentor peer leaders.
- Assist with the planning, facilitation, promotion and delivery of YCO initiatives and events.
- Participate in evaluation activities.

Adult ally training

The aim of the adult ally training is to provide the adult allies with the YCO training, support, resources and curriculum to engage and support youth in peer-to-peer outreach and program planning.

This training will give the adult allies the knowledge and skills they need, as well as practical tips and strategies to start their own YCO groups.

Implementation leaders will provide the trainings to the adult allies and help them work through any questions or challenges that may come up during the training.

- For additional questions or a copy of the PowerPoint training presentation, email: mentalhealthteam@ottawa.ca





Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Introduction to the program

**Time required:**

- 20–40 minutes

**Supplies required:**

- Adult ally training PowerPoint (this can be obtained via email at mentalhealthteam@ottawa.ca)

**Objective:**

- To introduce adult allies to the YCO program

**Facilitator steps:**

1. Review YCO goals and objectives
2. Facilitate scavenger hunt energizer
3. Explain how YCO works

1. Youth Connections Ottawa goals and objectives

The purpose of this activity is to review the goals and objectives of the YCO program with the adult allies. This will help to ensure that everyone has the same understanding about the purpose of the program and the goals and objectives to be met.

The goals of YCO are to:

- Motivate, engage and equip youth with the skills for peer-to-peer outreach within their schools and communities.
- Increase resilience and promote help-seeking behaviour among youth in a safe and positive manner.
- Increase knowledge on issues related to mental health, positive coping strategies, substance use health and technology use and social media.
- Prevent and reduce stigma related to mental health and substance use health.

Overall, YCO aims to engage youth to implement fun, insightful, safe, and health-promoting activities by youth for youth across Ottawa.

The objectives of YCO are to:

- Raise awareness about the Mental Health Continuum* and the Spectrum of Substance Use** to support overall well-being of youth and decrease stigma related to mental illness and challenges related to substance use.
- Increase awareness of the positive and negative effects of recreational screen time and promote being mindful while using technology.
- Provide adult allies with the training and curriculum needed to engage and support youth in peer-to-peer outreach and campaign planning.
- Develop leadership and advocacy skills of participating youth.
- Engage peer leaders to develop, implement and evaluate creative youth engagement strategies to promote mental health, substance use health, reduce stigma and mindful use of technology.
- Provide opportunities for health, social and education professionals to collaborate with youth to implement initiatives that promote health and well-being while reducing stigma in their local schools and communities.

*The mental health continuum explains that people can have positive or negative mental health with or without a diagnosed mental illness. See [Appendix 3](#) for more.

**The Spectrum of Substance Use is inclusive of everyone, those who consume substances and those who do not, and recognizes that a Substance Use Disorder is a complex health condition. See [Appendix 4](#) for more.

2. Scavenger hunt energizer

This activity will help the group to feel more comfortable with one another and build a rapport.

Directions:

1. Divide the group into teams of up to five.
2. Provide teams with a list of items that can be found in the immediate area, pockets, purses, with technology or online:
 - A credit card
 - A digital photo of a cat wearing a hat
 - A blue marker
 - Someone you trust
 - A pair of reading glasses
 - A baby picture
 - A fidget toy
 - A meme
 - Headphones
 - A gym membership
 - A recording of a toilet flushing
 - The name and address of a shoe store in Halifax, Nova Scotia
 - A newspaper article
 - A grocery receipt
 - A happy or sad song
3. The team that finds the most items wins.
4. Have teams create a (funny) short story with some or all of the items and include how these items connect to your mental health.
5. Share these stories with the entire group.

3. How Youth Connections Ottawa works

Drawing on a multi-partner and multi-component model to support a peer-to-peer approach, peer leaders will plan, implement and help to evaluate youth engagement activities within their schools and communities.

YCO incorporates five main components:

1. Training for implementation leaders to implement and support YCO in schools and communities.
2. Training for adult allies.
3. Training for peer leaders (with adult allies).
4. Develop peer leaders.
5. Collaboration, networking, support and capacity building among YCO participants.

YCO involves training and education, whereby youth groups will gain hands-on support and mutual learning opportunities. Adult allies will participate in a half-day orientation training.

Following that, training for peer leaders together with their adult allies will occur. This joint training will consist of orientation, team building, campaign ideas and activity planning.

Adapted from: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.



Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Program roles and responsibilities

**Time required:**

- 20–40 minutes

**Supplies required:**

- Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) program roles and responsibilities

**Objective:**

- Increase understanding of the four major YCO program roles and their responsibilities

**Facilitator steps:**

1. Facilitate “who are we?” activity
2. Review YCO roles and responsibilities

1. Who are we? activity

The who are we? activity is a fun way to demonstrate that we all have different roles to play. This activity is a helpful way to introduce the next topic of the roles and responsibilities within the YCO program.

Steps for game:

- Select someone to be “it”
- Have the “it” leave the room
- The remaining participants will decide who the group will be such as educators, doctors or students
- When “it” re-enters the room, they go around the room asking questions to figure out who the group has become
- Try your best to confuse but answer truthfully!
- Determine ahead of time how many questions “it” can ask
- “It” can guess correctly or give up. Then it is someone else’s turn to be “it”!

Following the game:

This game provides an opportunity to think about how roles and responsibilities can overlap, be adapted or change over time. Much like the roles in YCO that are outlined next, roles can be adapted or changed over time. Adult allies may need to adapt their roles to ensure they are meeting the specific needs of the peer leaders in their group and youth in their community or school.

2. Youth Connections Ottawa roles and responsibilities

Having a clear understanding of the different roles and responsibilities of everyone involved will help the YCO programs to function well. You can take this time to review the YCO roles with the adult allies and allow time for discussion.

The YCO coordinator (Ottawa Public Health staff)

Primary responsibilities of the coordinator are to support the training of implementation leaders and support the evaluation of the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) in schools and the community.

YCO coordinator will also:

- Assist with program integration within the schools and the community.
- Network with organizations, school boards, and local communities to identify opportunities for implementation of YCO.
- Support implementation leaders as they implement and deliver the YCO program in their schools and in the community.
- Support YCO evaluation.

Implementation leaders

Implementation leaders will liaise between the YCO coordinator and the school or community group to deliver YCO.

Implementation leaders will also:

- Assist with the operations of the program:
 - Act as a resource and/or advocate for initiatives that promote health and wellbeing on the topics identified by the youth groups.
 - Provide adult allies with tools and information to support the peer leaders.
 - Deliver an adult allies orientation and training workshop on YCO.
 - Deliver a peer leaders training within the youth groups.
- Support the recruitment of peer leaders.
- Use meaningful youth engagement principles and practices, and promote mental health and substance use best practices throughout YCO.
- Be a resource to the school or community group for knowledge exchange on health promotion topics relevant to the youth groups.
- Participate in evaluation activities.

Adult allies

Adult allies are made up of champions for youth and directly support the program at the school or community level (e.g., school educators, health promoters, etc).

Adult allies may also include faith leaders, community leaders, external school partners or others who can attend and assist with planning meeting.

Adult allies will also:

- Oversee the operational support of the program and its integration within schools and communities.
- Support the recruitment of peer leaders.
- Support the compensation of the peer leaders with community involvement hours, certificates, etc.
- Attend and assist with the peer leaders training workshop.
- Use meaningful youth engagement principles and practices, as well as demonstrate interest in promoting mental health and substance use health throughout YCO.
- Use their knowledge of the populations of youth they work with to customize the program to meet the needs of the community.
- Collaborate with the implementation leaders to mentor peer leaders.
- Assist with the planning, facilitation, promotion and delivery of YCO initiatives and events; and.
- Participate in evaluation activities.

Peer leaders

Peer leaders are youth participating in YCO who:

- Attend a YCO training workshop.
- Learn about mental well-being, reducing stigma, substance use health, building resilience, self-help and help-seeking strategies.
- Work with other youth, adult allies and implementation leaders to assess the needs of youth in order to promote well-being within their school and community.
- Lead, plan and implement fun and relevant activities created by youth for youth.
- Participate in evaluation activities.

Adapted from: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.



Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Youth Connections to Well-being



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella handout (see [Appendix 2](#))



Objective:

- Increase knowledge about the importance of protective factors and how they affect your mental health



Facilitator steps:

1. Show and facilitate a discussion about the Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella. Identify which Youth Connections to Well-being are existing strengths and which strengths participants would like to work on improving

1. Youth Connections to Well-being

Youth Connections to Well-being are protective factors that contribute to resilience and well-being. Use this activity with the youth groups to have them consider what protective factors they have in place and what ones they would like to develop. This activity will allow youth to reflect on how to promote and enhance the protective factors in their lives and in others. This will be a key step when considering future YCO campaigns and activities.

Begin by introducing the protective factors. Read through these as a group and discuss how each connection contributes to positive mental health and well-being.

Using the Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella handout (see [Appendix 2](#)), discuss (as a group or in pairs) the various stressors faced by youth and brainstorm additional connections to well-being that could contribute to increased resilience. Ensure time is taken to consider the stressors and protective factors specific to the youth in each specific group, as these will vary between communities. The umbrella handout provides a great visual—the rain drops represent the various stressors in one's life, while the umbrella represents the various connections to well-being and coping strategies that help protect one's mental health and increase resilience.



Youth Connections to Well-being

Possible answers:

1

Mental health

- A state of well-being
- Able to realize your own abilities and potential
- Can cope with the normal stresses of life
- Self-care
- Affects how we think, feel and act
- Helps determine how we deal with stress, relate to others and make choices
- Can be influenced by technology use and social media
- Mental health does not mean the absence of a mental illness. Someone with a diagnosis of a mental illness can have positive mental health, just like someone without a diagnosis of a mental illness can have negative mental health. We all need protective factors to help us cope with life's challenges and to protect our mental health

2

Substance use health

- Exists on a spectrum and can change day-to-day
- Advancing a person's well-being, not only preventing harm
- Can include no use, beneficial use, lower-risk use, problems occurring with use or substance use disorder
- Well-being and recovery are possible and looks different for every person
- Improves health outcomes for those living with challenges from substance use or a substance use disorder
- Treatment for addictions and substance use disorders can work as well as treatments for other medical conditions. Recovery is about a person feeling stronger and better about themselves in a way that allows them to live their life with meaning and it does not matter the illness or medical condition they may have

3

Mentors and positive relationships

A mentor is:

- An experienced and trusted advisor and guide
- A positive influence
- Someone who makes us feel comfortable and safe
- Someone whom we consult, ask questions or gives us advice
- Non-judgmental
- Someone who teaches us, listens to us and helps us

A positive relationship:

- Fosters open communication
- Is respectful and trusting
- Can be found in friendships, family and kinships



Community resources

- Trusted adults in your school and community
- Ottawa Public Health
- Emergency Services
- Rideauwood Addiction & Family Services/Centre LeCAP
- Youth Services Bureau
- Community Resource Centres and Community Health Centres
- Additional resources available online: OttawaPublicHealth.ca/MentalHealthSubstancesResources



Healthy interests

Choosing to:

- Engage in healthy activities (such as sports, art, hobbies, after-school programs)
- Eat a variety of healthy foods each day
- Be mindful when using technology
- Engage in lower-risk practices that reduce harms
- Make informed decisions



Kindness

Being:

- Friendly, compassionate, empathetic and considerate
- Concerned for others
- Respectful
- Being kind is helpful to others but also feels good to ourselves



Spirituality

- Refers to the need to experience love, hope and meaning in life
- More than just religion
- May include mindfulness or being mindful
- Focuses awareness on the present moment
- Acknowledging and accepting one's feeling and thoughts
- Not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us



Resilience

Ability to:

- Bounce back from or work through stress
- Cope with challenges
- Recover from difficulties
- Adjust to misfortune or change
- Deal with life's struggles
- Know and use positive coping strategies

Key messages

- The Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella identifies supports and skills that allow for positive mental health, substance use health and well-being.
- When these supports and skills are present in youth's lives, they provide protective factors that mitigate or reduce risks and promote resilience.
- These connections are the basis of the YCO program and the aim of the youth-led peer-to-peer activities are to foster these protective factors.



Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Creating safer spaces and answering difficult questions



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Mentors and positive relationships, kindness and community resources



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- None



Objective:

- Create a safer place for Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) participants
- Increase confidence amongst youth when discussing mental health or substance use health topics



Facilitator steps:

1. Discuss how to create a safe space for youth
2. Discuss tips for how to talk with youth safely and effectively

1. Creating a safe space for youth

Given that mental health, mental illness, substance use health and challenges from substance use can be sensitive topics, consider the best way to support the psychological safety of student and adult participants. The following are key steps to support youth if they experience psychological distress during training. These are adapted from The YMHAC initiative, which recommends developing a psychological safety plan that involves appointing adult safety leads, along with following key steps to support youth if they experience psychological distress during training:

Key steps:

- Provide a pre-warning and normalize sensitive topics (i.e., today we are going to be talking about substance use health. Sometimes this can be difficult to talk about, but it is an important discussion. We encourage you to reach out for support if needed.).
- Let youth know: “If at any time during the training, you are feeling uncomfortable, please let an adult ally know”.
- Monitor for signs that indicate participants may need support (e.g., tearful, becoming withdrawn).
- Use a code so the youth can let facilitator(s) know if they’re ok. For example, tell them to use a thumbs up code if they have to leave (e.g., washroom). If no code is given, a check-in with the individual is suggested.
- Establish a relaxation space or “chill zone” for students who may be triggered by content.
- Allow students to opt out of participating in various activities.
- Recognize that some youth may be less comfortable speaking in large groups. It is important to create opportunities for various forms of participation.

- Be aware of locally based resources for support including Youth Services Bureau (YSB), and Kids Help Phone. [See Appendix 8](#) for a list of Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Resources.
- Have appointed personnel (e.g., social worker, psychologist, guidance counsellor and/or educator) attend or at least be available to support youth as needed.

Adapted from: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

Adult allies have an important mentorship role in the positive mental health and well-being of youth.

How to start the conversation:

- Recognize you are not expected to know everything.
- Remember, it is okay to say, “I do not know the answer”.
- Offer to brainstorm reliable sources to find the answers together.
- Consult an expert for more information needed (e.g., social worker, psychologist, public health staff, Rideauwood/Le CAP counsellors, Youth Net).
- If you are unsure of the answer re-direct the question and ask if anyone else has thoughts.
- It is okay to say “let me think about that” but make sure you come back to the question.

2. Tips for how to talk with youth

One barrier that prevents people from having difficult conversations with youth is not knowing what to say. This activity is meant to provide examples of how to talk with youth.

There is no perfect way to have any conversation, but here are some tips to help you:

- Be present and genuine when talking to youth. For example, maintain eye contact, focus on what they are saying and repeat back or paraphrase what they have said to ensure clarity.
- Be supportive by asking about what concerns, worries or questions they have.
- Ask questions and then be sure to listen carefully as it shows respect and is a way to gather information.
- Ensure that your approach is nonjudgmental and open minded.
- Be comfortable with silences or pauses in conversation.
- Acknowledge that youths' experiences are individual and may be different from the rest of the group.
- Learn about different cultures, communities, faiths, etc. and how this influences what is important to each youth.
- Youth also share some common experiences as young people. Stay informed on common trends and experiences among youth and empathize with what they may be facing.

Below are some guidelines for talking to youth about topics relating to mental health and substance use health:

- Ask youth what it is like to be talking to you about this. For example, “how does it feel to be talking about mental health and/or substance use health with me?”.
- Be mindful of the language used when speaking to youth. Use **Person-First language** and avoid stigmatizing language that can further isolate and marginalize people.
- Know what you are comfortable with and what is appropriate to share – youth may value and be curious about your lived experiences.
- While mental health and substance use health are serious topics, youth appreciate opportunities to laugh and have fun. Don’t be afraid to find appropriate ways to incorporate laughter and fun into the program.
- Make yourself available to talk again if needed but know when to get more help and know what resources are available (such as knowledge experts within schools and the community, social workers, psychologists, public health staff, school-based counsellors, Rideauwood, Le CAP, Youth Services Bureau, Community Resource Centres or Community Health Centres).
- See **Appendix 6** for “Tips for Talking to Someone about Their Substance Use”.

When youth ask for advice:

We know that many youth want to talk to someone about mental health but don’t know where to turn. Youth may come to you with concerns regarding mental health, addiction and substance use health. Take this opportunity to direct youth to trustworthy resources and services to ensure they are getting the support they need. If you are unsure about where to direct youth, visit Ottawa Public Health’s [Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Services and Resources](#).



Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Meaningful youth engagement



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Healthy interests, mentors and positive relationships and resilience



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Projector and screen
- Speakers
- Internet capable source (e.g., laptop or smart board)



Objective:

- Increase awareness of youth engagement
- Understand the process involved in youth engagement



Facilitator steps:

1. Watch “What is Youth Engagement?” video by the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (OCECYMH): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBWuF9y8hko&feature=youtu.be>
2. Review and discuss the core components of youth engagement
3. Review and discuss the guiding principles about working with youth

1. Watch the “What is Youth Engagement?” video

It is important that everyone in the group have an understanding of what meaningful youth engagement is and to learn about it from trusted sources, such as the Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health (OCECYMH).

Watch “What is Youth Engagement” video by the OCECYMH:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBWuF9y8hko&feature=youtu.be>

After watching the video review the core components of youth engagement with the adult allies.

2. Core components of youth engagement

- 1. Positive youth development:** Use a strengths-based and positive approach to develop positive relationships and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to enhance lasting mental health and substance use health.
- 2. Positive relationships:** Have trusted adults and adult allies who support, advocate for and collaborate with youth.
- 3. Positive space:** Create safer spaces for youth that promote protective factors and are open, authentic, respectful and free from discrimination based on gender, sex, sexual orientation, race, income, appearance, faith or other identifying factors.
- 4. Positive opportunities:** Support youth to develop important life skills that can contribute to overall development, prepare them for the future and help them build healthier communities.

3. Guiding principles of youth engagement

Put safety first and develop a safety plan

- Have a safety plan such as accessible clinical support (for youth and adults) across youth engagement activities, particularly when youth (and adults) are asked to draw on lived experience while engaging in these activities.

Value youth as community assets

- When given the opportunity, youth can be active and skilled contributors to their own well-being, and valuable partners in initiatives that promote health and well-being.
- It is important to consider how youth can be compensated for their work in the program. Some options could include providing snacks during meetings, community involvement hours, certificates of achievement or letters of reference.

Commit to participatory leadership

- Participatory leadership is based on the belief, that those most greatly impacted by an issue should be invited to be meaningfully involved in defining and addressing the problem.
- Invite youth to generate a shared understanding of problems, priorities and possibilities and to work towards achievable and sustainable goals.
- Build the capacity of youth to mobilize around issues that are important to them and to contribute to social change.

Build authentic relationships

- Relationships are key to building and sustaining resilience and positive youth development.
- Build on respect and trust.
- Show youth you are actively listening and help amplify their voices.
- Be open to peer leaders' feedback about lessons, activities and other aspects of the program.
- Offer words of encouragement as well as constructive feedback.
- Ask what youth in your group need and what is important to them.
- Ensure that videos, lessons, activities and other content you include reflect the diversity of the youth in your group.
- Work together using an equal power balance between youth and adults to achieve common goals. Both adults and youth have a voice in decisions and are valued for their contributions.

Strive for health equity

- Remove barriers that prevent access to health supports. Some barriers include stigma, geographical location, cost, language or lack of knowledge of available services.
- Youth from marginalized backgrounds value seeing and hearing from people they can relate to.
- Shared identity such as hobbies, language, ethnicity, race and faith can bring youth together. Youth have expressed that shared identity provides a strong sense of belonging. For example, hobbies, language, ethnicity, race and faith can bring youth together.

Meet youth where they are at

- Have realistic expectations.
- Build on the unique and diverse strengths of youth.

- Address barriers to participation (e.g., transportation, physical location, time of meetings, religious observances).
- Recognize and respect youths' comfort levels with discussing various topics.
- Create opportunities for youth to develop their skills.
- When it comes to youth engagement, youth and adults may make mistakes along the way. Youth engagement is not just about outcomes, it is about the process of being meaningfully involved.

Use a whole community approach

- Consider where youth live, work and play.
- Several factors can threaten youths' mental health, including unemployment, job insecurity, poor working conditions, low income, education, food insecurity, the absence of safe and affordable housing and social exclusion.
- Youth mental health is a shared responsibility, and young people are key players in creating solutions.

Adapted from: Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions. (2019). Waking the talk, a toolkit for engaging youth in mental health. Retrieved from <http://www.yetoolkit.ca/>.



Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Implementation tips and resources



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Flip chart and markers (optional)



Objective:

- Increase knowledge around tips and resources required for implementation of Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO)



Facilitator steps:

1. Review and discuss considerations for implementation of the YCO

1. Discussion: implementation Youth Connections Ottawa

In this activity you can brainstorm the required steps involved with implementing a YCO program within your school or community group. Use this worksheet to help guide your conversation and brainstorming with the adult allies.

The following are some key considerations for implementation of the YCO program:

- Identify keen and interested adult allies within the school and community to lead the program or group

1. Adult logistical considerations:

- Staff release time (for training, planning and evaluation).
- Space for training or meetings (a large classroom or the library).
- Communication plan among adults and for youth (email distribution lists, Google classroom).
- Send out frequent reminders of upcoming meetings and sessions to increase attendance.
- Train existing members of school or community groups to incorporate Youth Connections to Well-being into their programming.

2. Recruitment of participants:

- Consider:
 - ◆ Asking a wide variety of staff including community developers, principals, school-based counsellors or youth workers to identify peer leaders.
 - ◆ The goal of your group:
 - ▶ Are you trying to reach youth from diverse backgrounds?
 - ▶ Are you looking for non-traditional leaders?
 - ▶ Are you working to engage a specific community?
 - ◆ Recruiting youth by invitation (to ensure a wide variety of participants and to maximize reach of peer networks).

- ◆ Approaching existing leaders in the schools and community.
- ◆ Calls of interest through announcements, lunch time fair, booth or flyer— [see Appendix 1](#) for YCO information handout for potential peer leaders.
- ◆ Inviting friends of members.
- ◆ Avoiding only recruiting those with experience and instead consider youth who are:
 - ▶ Passionate about well-being and want to make a difference.
 - ▶ Have the potential and openness to learn, develop and grow.
 - ▶ Willing to invest time and energy, problem-solve, take risks and work in a team with other youth and adult allies.
 - ▶ New to the school or community.
 - ▶ Represent the diversity of youth at your school or community.

3. Collecting consent:

- Your organization may require consent from parents or guardians of youth who are interested in participating as peer leaders. See the implementation section for a [sample parental consent form](#). Check with your school board or community agency for consent requirements and possible policies, procedures and documents.

4. YCO peer leaders training:

- Where will training take place? Consider using the school library or community gathering places for ease and comfort.
- When will training take place? Is this a busy time for students and staff?
- Will you need audio visual equipment such as projector and speakers for sound?
- Will you be providing lunch? Are there dietary restrictions?

5. Meetings:

- Youth often have a lot on their plate. It may be important to consult with peer leaders ahead of time to decide on the frequency, duration and time of day of meetings.
- Create a safer space when generating ideas.
- Youth want to know that their input is valued. Ensure that you are prioritizing the voices of peer leaders during meetings.
- While mental health and substance use health are serious topics, youth appreciate opportunities to laugh and have fun. Don't be afraid to find appropriate ways to incorporate laughter and fun into meetings.
- Create opportunities for various forms of participation. Not all peer leaders may be comfortable speaking in front of large groups.
- Think about holding some meetings and events within different areas of the school community—youth often appreciate field trips.
- Have icebreakers or energizers at the start of each meeting and invite youth to facilitate them.
- Provide opportunities for fun team building and free time for youth to get to know each other and discuss potential ideas.
- Consider meetings dedicated to planning and implementing activities or campaigns.
- Invite guest speakers.
- Incorporate videos.
- Avoid lectures—use a diverse range of interactive activities to teach lessons.
- Debrief what went well and what could be improved regarding activities or campaigns.
- Take time to provide ongoing feedback to peer leaders—this includes celebrating successes large and small successes.

6. Activities/campaigns:

- Start small.
- Support youth to choose their own priority initiatives and campaigns.
- Invite youth to bring their lunch for lunchtime meetings.
- Consider meetings dedicated to planning and implementing activities or campaigns.
- Debrief what went well and what could be improved regarding activities or campaigns.
- Obtain feedback.
- See implementation section for ideas. These should be shared with peer leaders to help inspire.
- Encourage community partners such as public health staff, Rideauwood or Le CAP counsellor or Youth Net to participate in training or workshop activities.
- Consider:
 - Resource and service awareness campaigns
 - Stigma reduction campaigns

- Coping and stress management education and training
- Caring and sharing moments
- Acknowledging youth and their voices

- Ensure there is a plan to promote events, activities and campaigns.
- Look for opportunities to incorporate activities into another theme week (e.g., Mental Health Week in May).
- Also consider the time of year, (e.g., exams, various religious/cultural holidays, system-wide events).

7. Let youth lead!

- While youth should work with the adult allies, they should ultimately drive the process.
- Consider letting youth lead meetings as they gain experience.
- Consider avoiding training, events or activities on Fridays and Mondays to ensure opportunity for follow-up exists and to maximize attendance.

Adapted from: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.



Adult ally training – facilitator worksheet

Planning

**Time required:**

- 20–40 minutes

**Supplies required:**

- Flip chart and markers (optional)
- Work plan template (see page 34)

**Objective:**

- Develop knowledge about how to create a Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) work plan

**Facilitator steps:**

1. Provide an opportunity for participants to review, discuss and formalize the next steps for adult allies
2. Discuss the need for a work plan to identify goals, required actions, resources and the importance of following a timeline. You can use the work plan template on page 34 as a guide to facilitate the brainstorm workplan activity

1. Discussion: next steps for adult allies

In order to ensure the success of the YCO program within your schools and community groups, it is important to take the time to plan the next steps that will get you started.

Identify the appropriate adult allies that can assist with each YCO group, how to recruit peer leaders and who would thrive as a peer leader. Be sure to consider peer leaders from many different groups and with a variety of different skills. Remember, all youth can become leaders if given the opportunity to grow in a positive and empowering environment that promotes well-being and personal growth.

This is also a good opportunity to brainstorm ideas together with youth for activities and campaigns that the YCO groups can engage in.

2. Activity: brainstorm work plan

Working through this workplan will assist groups to determine what they are interested in and the resources and time that will be required to implement their initiatives.

Example YCO work plan template:

Goal	Actions	Timelines	Resources	Lead staff	Comments
Identify adult allies (e.g., youth workers, school guidance, community developers, school counsellors)					
Speak with school and community organization about logistics					
Recruitment strategies					
Training (when, where, how, who)					
Meetings (when, where, how, who)					
Events, activities or campaigns (including existing in school or community group)					

3

Peer leaders

Peer leader training

The purpose of the peer leaders training is to empower and engage youth through activities that further increases their knowledge on issues related to substance use health, mental health and making safer choices. The training is designed to teach youth the YCO model, motivate, engage and equip youth with the skills for peer-to-peer outreach within their schools and communities. In addition, YCO intends to increase resilience and promote help-seeking support among youth in a safe and uplifting manner.

The adult allies attend the peer leaders training to establish them as a key partner in the YCO program within their school or community. This will also allow the adult allies to know what training and content the peer leaders have received to make for easier communication and planning.

The following sections provide the content needed to deliver the peer leaders training. YCO is designed to be flexible. Facilitators may choose to adapt the content to meet the needs of the group, however, it is recommended to include as many of the topics outlined as possible in order to effectively equip and prepare youth for YCO implementation.

The following sections each comprise a topic, along with key messages and activities designed to generate discussion and reinforce learning.

Understanding the role of peer leaders

Peer leaders are youth participating in YCO who:

- Attend a YCO training workshop.
- Learn about mental well-being, reducing stigma, substance use health, resilience, self-help and help-seeking behaviour strategies.
- Work with other youth, adult allies and implementation leaders to assess the needs of youth in order to promote well-being within their school and community.
- Lead, plan, implement and evaluate fun, inspirational and relevant activities for youth by youth.
- Participate in evaluation activities.

Peer leader training considerations

Full day option

Providing a full day training for peer leaders is the recommended approach. This will provide the implementation leader with enough time to complete all activities with the peer leaders and allow enough time for in-depth discussion. It is recommended that the adult allies involved in the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) group be invited to the training as well.

Half day option

While a full day of training is recommended, it is not always feasible. There may be different time constraints in the school or community that make it difficult for the peer leaders and adult allies to dedicate an entire day to training.

If a half day training is necessary, the implementation leader can adapt training in advance. It is important to consider how to cover the remaining topics at another time with the peer leaders.

Adaptability

Prior to offering the peer leader training, consider the diverse needs of your group and how to meet the individual needs of participants. Many of the activities can be adapted to meet a variety of accessibility, mobility and learning needs.

As an example, closed captioning can be used for the activities that have videos to support those with hearing difficulties.





Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Introducing the program to peer leaders



Time required:

- 10–20 minutes



Supplies required:

- Flip chart paper and markers (optional)



Objectives:

- Increase the understanding of the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) program by peer leaders
- Establish a comfortable group dynamic



Facilitator steps:

1. Introduce the YCO program, including the Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champion (YMHAC) toolkit as an additional resource www.rnao.ca/bpg/initiatives/mhai/ymhac
2. Establish group norms with the group
3. Facilitate the “great wind blows” activity

1. Program introduction discussion

This discussion will allow youth to learn about the purpose of YCO and why they would want to participate. Make sure to discuss the importance of learning how to support their own mental health and substance use health as well as that of their peers.

Using YCO, youth can support our mental health and help friends and peers through initiatives that promote health and well-being. This means learning about:

- Mental health
- How to add to your resilience
- How to manage stress
- Youth Connections to Well-being
- How to talk about mental health and reduce stigma
- Substance use health
- Where and how to get help
- How to be a well-being advocate and promote mental health and substance use health
- How to plan YCO activities or campaigns and share this knowledge with your peers

Adapted from: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

2. Establishing group norms

Take the time to establish what the group norms will be for your peer leader training group. These group norms can also be used and referred back to for subsequent YCO meetings. Below are some suggestions, but it is important to have everyone provide input (this could be done through a group brainstorm or discussion) and agree on what they should be. It is helpful to write group norms out somewhere where the entire group can see.

In this activity you can write out the group's responses on flip chart paper. Be sure to capture everyone's responses accurately and validate all contributions.

Possible group norms:

- Listen to each other and do not interrupt
- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak
- Practice being open-minded
- Treat each other with dignity and respect
- Practice being as non-judgmental as possible
- Support each other
- Avoid offensive language and jokes about people's ethnicity, sexual or gender identity
- Be mindful of nonverbal communication and body language
- Participate to the fullest of your ability

Confidentiality and privacy:

It is important to discuss privacy and the limitations of confidentiality when creating group norms. Inform the peer leaders that if they tell you that they themselves or another youth, may be in danger, you will have to tell another adult to ensure that everyone is safe.

Ask youth to not use names or other identifying descriptions when they are sharing stories. Remind them to respect the privacy of their peers and not discuss personal information that they have learned unless there is a safety concern.

3. Great wind blows activity

The purpose of this activity is to help the peer leaders and the adult allies in your group to get to know one another better and to feel more comfortable with each other. Adapted from: <https://www.icebreakers.ws/medium-group/great-wind-blows.html>.

This energizing activity gets everyone moving, helps to break the ice at the beginning, and mixes up the group. It is also a fun way to get to know interesting things about each other.

Directions:

1. Arrange all the chairs to form a circle (all chairs facing inward toward the middle). One player starts in the middle, standing up. They begin the round.
2. The person in the middle starts by saying "Great wind blows for everyone who..." and then says any characteristic that is true for themselves. For example, if the person has sung karaoke before, they can say, "Great wind blows for everyone who has sung karaoke." All players who have sung karaoke before must stand and quickly find a new seat that is more than two chairs away from them.
3. If a player is not able to find a vacant seat, they are the new person who is in the middle.

Some ideas include:

- Great wind blows for everyone who is wearing socks.
- Great wind blows for everyone who hates chocolate.
- Great wind blows for everyone who wears a watch.
- Great wind blows for everyone who likes to play video games.



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Youth Connections to Well-being



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella handout (see Appendix 2)
- Flip chart and markers
- Scissors and tape



Objectives:

- Increase knowledge about the importance of protective factors and how they affect mental health
- Reflect on existing protective factors and identify new areas to develop



Facilitator steps:

1. Facilitate the Youth Connections to Well-being activity
2. Show and facilitate a discussion about the Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella

1. Learning about Youth Connections to Well-being

The Youth Connections to Well-being exercise is an important part of Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO). Use this activity with youth to have them consider what protective factors they have in place and what they would like to develop. Begin by introducing the protective factors. Explain that each coloured piece of the umbrella represents a protective factor and that together, these contribute to improved resilience and well-being. Read through the protective factors as a group and discuss how each connection contributes to positive mental health and well-being.

There are two options for facilitating this activity:

- **Option 1 (Recommended):** To make this activity more interactive, cut out the umbrella from the Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella handout (see Appendix 2) and tape the umbrella to a large piece of flip chart paper. Cut out the raindrops and provide each peer leader with a few raindrops and pieces of tape. Instruct the peer leaders to write down various stressors on the raindrops and stick them on the flip chart paper above the umbrella. Next, provide the peer leaders with sticky notes and instruct them to write down the different protective factors that they either have, or would like to have, in their life. Have the peer leaders come up and stick these protective factors on the umbrella on the flipchart paper.
- **Option 2:** Using the Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella handout (see Appendix 2), discuss the various stressors faced by youth and brainstorm additional connections to well-being that could contribute to increased resilience. The umbrella handout provides a great visual—the rain drops represent the various stressors in one's life, while the umbrella represents the various connections to well-being and coping strategies that help protect one's mental health and increase resilience.

After the activity, use the following prompts to facilitate a discussion.

Ask youth to:

- Reflect on whether the different connections on the umbrella is a strength for them or an area they would like to work on
- Share when they used the connections in the umbrella to feel better or to improve well-being.
- Share ideas about how they can work to make these connections stronger for someone

Key messages

- The Youth Connections to Well-being umbrella shows us the supports and skills that allow for positive mental health, substance use health and well-being
- Having these supports and skills in our lives help us to cope during challenging times and protect our mental health
- These connections will be the basis of the initiatives, activities and events planned by peer leaders, with the goal of increasing these supports and skills among peers



Youth Connections to Well-being

Possible answers:

1

Mental health

- A state of well-being
- Able to realize your own abilities and potential.
- Can cope with the normal stresses of life
- Self-care
- Affects how we think, feel and act
- Helps determine how we deal with stress, relate to others and make choices
- Can be influenced by technology use and social media
- Mental health does not mean the absence of a mental illness. Someone with a diagnosis of a mental illness can have positive mental health, just like someone without a diagnosis of a mental illness can have negative mental health. We all need protective factors to help us cope with life's challenges and to protect our mental health

2

Substance use health

- Exists on a spectrum and can change day-to-day
- Advancing a person's well-being, not only preventing harm
- Can include no use, beneficial use, lower-risk use, problems occurring with use or substance use disorder
- Well-being and recovery are possible and looks different for every person
- Improves health outcomes for those living with challenges from substance use, or a substance use disorder
- Treatment for addictions and substance use disorders can work as well as treatments for other medical conditions. Recovery is about a person feeling stronger and better about themselves in a way that allows them to live their life with meaning and it does not matter the illness or medical condition they may have

3

Mentors and positive relationships

A mentor is:

- An experienced and trusted advisor and guide
- A positive influence
- Someone who makes us feel comfortable and safe
- Someone whom we consult. Ask questions or who gives us advice.
- Non-judgmental
- Someone who teaches us, listens to us and helps us

A positive relationship:

- Fosters open communication
- Is respectful and trusting
- Can be found in friendships, family and kinships



4 Community resources

- Trusted adults in your school and community
- Ottawa Public Health
- Emergency Services
- Rideauwood Addiction & Family Services/ Centre LeCAP
- Youth Services Bureau
- Community Resource Centres and Community Health Centres
- Additional resources available online: [OttawaPublicHealth.ca/MentalHealthSubstancesResources](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/MentalHealthSubstancesResources)



5 Healthy interests

Choosing to:

- Engage in healthy activities (such as sports, art, hobbies, after-school programs)
- Eat a variety of healthy foods each day
- Be mindful when using technology
- Engage in harm reduction and lower-risk practices
- Make informed decisions



6 Kindness

Being:

- Friendly, compassionate, empathetic and considerate
- Concerned for others
- Respectful
- Being kind is helpful to others but also feels good to ourselves



7 Spirituality

- Refers to the need to experience love, hope and meaning in life
- More than just religion
- May include mindfulness or being mindful
- Focuses awareness on the present moment.
- Acknowledging and accepting one's feeling and thoughts
- Not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us



8 Resilience

Ability to:

- Bounce back from or work through stress
- Cope with challenges
- Recover from difficulties
- Adjust to misfortune or change
- Deal with life's struggles
- Know and use positive coping strategies



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Stigma



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Substance use health, mental health, and kindness



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Projector and screen
- Speakers
- Internet capable source (e.g., laptop or smart board)



Objective:

- Understand the impact of stigma



Facilitator steps:

1. Watch the *have THAT talk* “Reducing Stigma” video created by Ottawa Public Health: <https://youtu.be/eio-l8PbdDk>
2. Watch the “End the Stigma” video created by Health Canada: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inDI06DXVjg>
3. Facilitate a group discussion and follow with a debrief

1. Watch the “Reducing Stigma” and “End the Stigma” videos

Watching both videos will encourage the group to think about the stigma that people experience when they talk about their mental health or substance use health, and how to encourage others to speak up and reach out for support.

Watch the *have THAT talk* “Reducing Stigma” video created by Ottawa Public Health: <https://youtu.be/eio-l8PbdDk>

Watch the “End the Stigma” video from Health Canada <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inDI06DXVjg>

Tell the peer leaders to be prepared to discuss what their thoughts are about what they see in the videos.

2. Group discussion and debrief

Stigma is a set of negative beliefs and prejudices about a group of people, as well as negative behaviours towards people or groups of people. People can experience stigma for a variety of reasons including mental health, addictions and substance use health. The purpose of this activity is to have the group discuss and evaluate how they feel about stigma.

1. Ask participants to share what they saw, felt and heard.
2. Suggested questions to stimulate discussion:
 - a. What is stigma?
 - b. Have you experienced a time in your life when you felt different? How did it feel?
 - c. Why do you think individuals living with mental illness or substance use disorders are stigmatized?
 - d. Are there any other social issues or health conditions that you can think of that are stigmatized?
 - e. How do you think stigma impacts the lives of people who are experiencing mental illness or mental health challenges? How can stigma impact people with substance use disorders or those experiencing challenges with substance use?
 - f. What could people do to change the public's view and attitudes towards people experiencing mental health challenges, mental illness, challenges with substance use, or substance use disorders?

Possible participants answers:

- a. Stigma can be: negative attitudes, being mean to people, treating other people poorly, hurting other people because of their mental illness, substance use disorder or their challenges with mental health and substance use and the misconceptions around it.
- b. Feelings related to stigma could be: isolated, shame, guilt, overwhelmed, afraid for safety, not able to do usual activities, fear of judgement, not knowing where to get help.
- c. Movies, TV shows, and stories in the news or on social media often depict people experiencing mental illness or challenges with substance use as violent or irresponsible. This may influence how people think about others. Language used in everyday conversation such as "they are crazy" or "they're a junkie" can make stigma worse.
- d. Income, ethnicity, appearance, gender identity and sexual orientation.
- e. People may decide not to get help even if it could help them feel better, they may feel lonely, or it may prevent people from telling friends and family that they are struggling.
- f. Education, awareness, advocating for policy changes, educational campaigns, challenging myths.

Adapted from: The Alberta Teachers' Association & Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta. (2016). *Can we talk? Mental health lesson plans*. Ottawa Public Health. (n.d.). have THAT talk. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health

Key messages

- When talking about mental health or substance use health, you do not need to say everything at once. You can ask the person if you can talk to them again.
- The stigma around mental illnesses, addictions and substance use health can keep youth from getting the help they need and keep people from supporting each other through difficult times.
- Using non-stigmatizing language can help reduce mental health and substance use health related stigma. Using kind words can make it easier for someone to speak up, to feel understood or to get help.
- For people who use substances, stigma can lead a person to avoid getting help or hide their substance use because they are afraid of being judged, getting in trouble with work, school, loved ones or the law. Stigma can also make it more difficult for a person to receive proper treatment, access jobs, housing and other necessities.
- It is important to remind youth that people may choose to use substances, but no one chooses to have a substance use disorder. It is important to treat substance use disorders the same as we would any other medical condition.
- Some people may not respond in the way you were expecting. They may not know what to say or how to be supportive. You can try talking to them at another time.
- You can always talk to a trusted adult, a health care professional, a helpline or go to a mental health, addictions and substance use health walk-in counselling clinic to talk to someone.



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Understanding mental health



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Mental health



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes (depending on discussion)



Supplies required:

- Projector and screen
- Speakers
- Internet-capable source (e.g., laptop or smart board)
- Flip chart and markers to take notes (optional)



Objective:

- Increase the knowledge and understanding of mental health and mental illness with peer leaders
- Initiate and create a space that encourages open dialogue



Facilitator steps:

1. Watch: “Promoting Mental Health Finding a Shared Language” from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klswi_4yRaE
2. Define and discuss mental health
3. Facilitate “hands up for mental health!” activity

1. Watch the “Promoting Mental Health” video

Watching this video as a group will allow everyone to have the same understanding of what mental health is. This understanding will help the peer leaders and adult allies to promote positive mental health using a shared language.

Watch the “Promoting Mental Health: Finding a Shared Language” video from CAMH https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klswi_4yRaE.

After watching the video, allow time for a discussion and questions.

2. Define mental health

Mental health is a state of well-being in which youth can realize their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and contribute to their community.

Mental illness is a diagnosed disorder that affects the way a person thinks, feels or behaves. Mental health can change over a lifetime related to the environments where we live, learn, work and play. Various communities may have different ways of understanding, talking about and addressing mental health.

Youth can experience positive (high) and poor (low) mental health at different times in their life with or without a mental illness (see Figure in Appendix 3).

Positive mental health protects youth from the stress of everyday life and can reduce the risk of developing poor mental health and mental illness. Promoting positive mental health supports youths' resilience to face everyday challenges and research shows that people who are resilient are healthier, live longer and are happier in their relationships.

Source: [Ottawa Public Health. Promoting Mental Health in Ottawa Summary Report 2018](#). (2018). Ottawa (ON): Ottawa Public Health.

3. Hands up for mental health! activity

This activity will examine common misconceptions about mental health and mental illness. Encouraging the group to close their eyes or to not look at each other will ensure more honest answers.

This activity also provides an opportunity to discuss the different ideas brought up with each question. There are key messages to help you to facilitate this discussion at the end of the worksheet.

Directions:

- Ask youth to sit either facing away from the group or with their eyes closed
- Explain that you will read out a statement and with their eyes closed or without looking at the rest of the group, vote whether the statement being read is true or false
- Using the show of hands, count the results and note them on the flip chart
- Ask students to share some general observations about the group's results. Facilitate a group-wide discussion about the survey results, highlighting items that may be surprising

Alternate option: You may use an interactive survey tool like the mobile app “Kahoot!” to poll youth answer (note youth would require access to a mobile device or laptop).

Questions and answers:

Most people will never be affected by mental illness

✗ FALSE

- Mental illness is diagnosable illness that affects our thoughts, feelings and actions. In Canada, one in five people will experience a mental illness in any given year. For this reason, most people are affected by mental illness, either directly (by having a mental illness themselves) or indirectly (by knowing someone with a mental illness).

We have some control over our mental health

✓ TRUE

- Mental health is a state of well-being where a person realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to the community. Although we cannot always control what happens to us, we have some control over how we react.
- Some ways we can take control of mental health include:
 - Taking care of our health
 - Acknowledging 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

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. Mental health challenges can be related to how the brain is working, and often it is important to get help from a professional. Unfortunately, because of stigma, many people do not ask for help.

People do not recover from mental health problems

✗ FALSE

- Like any health problem, people recover from mental health problems. It is important to get the proper help. Sometimes people need the help of a counsellor, a social worker, a physician, a psychologist or a psychiatrist in their recovery. They may also need the help and support of friends and family, as well as the understanding of co-workers or classmates.
- Sometimes embarrassment stops people from getting the help they need. Many people experience a mental health problem in their lives, but with help are able to recover and have full, happy lives.

Being a good friend can sometimes mean breaking a promise to make sure a friend gets help

✓ TRUE

- Sometimes it is essential to break a promise to ensure that a friend gets the support they need. A friend may tell you they are feeling “bad” or want to hurt themselves. They may even tell you they are thinking about suicide. When friends struggle, they often require more support than a friend can provide. To keep them safe and to get the help they need, it is important you share this information with an adult you trust.

Positive coping strategies can help us deal with life’s stressors

✓ TRUE

- Positive coping strategies describes the things you do that:
 - Help you to feel better
 - Respects others and property
 - Helps you to solve the problem
- Positive coping strategies help us to feel more balanced and able to cope with stress. They help us:
 - Learn to accept our feelings
 - Find ways to relax and calm overwhelming feelings
 - Think and problem solve challenges in more realistic and positive ways

The way we listen and talk to our friends shows we care and makes them feel safe to share their concerns

✓ TRUE

- Listening and acknowledging people’s feelings and thoughts shows you accept them and care about their mental health and well-being. You can help them feel safe to talk and get the help they need.

Talking to ourselves in a positive way can help us get through life’s struggles

✓ TRUE

- Self-talk is our inner voice that affects how we feel and behave. Positive self-talk involves talking to yourself in a way that is compassionate and understanding. It takes practice to learn this strategy. In a tough situation self-talk can help you think in positive, realistic ways. It helps problem solve challenges and try new ideas. For example, when you fail a test, tell yourself, “Failing is upsetting, so I feel disappointed and that’s okay. I can change things. I will talk to my teacher and ask for help, give myself more time to study and then re-take the test”.

You can tell by looking at someone whether they have a mental illness

X FALSE

- Generally, you cannot tell if a person has a mental illness based on their appearance. However, 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.

Medication is the only treatment for mental illness

X FALSE

- Medication can be a very effective part of managing a mental illness but it is not the only type of treatment or support that helps people recover. There are many different things that can help a person recover and stay well including medication, counselling, social and recreational groups, self-help, holistic health, religious support, hospital care, exercise and nutrition. The best approach is to have a combination of strategies that have been proven to be effective.

Sources: The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (n.d.). *Mental illness and Addiction: Facts and statistics*. CAMH.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health. (2022). *Healthy Transitions*. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health.

The Alberta Teachers' Association & Canadian Mental Health Association Alberta. (2016). *Can we talk? Mental Health Lesson Plans*.

Mental Health Commission of Canada. (n.d.) *Recovery*. <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/recovery/>

Key messages

- Many people are affected by mental illness either indirectly (by knowing someone with a mental illness) or directly (living with a mental illness themselves).
- We need to take care of our mental health the way we take care of our physical health.
- There are skills we can learn to protect our mental health and well-being.
- There are ways of thinking, as well as actions we can take that can promote mental health (help us feel better and cope with everyday struggles).
- The way we think about things influences our feelings and actions.
- We can change the way we feel and act, if we first change the way we think.
- It is natural to feel sad, upset and angry in certain situations. Sometimes trying to change the way we think about things can help, but sometimes situations and feelings are just too overwhelming for us to handle alone. At times like these, we need to get help (just as we would if we were feeling physically sick or had been physically injured).



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Substance use health



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Substance use health



Time required:

- 60–90 minutes



Supplies required:

- Invited adult ally as knowledge expert (optional)
- Before engaging in group discussion, review content in [Appendix 4 Spectrum of Substance Use](#)
- Projector, screen and speakers
- Internet capable source (e.g., laptop or smart board)



Objective:

- Allow youth to better understand substance use health and the Spectrum of Substance Use



Facilitator steps:

1. Watch the video “My Journey Begins with Compassion” from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD0EOwWK8gI>
2. Facilitate a group discussion about substance use health and the Spectrum of Substance Use
3. Talk about what youth can do if they are questioning their relationship with substances, if problems are occurring with their substance use, harm reduction strategies, and refusal techniques

Option to consider: To discuss substance use health in more detail, consider inviting a youth outreach worker, Rideauwood/LeCAP counsellor or other experts to a meeting to address more specific questions or topics.

1. Watch the “My Journey Begins with Compassion” video

This video will encourage the group to think about the impacts of substance use stigma, and how stigma can create barriers to recovery and well-being. It can also prompt conversation on how to support individuals who have problems occurring with their substance use.

Watch the video “My Journey Begins with Compassion” from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RD0EOwWK8gI>

Tell the peer leaders to be prepared to talk about their thoughts on the video.

2. Group discussion

Most Canadians will use some type of substance in their lifetime, however using substances at a younger age will increase risks. Childhood is a time when health practices and behaviours are learned, and adolescence is a period when both positive health behaviours and risk behaviours can be adopted. For many youth, this will be a time they begin exploring their relationship with substances. Some will not use but may experience pressures from peers. Others may choose to use for various reasons such as to have fun or to cope with life events.

Substance use health can vary from one day to the next as we face different circumstances. Some people may find themselves using more substances or experiencing challenges with their substance use during times of increased stress. It's important to talk about challenges with substance use the same way we talk about challenges with mental health or mental illness, and how a person can achieve wellness even if they are still using substances. Substance use health means supporting a person's well-being, even if the person continues to use substances.

The purpose of this activity is to help peer leaders discuss substance use health and understand that substance use falls on a spectrum. It is important to think about your own experiences with substances and remember that there are many different reasons why someone may or may not use substances.

[Appendix 4](#), the Spectrum of Substance Use, can be used to help facilitate this discussion. Everyone should be able to identify themselves somewhere on the spectrum. It is important to remember that progress along the spectrum is not linear, and that health and well-being are achievable at any stage. Someone may identify with a different place on the spectrum at any time.

Ask youth:

- a. How did the video make you think or feel?
- b. Why do youth use substances?
- c. What are some risks when using substances?
- d. What are some ways to reduce risks when using substances?
- e. What are some signs someone may need support with their substance use?
- f. How might you support a friend or loved one experiencing problems with their substance use?
- g. How can people challenge stigma and discrimination towards people who use substances?

Possible responses:

- a. People may choose to use substances, but no one chooses to develop a substance use disorder. It is important to remember this and understand that substance use disorders are a medical condition. Stigma can be reinforced or prevented, depending on the words we use. [See Appendix 5](#) for person-first language resources.
- b. Social reasons, pressure from peers, managing health issues, physical pain or to cope with a difficult situation are some reasons youth may choose to use substances. Sometimes youth may try to manage mental health challenges by using substances. Mental health and substance use health can affect each other in many ways. Some people may use substances to help forget about their problems. While this may seem helpful in the moment, this can delay getting proper support and treatment. The sooner someone gets help, the better.

- c. Long-term effects are worse for youth who use early and often because the effects may not be reversible when substance use stops. Substance use can affect youth's physical and mental health, as well as emotional and social development. Substance use can also affect decision making, concentration, memory, judgement and how quickly someone reacts. For more information, visit thelinkottawa.ca.
- d. Education, awareness, and information that is accurate and evidence informed about substances are important factors for reducing substance use related harms and stigma. There are ways to use substances that decrease health and social risks. It's important to remember that lower risk does not mean no risk, as there are risks when consuming any type of substance, even prescription medications. Below are guidelines developed to help Canadians make decisions about their substance use:
 - Canada's Risk Reduction Cannabis Use Guidelines*
 - Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health**
- e. Some signs someone may need support with their substance use include:
 - Having difficulty managing relationships and different parts of life because of substance use (for example, being absent from school or work, unstable finances, etc.).
 - Changes in mood, personality or behaviour (having trouble with concentration, isolation from friends and family, general loss of interest in activities once enjoyed, etc.).

- f. Sometimes a person may not realize there are problems occurring with their substance use. Talking to them can help and may be the encouragement they need to seek help.

- Role model that you have asked for help in the past.
- Ask if they might like to talk to someone for more information. [See Appendix 8](#) for Youth Mental Health Addictions and Substance Use Health List.

If you find yourself having difficulty with this, see Tips for Talking about Substance Use in [Appendix 6](#).

- g. Stigma is any negative attitudes, beliefs or behaviours that discriminates against people or groups of people. Stigma is one of the biggest barriers stopping those experiencing challenges with their substance use from getting help, receiving care or even telling those closest to them that they are struggling which can isolate people even further. Some ways to help reduce stigma include:
 - Correct myths about substance use or people who use substances when you hear it.
 - Be compassionate and understanding, and encourage others to do the same.
 - Use de-stigmatizing and person- first language. For example, instead of saying drug abuse, use language that is respectful such as a person with a substance use disorder. [See Appendix 5](#) for more People First Language information.
 - Reach out to organizations/groups in your area that represent the voices of people with lived/living experience to learn more.
 - Advocate for policy changes that de-stigmatize substance use.

Source: Health Canada. (2020). Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/resources/lower-risk-cannabis-use-guidelines.html>

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA). (2023). Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health. Ottawa, ON: CCSA. <https://ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-05/CGAH-Drinking-Less-is-Better-en.pdf>.

3. Refusal techniques

There are many different reasons why someone may or may not use substances. This can look different for each person and can change overtime. It can be very difficult for people to say no to substances. Encourage youth to explore and practice ways of refusing substances that feels authentic to them. Have peer leaders discuss options of what to do or say if someone offers them substances. Remind your group that not everyone will refuse substances. If youth choose to use substances, encourage them follow the party safer tips. [See Appendix 7](#) for more information.

It can be difficult for people to refuse substances. We can support those who choose to not use substances by:

- Not commenting or questioning them
- Respecting their choices
- Backing them when they are being questioned or pestered by someone else

Examples of refusal techniques include:

- **Say “no thanks”:** Just say no, plainly and confidently. Just saying no without a lot of arguing and explaining is often the best and easiest response.
- **Make an excuse:** Give a reason why you cannot use a substance. Sometimes backing up the “no” with evidence can give it more power. For example, if you are in sports or extracurriculars, say substances will interfere with your progress.
- **Repeat yourself:** Sometimes it takes more than once, “I’m still not interest”. Just because someone continues to ask does not mean you have to give in.
- **Suggest a different activity:** Like playing sports, listening to music, group yoga or going to the movies. By thinking of something better to do, you are offering everyone an “out.” You might be surprised who might take you up on it.
- **Use humour:** Make a joke. Sometimes a witty one-liner or well-timed joke can lighten the mood and help deflect the attention.
- **Walk away:** If all else fails (and you can do so safely), walk away. You do not have to stay if you feel uncomfortable. Find other people to talk to or call someone you trust to pick you up. With you leading the way, others who do not want to stay may follow you.

Key messages

- Just like physical or mental health, substance use health can vary from one day to the next as we are faced with different circumstances.
- The only way to completely avoid any harms from substance use is to avoid use. However, many people use substances without causing significant harm to themselves or others.
- For some, substance use may be beneficial, like taking important medication as prescribed or taking a pain reliever, like Tylenol for a headache. Some people may find themselves using more substances or experiencing challenges with their substance use during times of increased stress. Some youth may choose not to use substances at all because of their faith, culture or other personal reasons, like not wanting to interfere with training for sports.

- Treatment for substance use disorders are effective. It is important to know this and to treat substance use disorders as we would any other health or medical condition.
- The spectrum includes no use, substance use and the development of a substance use disorder. It is based on the evidence we currently have on substance use and addictions. However, it is not linear and is not meant to read as a process, where a person progresses from one stage to another. For example, if someone breaks their leg while using substances, this would be considered problems occurring while using substances. That same person could begin drinking alcohol at another time using Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, which would be considered lower risk substance use. We all fit somewhere on the spectrum. It's important to remember that well-being can be achieved anywhere on the spectrum.
- No use is an option. Encourage youth to explore and practice ways of refusing substances that feels authentic to them, however if youth choose to use substances, follow the Party Safer Tips which outline ways to stay safer if using substances [See Appendix 7](#) for more Party Safer tips.
- It is natural to be curious, but it is important to understand the potential risks and benefits of substance use. Children and young adults are especially vulnerable to the effects of different substances because of the impacts on brain development. Youth should learn about the effects of alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other substances so they can make informed decisions. Visit thelinkottawa.ca for more information.

Sources: CAPSA. (2021). Understanding Substance Use Health: a matter of equity. <https://capsa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CAPSA-Substance-Use-Health-EN-1.pdf>



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Technology use and social media



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Resilience, mentors and positive relationships, healthy interests, mental health



Time required:

- 30–60 minutes



Supplies required:

- Student cell phones



Objectives:

- Allow youth to better understand their relationship with technology and social media
- Consider how technology and social media affects youth's lives



Facilitator steps:

1. Define recreational screen time
2. Facilitate “a world without screens” activity
3. Facilitate discussion about relationship to technology and social media

1. A world without screens activity

Directions:

1. Explain to youth that the group will be discussing technology use and recreational screen time and provide a definition of recreational screen time.
 - Recreational screen time is time spent on screen that is not related to school or work. This includes time spent on tablets, gaming devices, computers, smartphones and television. Many youth report using more recreational screen time than the two hours that is recommended (Ottawa Public Health, 2021).
2. Explain to peer leaders that to better understand our technology and social media use, part of this discussion will involve an experiment with our phones.
3. Allow/encourage all students to complete any texting, messaging, feed checks (any task on phone) for 1–5 minutes as appropriate when students arrive. Ask students to turn on notifications (vibrate or sound) and place phones face down in a group in the middle of a table or on the central of the desk etc. Alternatively, you can have the youth place their phone on the table just in front of them or on their individual desks. Begin discussion. Encourage students to leave phones on the table. If they choose to respond, ask them to return their phone to the pile.
4. At the end of the discussion ask:
 - How does it feel when a phone buzzes and you can't/ don't answer it?
 - What do you think this means?

2. Group discussion and debrief

Sample questions:

1. How would our world be different without screens (including gaming, computers, video streaming, television, phones)? What would change? Would these changes be positive or negative? Explain.
 - Possible points to discuss:
 - Education, gaming, television, YouTube and Netflix
 - Social media
 - ▶ How do influencers affect how youth think, feel and behave?
 - ▶ Do social media sites (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok) represent real life?
 - ▶ Does this affect self-esteem? If so, how?
2. Many youths engage in more recreational screen time than what is suggested. Why do you think that is?
3. How would your physical and emotional health be different if there were no screens?
 - E.g., sleep, physical activity, healthy eating, time with friends and family, time in nature.
4. How does screen-time affect relationships—friends, family, school?
5. Would you be able to go without screens for a year, a month, a week, a day? Explain.

Technology and social media use has increased over the past ten years. Many people use technology to communicate with friends and family and for numerous youth the internet is a major source of entertainment and social connection. Social media and gaming are a large portion of people's technology use. While technology and social media have the potential to be a source of fun, education and social connectedness, depending on how often we use technology, it can also have a negative impact on our relationships, physical and mental health, self-image and identity.

When technology use gets in the way of other parts of life including relationships, school, hobbies and basic daily living (e.g., sleep, eating, hygiene) and someone feels like they can't stop using technology despite negative consequences, this is called problems occurring with tech use. Problems can happen with any type of technology, including video games, social media and the internet.

It is important to think about why we are using technology, rather than just how much we are using it. We all have a relationship with technology. To better understand this relationship, we can ask ourselves:

- Do I use tech when I am uncomfortable?
- Do I use tech when I am trying to avoid something that is bothering me?
- Is tech the only coping tool that I currently use? What are other things that I can do instead?

Key messages

- Technology and social media can be a source of entertainment, education and social connection.
- Problems can occur when technology use gets in the way of other parts of life including relationships, school, hobbies and basic daily living (e.g., sleep, eating, hygiene) and someone feels like they can't stop using technology despite negative consequences.
- Problems occurring with tech use can happen with any type of technology, including gaming, social media and the internet.
- It is important to consider why we are using technology, rather than just how much we are using it.
- Technology and screentime can affect our lives in both positive and negative ways.
- If you are questioning your relationship with technology, see the Spectrum of Substance Use in [Appendix 4](#) for more information on the 4 “C”s of addiction.

Sources: Eastern Health. (2021). *Screen time*. <https://hi.easternhealth.ca/healthy-living/physical-activity/screen-time/>
 MediaSmarts. (2022). *Young Canadians in a wireless world, phase IV: Life online*. MediaSmarts. Ottawa.
 Ottawa Public Health, (2021). *Status of mental health, addictions and substance use health among Ottawa Students during the COVID-19 pandemic: Results from the Ontario student drug use and health survey, 2021*. https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/reports-research-and-statistics/resources/Documents/OSDUHS_MHASUH_2021_EN.pdf
 Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services. (2023). *Tech use: Supporting the well-being of youth and young adults*.
[Tech Use: Supporting the Well-Being of Youth and Young Adults - Rideauwood](#)



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Building resilience



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Resilience, spirituality, and mental health



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Relaxing music or sounds (optional)
- Speakers (if playing music)



Objective:

- Recognize that stressful situations can trigger different behavioural responses
- Appreciate the relationship between thoughts, feelings and actions
- Understand the difference between positive and negative types of stress
- Recognize you have choices in how you respond to stressful situations
- Learn two practical ways to increase your resilience: deep breathing and mindfulness



Facilitator steps:

1. Start with “human continuum” activity
2. Debrief “human continuum” activity
3. Facilitate “deep breathing and mindfulness” activity

1. Human continuum activity

This activity will allow youth the opportunity to evaluate how they respond to challenging situations and help to normalize that we all have stress in our lives and have different ways that we react to it.

Directions:

1. Line up participants in the middle of a large open space.
2. Ask participants if they relate to the statements below (see list of possible statements).
 - If the answer is yes, move forward one footstep
 - If the answer is no, go backward one footstep
3. Have participants look around at the end and see where others are standing in relation to them.

Possible statements:

- When I am feeling stressed, I get frustrated, angry or irritable.
- When something bad happens, I get angry quickly.
- I get upset or sad if I miss events because of school and/or work.
- When I am feeling stressed, I get worried and anxious and I cannot stop thinking about what is bothering me.
- When I am feeling stressed, I use technology and social media to avoid what is bothering me.
- When I am under stress, feeling worried or sad, I want to be alone and stay away from my friends and family.
- I have felt bad after getting mad at someone and wished I had reacted differently.
- I have enough time to spend with my friends and family.
- I take time to relax.
- I have time to do something just for me every week.

2. Debrief human continuum activity

Facilitate a brief discussion by asking students the following questions:

1. What are some examples of situations that cause emotions like sadness, worry or anger?
Examples might include things like:
 - Exams or tests
 - Fighting with friends/parents
 - Loss of a loved one (family member, pet)
 - Bullying/cyberbullying
 - Parent's divorce
 - Illness
 - Depression, anxiety or other mental health challenges
 - Worry about a friend's, family member's or your own substance use
 - Body image
 - Navigating sexual orientation and gender identity
 - Experiencing racism, sexism, transphobia or other forms of discrimination
 - Climate change and other world events
2. Can feeling sadness, anger or worry influence how we react to a situation?
3. What are some symptoms related to stressful or upsetting situations?
 - Sweaty palms
 - Lump in throat
 - Trouble concentrating
 - Shaking hands
 - Headache
 - Nail biting
 - Heart beating wildly
 - Tense muscles
 - Mood changes
 - Dry mouth
 - Clenching teeth
 - Poor school performance
 - Shaky voice
 - 'Butterflies' in stomach
 - Feeling worried or anxious
 - Red blotches on skin
 - Trouble sleeping
4. Can stress be good for us? What are some examples of good stress?

Some stress in our lives can be necessary to help keep us alert and energized and to help us get things done. We can understand this type of stress as "good stress". Good stress is short-term, manageable and often useful.

Examples of good or short-term stress might include things like:

- Learning a new activity (motivation)
- Scoring a goal in soccer (burst of energy)
- First day of school (a natural reaction)
- Taking a test or presenting in front of a group (learning to deal with stressful situations can make you more resilient)
- Excitement about going on a family vacation (feeling happy and energized)

Explain that everyone experiences emotions like anger, worry and sadness at points in their life. For many of us it may not just be one of these emotions, but a combination. Sometimes when we are under normal stress and we find that the anger, worry or sadness in our life is getting to be too much, we may need to check in with the supports in our life. If our family, friends, work, school or leisure time gets severely impacted for longer periods during these struggles, professional mental health support can often help.

5. Next, ask youth to think about how they cope with stress.
 - Do a stress check—what is going on in my life?
 - Recognize signs—how am I feeling?
 - Learn what triggers are—what is making me feel this way?
 - Have a plan to help deal with every day stressful situations and manage those feelings.
 - Add to your resilience—resilience is the ability to work through life's struggles in a positive way and recover afterwards.
6. What coping strategies can you use to add to your resilience?

Some simple stress relievers include:

- Thinking positively
- Talking to a trusted adult
- Practicing deep breathing and relaxation exercises
- Getting out in nature and being active
- Getting enough sleep
- Eating healthy food

It is important to realize that we all react to stressful situations in different ways. We may even react to stress differently ourselves, depending on the situation. However, once we become aware of the signs of stress, we are better able to recognize them in ourselves and apply our coping strategies.

3. Deep breathing and mindfulness activity

Deep breathing and mindfulness help ease stress. This activity teaches practical skills to help youth become more resilient.

Directions:

1. Before beginning, ask participants how much stress they are feeling on a scale of one to ten. They can use their fingers to show their stress level. Explain to the group they are going to try an exercise which may improve feelings of stress.
2. Make the room as comfortable as possible (e.g. turn down the lights or play relaxing music.).

3. Read the following “take time to breathe” 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.
- Have participants practice deep breathing for about 15–30 seconds. 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.

4. Ask participants on a scale of one to ten how stressed are they feeling after completing the exercise and how the activity made them feel.**Possible answers:**

- Feelings afterwards: relaxed, calm, quiet, less stressed, some participants may not feel any different; some may feel more stressed because they could not stop their thoughts from wandering. This is normal and improves with practice.
- Some participants might find these activities difficult. Remind participants that it takes time and practice to learn new skills.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health. (n.d.). have THAT talk. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health.

Key messages

- Being resilient is good for our mental health because it helps us recover and work through challenges in a positive way.
- You can learn resilience skills at any time.
- There are many strategies for relieving stress such as deep breathing and mindfulness.
- Being able to notice the signs of stress can help us know when to use our coping strategies.



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Dealing with stress



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Mental health, resilience, healthy interests, and mentors and positive relationships



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Mural paper or large flip chart paper
- Crayons or markers



Objective:

- Enhance knowledge of different strategies that are helpful for coping with stress or stressful situations



Facilitator steps:

1. Facilitate the creation of a stress-busting mural
2. Discuss the various stress-busting key messages for youth

1. Stress-busting mural

In this activity, you will have the youth identify stressors followed by brainstorming healthy ways to cope. The focus for this activity is not on the stressors but rather the coping strategies, the problem solving and the strength of the group.

Part one:

Ask youth to name different stressors in their lives (e.g., homework, tests, jobs, parents, relationships, friendships, conflict, mental or physical health challenges). Capture these examples on flip chart paper.

Part two:

Ask youth to think of a time when they have experienced a stressful time or faced challenges. What helped them through it? Capture these examples on flip chart paper.

Possible answers:

- | | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Family | • Hobbies | • Talking to someone you trust | • Spending time in nature |
| • Sports | • Taking time to chill | • Reading | • Music |
| • Keeping a routine | • Journaling | • Sleep | • Deep breathing |
| • Art | • Thinking positively | • Friends | |
| • Meditation | • Laughing | • Healthy activities | |
| • Comfort food | • Yoga | | |

Part three:

Ask youth, as a group, to create a stress-busters mural with various positive coping strategies either written or represented through art on flip chart or mural paper.

Alternative option:

Have youth split up into smaller groups at the beginning and have each group draw a “gingerbread person” outline on flip chart or mural paper. Next, have them draw their responses to part one and part two (as above) and take it up as a group to encourage discussion.

2. Key messages

The stress-busting mural activity gives the peer leaders the opportunity to think of things that cause them stress. More importantly, this activity also encourages them to think of positive coping strategies and personal supports.

As a follow up to the stress-busting mural it is important to discuss what the peer leaders have learned. Below are many key messages to help you have this conversation.

- We all have different strengths. Keeping a good balance of fun and responsibility in our lives helps us stay healthy. Spend some time with friends or participate in a hobby or pastime that you love.
- Talking out our problems and seeing them from a different view might help us figure out ways to deal with them. It feels good to know someone understands.
- Using positive self-talk, positive coping strategies and learning to relax can help us handle our feelings and stress. Telling ourselves things to make us feel better about a negative situation can help us get through life’s struggles. This is called positive self-talk and it takes practice.
- Positive self-talk is saying:
 - “I can do this”.
 - “I will try harder the next time”.
 - “I am a good person”.
- How we think about things affects how we feel and how we act. Sometimes, if we change the way we think about a negative situation, we can feel better and deal with the situation more easily.
- Problem solving is an important skill for our mental health and can give a sense of control.
- Set aside some time for laughter, ours bodies’ natural way to relieve stress. Laughing can make us feel good and that good feeling can stay with us even after the laughter stops.
- Enjoying time spent with friends can have similar effects as laughter. It can release chemicals called endorphins in our brains. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and temporarily relieve pain.
- Make sleep a priority. When we are tired and have not had enough sleep, it becomes harder to control emotions and behaviours, which then makes it harder to deal with stressful situations.
 - Teenagers need 9 to 9.5 hours of sleep per night.
 - Improve sleep by doing quiet activities before bed. Avoid screens, TV or loud music.
 - A good night’s sleep helps us to better deal with our daily challenges and stresses.
- Food provides fuel for body and brain. Without enough energy from food, we may feel tired and find it hard to concentrate.
- Physical activity is a great way to help us deal with stress. It can improve our mood and give us energy.
- Regular exercise can boost our self-esteem and help us concentrate, sleep, and feel better.
- Sometimes we use technology and social media to relax and connect with friends. However, it is important to notice when tech use may be getting in the way of other important parts of your life such as friendships, family, hobbies, exercise and sleep.
- When we are having one of those days when nothing goes right, writing about it in a journal can help get it off our minds. Sometimes we come up with solutions more easily on paper.

Source: Ottawa Public Health. (n.d.). Stress Busters Display. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health.



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Help-seeking and trusted adults



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Mentors and positive relationships and community resources



Time required:

- 20–40 minutes



Supplies required:

- Sheet of paper



Objective:

- Demonstrate the importance of getting help and identifying helpers
- Recognize that we sometimes need more than one person to help us when we have challenges
- Learn about different people and supports that are available



Facilitator steps:

1. Facilitate “stronger together” activity
2. Facilitate help-seeking discussion

1. Stronger together activity

Stronger together creates an opportunity to recognize that while personal coping strategies are important, it is also important to ask for help. You can use this icebreaker to discuss how people can benefit from more than one resource to help them when they are experiencing challenges.

Directions:

1. Scrunch up a piece of paper to make a paper ball. Ask a youth to identify one possible support and come to the front of the group to hold the ball of paper with one finger (paper ball falls).
2. Ask youth, one at a time, to identify people or places that they can go to for help and then come to the front of the group and try to hold up the ball together using one finger each.
3. Continue to ask youth to identify a support and add their finger to support the ball until there are enough fingers to hold the ball of paper (usually 4 to 5 youth).

Ask the group:

- a. What happened when only one person tried to hold the paper ball? What could this represent?
- b. What happened when more people came to help hold up the paper ball? What could this symbolize?
- c. What do you think this activity demonstrates?

Possible answers:

- a. When we are dealing with an issue or challenge, we may need to rely on more than one person to help support us.
- b. It can be challenging or sometimes nearly impossible to deal with issues all on our own.
- c. When we have more people to assist us, our challenges may become easier to manage.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health. (2022). Healthy Transitions. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health.

2. Help-seeking discussion

This activity will encourage the peer leaders to think about the importance of seeking help. The discussion focuses on what they would do if someone needs help, as well as who they can reach out to when they need help.

Ask youth to define help seeking

- Summarize and include that help-seeking is the attempt to get help to deal with (in this case) a mental health or substance use health concern.

What would you do if your friend was struggling or in crisis?

- Listen and be there for them.
- Encourage them to get help.
- Link them to a trusted adult.
- If they are in immediate danger call 9-1-1.
- Break codes of silence when safety is a concern.
- Remember, your job is to listen and help your friend to get help. You do not need to know the answers and your role is not to fix everything.

Who are trusted adults in your school and community life?

- Educator
- Parent
- Social worker
- Club leader
- Rideauwood/Le CAP counsellor
- Principal
- Family member
- Psychologist
- Coach
- Youth worker
- Vice principal
- Good friend
- Doctor
- Faith leader
- Community developer
- Guidance counsellor/school based counsellor
- Mentor
- Nurse
- Community member
- Other

Key messages

- Help-seeking is the attempt to get help for yourself or others (your peers, friends, family members, etc.) to deal with a problem or concern.
- While we can offer support to each other it is important to know when more help is needed and when you need to break a promise to get help from a trusted adult.
- Sometimes we need to get help from more than one person when dealing with an issue or challenge.
- We all need help sometimes.



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Advocacy and mental health promotion



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Community resources, resilience, and healthy interests



Time required:

- 40–60 minutes



Supplies required:

- Flip chart paper or Chromebooks for youth to take notes (optional)
- Ball of yarn



Objective:

- Learn how to be an advocate and promote mental health and well-being
- Define well-being
- Discuss and develop a well-being statement for the length of the program



Facilitator steps:

1. Review the ten steps to advocacy
2. Define health promotion and well-being
3. Develop a well-being statement

1. Ten steps to advocacy

This worksheet will help the peer leaders learn how to move their Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) group forward. They will learn the importance of advocating for initiatives that promote health and well-being and how to develop a well-being statement of their own.

In this activity you will review the 10 Steps to Advocacy. The steps will help the peer leaders to develop future campaigns and events.

Directions:

1. **Select your issue:** What is the problem? What does your school, community or peers need?
2. **Investigate:** Does someone already do this? Who are key people you need to influence? What do people want to know?
3. **Do your homework:** Build your evidence. Are there resources in the community who may be interested or specialize in this?
4. **Engage others:** Build a diverse team and reach out to allies.
5. **Develop your strategic plan:** What are your goals? How will you reach your goal? What do you need? Will the activity, event or campaign be interactive?
6. **Communicate:** Think how you will communicate your message (e.g., activities, posters, social media and cafés). How will you introduce the theme and main message? Once this is decided, promote your event or campaign.

7. Discover: Receive constructive feedback.
What are the limitations?

8. Fine-tune: Final changes.

9. Seize your opportunity: Time it for the
biggest impact.

10. Take action: Run your event or campaign.

Source: Youth Net. (n.d.). How 2 B A Wellness Advocate. Ottawa, ON: CHEO.

2. Define health promotion

YCO recognizes that youth are much more powerful than adults when it comes to having an impact on other youth. This is a way to take what is important to you, your school and community, and promote it in a positive way.

Health promotion is taking action to strengthen the health of everyone. An important part of health promotion is helping people have more control over their health. Through healthy activities and campaigns, you can promote health among your peers. This means using the Connections to Well-being as themes for your activities, campaigns and events to increase resilience. Through your campaigns and activities, you can empower your peers to develop ways of bouncing back and promoting mental health, substance use health and overall health.

3. Define well-being activity

Well-being is more than not being ill. Well-being is a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health.

Ask students to reflect on what well-being means to them. (e.g., a network of close friends, enough sleep, a sense of belonging, healthy self-esteem)

Directions:

1. Sit the group in a circle with everyone facing inward toward the center.
2. Introduce yourself and one characteristic about what well-being means to you.
3. Holding firmly to the end of the yarn, toss the ball of yarn to someone in the circle after you have shared your thoughts.
4. The person receiving the ball introduces themselves and shares one characteristic of what well-being means to them.
5. Then, holding firmly onto a piece of the yarn, they toss the ball of yarn to another person in the circle. Remember to hold the yarn tightly and above the ground before tossing.
6. Continue until everyone has shared their thoughts about well-being and everyone is holding a piece of yarn.

Adapted from: Better Health Channel. (2022). *Wellbeing*. Victoria, AU: Department of Health. <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/wellbeing#factors-are-interrelated>.

4. Well-being statement development

A well-being statement will become the motto of the group and will help to encapsulate their goals. The well-being statement is a message about what the YCO group hopes to achieve.

You can use this time to brainstorm with the peer leaders and adult allies. Have them discuss as a group what they would like to achieve from the YCO group within their school or community.

From the brainstorm you can work together to come up with a well-being statement that represents their YCO group. Use the examples and key messages below to help guide your conversation.

Examples:

- Look, listen, link
- Agents of change
- Breaking codes of silence

Key messages

- Health promotion is about taking action to strengthen the health of all.
- Health promotion fosters individual and community resilience.
- By working to increase people's self-esteem, coping skills, social connectedness and well-being, health promotion empowers people and communities.

Adapted from: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. (2018) Healthy growth and development guideline, 2018. Toronto, ON: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.



Peer leader training – facilitator worksheet

Next steps and planning

**Time required:**

- 20–60 minutes

**Supplies required:**

- YCO action plan template
- Use Chromebooks for notes and to complete the YCO action plan template (optional)

**Objective:**

- Begin planning health promotion activities

**Facilitator steps:**

1. Allow youth participants, with support from adult allies, to begin planning their health promotion activities
2. Consider using the Youth Connections Ottawa action plan template
3. With larger groups, consider breaking up into smaller ones
4. Spend some time planning what you would like to do this year
5. Base your plan on your well-being statement (see the Advocacy and Health Promotion section)

Consider using the following template (see next page):

Youth Connections Ottawa action plan			
Initiative #__: (briefly describe your planned activity)			
Activity (what do we need to do to reach our goal?)	Desired outcome or hopes and dreams (what do we want to see happen?)	Resources (what do we need to make it happen?)	Success (how will we know if we achieved success?)
Initiative #__: (briefly describe your planned activity)			
Activity (what do we need to do to reach our goal?)	Desired outcome or hopes and dreams (what do we want to see happen?)	Resources (what do we need to make it happen?)	Success (how will we know if we achieved success?)
Initiative #__: (briefly describe your planned activity)			
Activity (what do we need to do to reach our goal?)	Desired outcome or hopes and dreams (what do we want to see happen?)	Resources (what do we need to make it happen?)	Success (how will we know if we achieved success?)

Source: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YM HAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

4

Implementation of the Youth Connections Ottawa program

Once the training of both the adult allies and peer leaders are complete, it is time implement the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) program within your schools and community. This chapter includes resources that the adult allies and peer leaders can use to begin their YCO groups.

Tips and how to

The following are considerations for implementation of the YCO program in your schools and community:

Identify keen and interested adult allies and peer leaders within the school and community groups to lead the program or group.

Adult logistical considerations

- Educator, staff, health promoter and youth outreach worker release time, (e.g.), for training, planning and evaluation.
- More than one implementation leader with the same knowledge, skills and expertise where possible.
- Space for training and meetings, (e.g.), a large classroom, library or large community space.
- Communication plan among adults and youth, (e.g.), email distribution lists, Google classroom.
- Ensuring you share event details with everyone, including sending out frequent reminders of upcoming meetings and sessions to increase attendance.

Recruitment of participants

- Consider:
 - A wide variety of staff including principals, guidance counsellors and youth outreach workers to identify youth.
 - Consider the goal of your group when inviting leaders. Are you trying to reach a variety of youth from diverse backgrounds, looking for non-traditional group leaders, or trying to engage a more specific community?
 - Existing leaders in the schools and community groups.
 - A call of interest through announcements, lunch time fair, booth or flyer ([see Appendix 1](#) for YCO youth information handout for potential peer leaders).
 - Encouraging participants to bring friends.
 - Training existing school and community groups to embed and incorporate the YCO program.

- Rather than only recruiting those with experience or high grades, consider youth that are:
 - Passionate about well-being and want to make a difference.
 - Have the potential and openness to learn, develop and grow.
 - Are willing to invest time and energy, problem-solve, take risks and work in a team with other youth and adult allies.
 - Are new to the school or community.
 - Represent the diversity of students at your school or community.

Recognizing the contributions of peer leaders

- It is important to take the time to recognize and celebrate the contributions of peer leaders and the skills that they have gained through YCO.
- Some ways to acknowledge the achievements of the group include:
 - Providing a certificate of completion. (see [Appendix 11](#))
 - Encouraging youth to add their involvement with YCO to their resume or post-secondary applications and providing them with references that highlight their contributions to the program.
 - Creating a photo collage or vlog of YCO events and achievements.
 - Providing youth with community involvement hours required for high school graduation.

Collecting consent

- You may need the consent from parents of youth who are interested in participating as peer leaders.
- Check with your school board and community organization for consent requirements and possible documentation materials. On the next page is a sample consent letter.

Consent for youth participation

Youth Connections Ottawa program parent or guardian information letter

Congratulations, your child has been selected for the role of peer leader for their school or community group! This letter is to inform you about the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) program and the role of the peer leaders. Please read the details below and decide if you or your child will agree to take part.

YCO is based on the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) Program.

The goal of the program is to improve the health and well-being of youth by focusing on initiatives that promote health, reduce potential harms and reduce the impact of stigma.

Ottawa Public Health has partnered with the [insert District School Board or Community group] to identify those interested in implementing this Program during [insert year].

For your child's school or community group, there will be a staff lead (e.g., educator) for the program. Youth from each participating organization will receive training and support and attend workshops for the YCO program. Peer leaders will help plan and participate in activities to promote mental health and well-being and complete various evaluation activities related to the program.

By participating in this program as a peer leader, your child will have an opportunity to:

Learn about:	Gain skills in:	Gain experiences with:
• Mental health vs. mental illness • Addictions and substance use health • Stigma • Building resilience and coping skills • Positive and negative effects of technology use and social media • Supports in your community	• Public speaking • Communication • Leadership • Advocacy	• Health promotion • Planning and delivering events and activities • Networking and meeting new people

Your child will take part in an anonymous survey post-program to share their experience in the program. This will allow the program to evolve and grow to better support youth.

Participation in the YCO program is voluntary.

Participants Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent or Guardian's Name (please print): _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Source: Adapted from Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.



Considerations for YCO peer leaders training

- Where will training take place? Consider using the school library or community gathering place for ease and comfort.
- When will training take place? Is this a busy time for students and staff?
- Will you need audio visual equipment such as projector and speakers for sound?
- Will you be providing lunch? Are there dietary restrictions?

Meeting considerations

- Youth often have a lot on their plate. It may be important to consult with peer leaders ahead of time to decide on the frequency, duration, and time of day of meetings.
- Create a safer space when generating ideas.
- Youth want to know that their input is valued. Ensure that you are prioritizing the voices of peer leaders during meetings.
- While mental health and substance use health are serious topics, youth appreciate opportunities to laugh and have fun. Don't be afraid to find appropriate ways to incorporate laughter and fun into meetings.

- Have icebreakers or energizers at the start of each meeting and invite youth to facilitate them.
- Provide opportunities for fun team building and free time for youth to get to know each other and discuss potential ideas.
- Consider meetings dedicated to planning and implementing activities or campaigns.
- Invite guest speakers.
- Incorporate videos.
- Avoid lectures—use a diverse range of interactive activities to teach lessons.
- Create opportunities for various forms of participation. Not all peer leaders may be comfortable speaking in front of large groups.
- Think about holding some meetings and events within different areas of the school community—Youth often appreciate field trips.
- Debrief what went well and what could be improved regarding activities or campaigns. Take time to provide ongoing feedback to peer leaders—this includes celebrating successes large and small successes.

Considerations for activities and campaigns

- Start small.
- See the activities with lessons section for ideas. Note: these should be shared with peer leaders to help inspire, not to replace the generation of new ideas.
- Suggested topics include:
 - Mental health and substance use health resource and service awareness campaigns.
 - Stigma reduction campaigns.
 - Coping and stress management education and training.
 - Caring and sharing moments.
 - Acknowledging youth and their voice.
- Ensure there is a plan to promote events, activities and campaigns.
- Look for opportunities to incorporate activities into another theme week (e.g.), Pink Shirt Day, Mental Health Week.
- Take into account the time of year (e.g.), exams, various religious or cultural holidays, system-wide events.
- Avoid training, events and activities on Fridays and Mondays to ensure opportunity to debrief afterwards and to maximize attendance.
- Encourage community partners such as public health staff, Rideauwood/Le CAP and Youth Net to participate in training and workshop activities.

Let youth lead!

- While youth should work with the adult allies, they should ultimately drive the process. Consider letting youth lead meetings as they gain experience.

Source: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario. (2016). *Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champions (YMHAC) initiative toolkit*. Toronto, ON: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario.

Activities with lessons

It is important to not have the entire meeting focus on campaign and event development. Take time to have learning activities within the group. This will help with group dynamics and increase the knowledge and skills of the peer leaders.

In the next pages, you will find helpful activities and lessons that can be used during YCO group meetings. Youth often enjoy learning in fun and interactive ways and may not be as interested in lecture style lessons. These activities use an interactive style of teaching and learning. Each activity relates to a practical coping skill or connection to well-being.

These include:

- Drawing bugs
- Gratitude mural
- Who are your connections?
- Stress backpack activity
- Screen-less day campaign

These activities are suggestions. You are encouraged to tailor the activities to meet the unique needs and interests of your group.

Drawing bugs



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Mentors and positive relationships, kindness and resilience



Topics addressed:

- Listening and communication skills



Supplies required:

- One piece of paper and pen per participant

Directions:

1. Instruct participants that you want them to listen to your directions and draw a bug.
2. Tell youth that you will state each instruction only once. You will not repeat yourself nor answer questions until drawing is complete.
3. Give the following directions:
 - The bug is round.
 - The bug has eight legs, grouped in pairs with four legs on the left and four legs on the right. In the pairs, one leg is longer than the other.
 - The bug has two eyes on the top of its body.
 - The bug has two squiggly antennae.
 - The bug has two tree leaf-shaped wings.
 - The bug has a spot next to each wing.
 - The bug has a triangular stinger on the bottom of the body.
 - The bug has two feelers on each foot—one longer than the other.
4. Compare the bugs for everyone to see.

Interactive discussion:

- How did it feel not being able to clarify instructions?
- Why were people so concerned about 'doing it right'?
- Why do all the bugs look different? (E.g.), everyone has a different interpretation of the description, based on personal life experiences.
- What would have helped so that the drawings would look more alike? (E.g.), asking questions and clarifying, repetition, seeing an example.
- How does this activity relate to real life? What can we learn from it? (E.g.), There are many different ways of looking at the same situation; clarifying what you have heard is important.

Source: Ottawa Public Health. (2022). Healthy Transitions. Ottawa, ON: Ottawa Public Health.

Gratitude mural



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Positive relationships, kindness and spirituality



Topics addressed:

- Gratitude and stress management



Supplies required:

- A large piece of mural paper and markers, magazines or other art supplies

Directions:

1. In small or large groups, create a mural of things that you are grateful for. Illustrations can be drawn or cut from magazines.
2. Ask questions to brainstorm gratitude mural ideas:
 - What is the best thing that has happened so far today?
 - Whom do you enjoy spending time with and why?
 - Has something made you laugh or smile today?
 - What is something you are looking forward to?

Interactive discussion:

- Gratitude is feeling grateful or thankful for people or things in your life. Gratitude can help us to feel more relaxed and to feel happier.
- What sort of things or people are you grateful for?
- Are there things that we spoke about today that you had not thought about before?
- How can gratitude or feeling grateful be helpful?

Who are your connections?



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Mental health, substance use health, mentors and positive relationships, community supports and kindness



Topics addressed:

- Social connections, support and gratitude



Supplies required:

- Flip chart paper and markers

Directions:

1. Using flip chart paper, draw a stick person in the centre of the page.
2. Ask participants to name people from whom they get support at home, school, work, community.
3. Place these names around the stick person.
4. Ask participants what type of support they get from the people they identified, (e.g.), helps with school, takes them shopping.
5. Use another colour marker and add participants' answers under the names identified.
6. Ask participants what they can do to say thank you to the people that support them.
7. Use another colour marker to add these answers.

Possible participants answers:

People who show support:

- Parents
- Relatives
- Friend
- Educator
- Coach
- Religious leader
- Mentor

Types of support:

- Help with homework
- Cooking

- Driving to activities
- Listening
- Problem solving
- Someone to lean on

Ways to strengthen, support or show appreciation for the support people in your life:

- Thank them.
- Spend more time together.
- Do something nice for them.
- Tell them how you feel about them and why they are important to you.

Key messages:

- Social connectedness can help make us feel like we belong and that we are cared for, supported and appreciated by others. Having strong social connections can strengthen our ability to deal with stress and improve our quality of life.
- There are times when we need a little extra help. Accept help and offer help to others. Relationships are stronger when both people help and learn from each other.
- We may turn to technology and social media to connect with friends and family or learn about events in our community. However, tech use can also lead to loneliness and isolation. It is important to make time for in-person contact with friends, family and your community.

Sources: Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *How does social connectedness affect health?* <https://www.cdc.gov/emotional-wellbeing/social-connectedness/affect-health.htm>

Schimmele, C., Fonberg, J. & Schellenberg, G. (2021). *Canadians' assessments of social media in their lives*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/36-28-0001/2021003/article/00004-eng.pdf?st=aYpsntG_

Stress backpack



Connections to Well-being covered in this activity:

- Resilience, positive relationships and community resources



Topics addressed:

- Introduction to stress, asking for help and community supports



Supplies required:

- One backpack
- Miscellaneous items

Directions:

1. Ask a student wearing a backpack to help with this activity.
2. Ask students to name causes of stress for either themselves or others. For every cause of stress, students place an item into the backpack that represents the size of the impact by the stress (e.g., binder, pencil case, book).
3. As the backpack gets heavier, ask how it feels to wear all of that stress? Is it starting to hurt? Where (e.g., neck, shoulders, lower back)?
4. Ask the participant if they can continue to wear the backpack. If yes, continue asking students to place items into the bag. If no, ask if they need help with all that weight and stress.

Interactive discussion:

Is it possible to remove all stress from our lives completely?

- It might not be possible to remove all stress from our life.
- Some stress is normal and necessary to help us be alert and energized (e.g., preparing for a test or playing a hockey game).
- It may be more difficult to remove the whole bag with all of the weight, all at once. Removing one element of stress at a time might make it more manageable and easier to carry.
- There are many different causes of stress and stress can affect everyone differently.

Is dealing with stress easier to do by ourselves or with help?

- This depends on how much stress there is, what is causing the stress and the person's ability to handle the stress.
- Is it easier to remove the whole bag (all of the stress) at once or to remove the items separately?
- Sometimes we need help from others when our stress becomes too difficult to handle alone.

Source: Tanya Lapointe Harris. (2018). Stress Backpack Activity. Ottawa, ON: Orleans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre.

Screen-less day campaign



Connections to Well-being covered in this campaign:

- Healthy interests, mental health and mentors and positive relationships



Topics addressed:

- Becoming aware of negative and positive effects of technology and social media
- Being mindful of technology and social media use



Possible objectives/goals:

- To increase the awareness of the positive and negative effects of tech use and social media
- To increase awareness of how technology is related to our physical and mental health and relationships
- To provide alternatives to screen time and promote balance

Directions:

- Designate a Screen-less day at the school or in the community where youth and teachers/adult allies are encouraged to look at their phones less or put away their phones completely.
- More ideas for screen-less day:
 - Encourage youth to download an app which records the amount of time you spend on your phone. Enter youth who participate into a draw for a prize. Recognize that the goal is not necessarily for people to stop using their phones, but for people to become more aware of their technology and social media use.
 - Have a challenge or a contest for youth to reduce their social media use for an hour/day.
 - Encourage youth to talk about the positive and negative impacts of being on social media less.
 - Create a mural/poster/graffiti wall that promotes mindful screentime, social media boundaries, ideas for reducing screentime or ways to become more aware of screen use.
 - Create announcements with facts, statistics and anecdotes about technology or social media, how it helps us and how it may cause issues in our lives.
 - Post interesting technology and social media related facts around the school or community (posters, sticky notes, TV).
 - Provide alternative activities to screen time at lunch.

Campaign ideas

The following are sample campaigns that can be used as inspiration or adapted to the needs of a youth, community or school:

- **Candy grams or pencil grams:** Attach messages or community resources to pencils during exams to give to students who have forgotten their pencils.
- **Caught you caring!** Award youth who show kindness to others.
- **Chill room:** Create a comfortable, non-judgmental space where students can “chill” when they need a place to relax.
- **Host a health fair.**
- **Murals and graffiti walls:** Create a mural or graffiti wall on a subject of your choice such as friends, community supports or gratitude.
- **Open doors:** Peer leaders open the doors and greet students at the start of the day.
- **Post-it day:** Use post-it notes to place affirming and positive messages on students’ lockers.
- **Worriless wednesday:** Designate a Worriless Wednesday to promote coping strategies and community resources.
- **Yoga, meditation:** Bring in an instructor to teach yoga, meditation or another relaxation technique or coping skill.
- **Web of positivity:** Create a spider web of yarn with positive.

Community and online connections (where to get help)

The Ottawa Public Health Mental Health, Addictions and Substance Use Health Services and Resources page provides a detailed up-to-date list of services and resources.

[OttawaPublicHealth.ca/MentalHealthSubstancesResources](https://ottawapublichealth.ca/MentalHealthSubstancesResources)

Appendix 8 provides a list of mental health, addictions and substance use health services youth can access.

[TheLinkOttawa.ca](https://thelinkottawa.ca) is a resource for youth from Ottawa Public Health which contains current public health messages. Visit [TheLinkOttawa](https://thelinkottawa.ca) to learn more about the following topics:

- Mental health
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Vaping
- Cannabis
- Opioids, Benzo’s, and other substances
- Party Safer

Evaluation

Overview and purpose

Through evaluation, we can assess the activities, support, resources and outcomes of our program to inform our program's effectiveness and identify improvements for ongoing development.

We can all work together to strengthen the impact and effectiveness of this program for youth.

By collecting, analyzing and/or reporting on information, OPH, school boards and community groups will be able to determine how well the overall program is achieving its desired goals to:

- Motivate, engage and equip youth with the skills for peer-to-peer outreach within their schools and communities.
- Increase resilience and promote help-seeking behaviour among youth in a safe and uplifting manner.
- Further increase knowledge on issues related to mental health, substance use health, technology use and social media, and healthy choices.
- Prevent and reduce stigma related to mental health and substance use health.
- Provide adult allies with the training and curriculum to engage youth and support youth in peer-to-peer outreach and campaign planning.

Evaluation does not need to be complex to be effective and provide information for future programs or initiatives. Choose an evaluation method that best supports the type of information you want to collect. For sample evaluation questionnaires, interview questions, or more information on evaluation plans see [Appendices 9 and 10](#) or [RNAO's Youth Mental Health and Addiction Champion Toolkit](#).



Appendices





Appendix 1

YCO information handout for potential peer leaders

Youth Connections Ottawa

Youth Connections Ottawa helps youth to support their peers with mental health and substance use health.

Peer leaders, with help from adults, plan fun activities and events that promote positive mental health and substance use health. Groups can choose to learn about resiliency, stigma, how to manage stress or where to get help then choose related activities that their communities will enjoy. Activities may include graffiti walls, kindness days or creating a place to chill. The options are endless.



You'll learn how to:

- Talk about mental health and substance use health
- Promote mental health and substance use health
- Build resilience and coping skills
- Connect with supports in your community

You'll gain skills in:

- Public speaking
- Communication
- Leadership
- Advocacy



You'll get to:

- Meet new people
- Plan and lead events and activities
- Promote wellness in your community

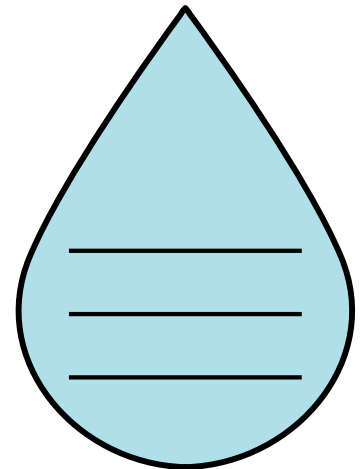
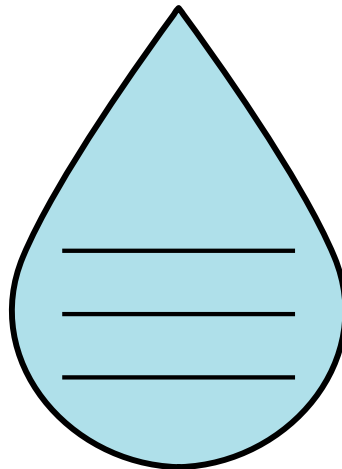
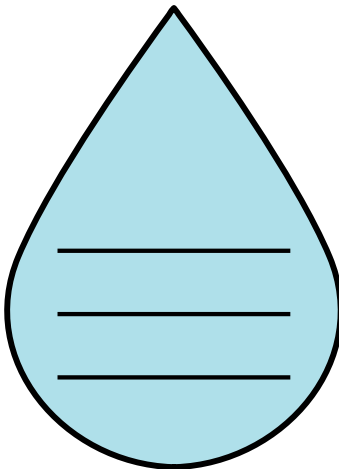
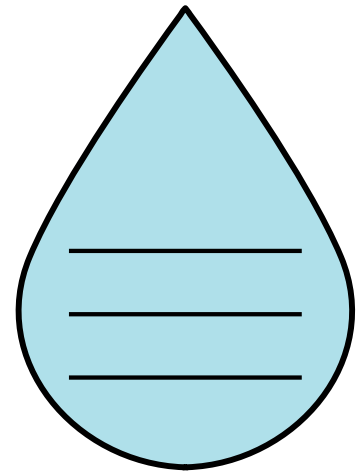
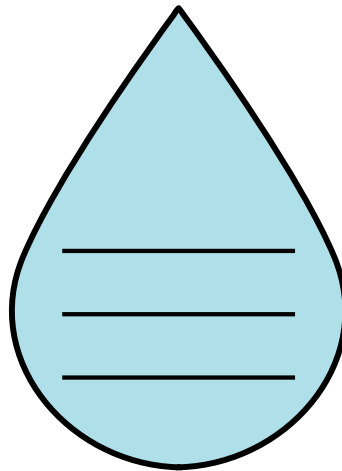
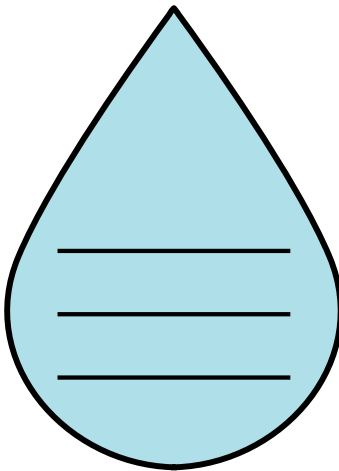


Appendix 2

Youth Connections to Well-being

Rain drops represent the various stressors in one's life, while the coloured sections in the umbrella represent the various connections to well-being and coping strategies that help protect one's mental health and increase resilience.

Rain drops



Umbrella





Appendix 3

Mental health continuum

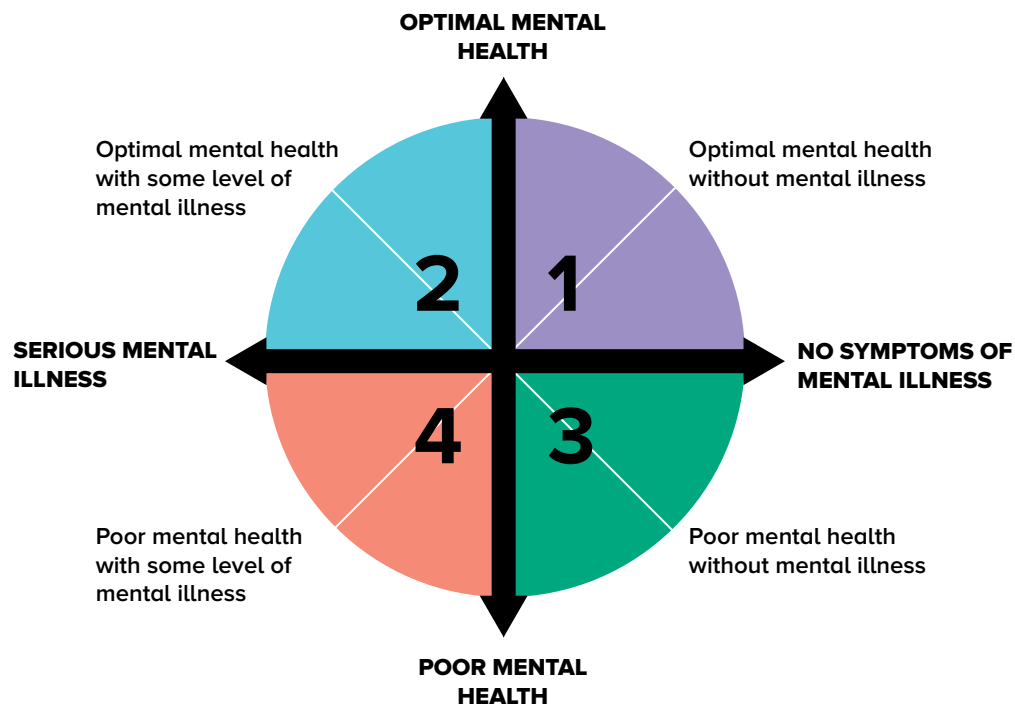
Mental illness and mental health

Mental health exists on a continuum. If something is on a continuum, it means it continues from one extreme to another and is constantly changing. To understand the mental health continuum, we need to understand what mental illness and optimal mental health are.

Mental illness is something a person is diagnosed with. Mental illness impairs a person's thinking, feelings and social abilities. Living with a mental illness can make it hard to do things like go to school, work, do hobbies and spend time with family and friends. Optimal mental health is a state of well-being. Someone with optimal mental health can appreciate their talents, deal with the usual stresses of life, work, play and contribute to their community.

A person can have optimal or poor mental health or exist somewhere in between. Each person will fall somewhere on the continuum. Where people exist on the continuum changes throughout their lives and from day-to-day. Stressful things that happen during a person's life will impact where they are on the continuum. It is important to know that a person can have positive or negative mental health with or without a mental illness. For example, a person living with a mental illness, who has a plan for dealing with stress and a good support system can have good mental health. On the other hand, a person without a mental illness can have poor mental health if they are experiencing stressors and are finding it hard to cope.

Adapted from: Ottawa Public Health. (2016). *Fostering Mental Health in Our Community*, Ottawa Public Health Strategic Direction, 2015–2018. Ottawa, (ON): Ottawa Public Health



© L.M. Keyes, used with permission

Sources: Health & Welfare Canada (1988), Keyes (2002) and Toronto Public Health (2013). Reference for photo: MacKean, 2011.

Adapted from: The Health Communication Unit at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto and Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario; based on the conceptual work of Corey Keyes.



Appendix 4

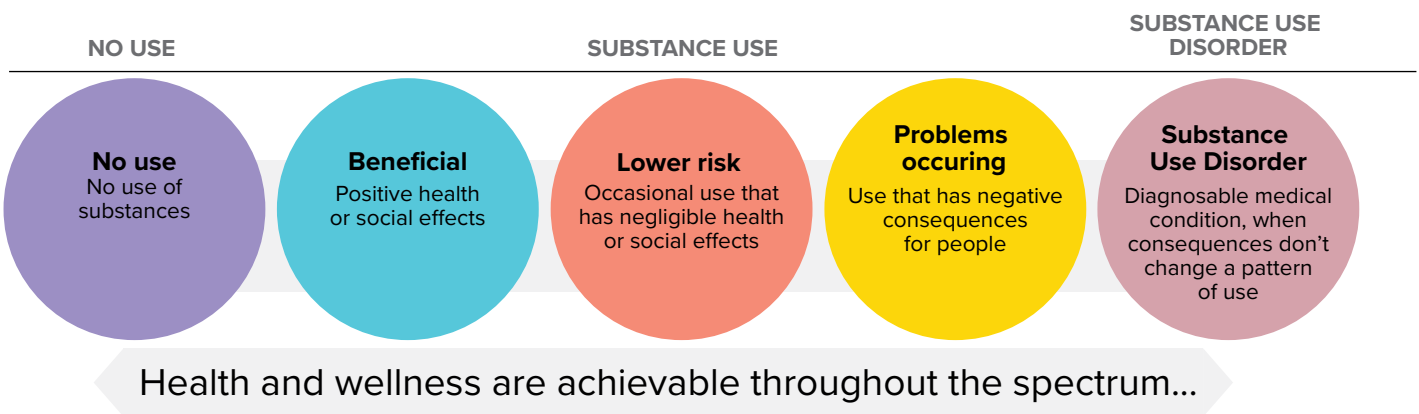
Spectrum of Substance Use

Similar to the way mental health can be understood on a continuum, substance use falls on a spectrum. The Spectrum of Substance Use was developed through a partnership between Ottawa Public Health (OPH) and the Community Addictions Peer Support Association (CAPSA), as a tool to help all of us talk about our substance use health.

The spectrum is not linear or meant to be read as a process where a person progresses from one stage to the next. A person may move between different stages throughout their lifetime. It's important to remember that well-being can happen at any point on the spectrum and can look different for each person—those who use substances and those who do not. Anyone should be able to identify themselves within the spectrum on any given day.

The only way to completely avoid any harms from substance use is to avoid use. However, many people use substances without causing significant harm to themselves or others. Children and young adults are especially vulnerable to the effects of different substances because of the impacts on brain development.

The Spectrum of Substance Use



- **No use:** Not using substances.
 - There are many reasons why someone might wish to not use substances (i.e. cultural considerations, athletic training, etc.).
- **Beneficial substance use:** The beneficial use of substances that results in positive health or social outcomes.
 - For example: Taking medications as prescribed, or the symbolic use of substances during religious services or spiritual ceremonies.
 - There are important considerations that come with the beneficial use of substances (i.e. safer storage and disposal of the substance, proper handling, potential side effects, etc).
- **Lower risk substance use:** Occasional substance use that can have negative health or social impacts.
 - There are ways to use substances that reduce the risk of health and social consequences. For example, Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health or Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines.
 - Lower risk consumption does not mean no risk, as there are impacts to health and well-being when using any substance, even in moderation.

- **Problems occurring with substance use:** Substance use that can have negative consequences.
 - Problems can occur when using a substance, but people do not choose to experience problems. This could look like hurting oneself or others while under the influence of a substance (breaking your leg or getting into a car accident).
- **Substance Use Disorder (SUD):** A treatable medical condition, not a moral failing and certainly not a choice.
 - Like other medical conditions, there are many complex health and social factors that contribute to the development of substance use disorders.
 - What tends to get overlooked is that treatment for substance use disorders are effective.
- **Addiction:** A complex medical condition that changes how the brain works (affecting a person's reward, motivation, stress and executive function systems) which allow us to plan, pay attention, remember instructions and keep track of what we are doing.
 - Characterized by the **4 “C”s** where use becomes **C**ompulsive, continues despite harmful **C**onsequences, is accompanied by **C**ravings and a sense of loss of **C**ontrol.
 - The 4 C's are a good tool for reflection for anyone questioning their relationship to behaviors or substances.
 - If you or someone you know may be questioning their relationship with substances, please visit the have THAT talk about Substance Use Health [website](#) for more information.

Source: Ottawa Public Health & Community Addictions Peer Support Association. (2021). Spectrum of Substance Use Health. [Ottawa Public Health 2019-2022 Strategic Plan](#).



Appendix 5

People first language: mental health and substance use health

Mental health and substance use health stigma can stop people from talking about the challenges they are facing. It can also prevent them from getting help when they need it. One way that we can reduce stigma is by using person-first language to talk about mental health and substance use health. Using person-first language helps make sure that the person is seen as a person first, not as an illness, behaviour or health condition.

Respectful	Stigmatizing
• Died by suicide/death by suicide/lost their life to suicide • He is facing suicide/thinking of suicide/experiencing suicidal thoughts	• Commit/committed suicide • He's suicidal
• People with mental illness • They have schizophrenia/are living with schizophrenia	• The mentally ill • They're a schizophrenic
• People with a substance use disorder • People struggling with their substance use	• Addicts, crack heads
• People with alcohol use disorder	• Drunk, alcoholics, people with alcoholism

Sources: The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). *Words Matter*. Retrieved on July 4, 2023, from <https://www.camh.ca/en/today-campaign/help-and-resources/words-matter>
Public Health Agency of Canada. (2019). *Communicating about Substance Use in Compassionate, Safe and Non-Stigmatizing Ways*. Government of Canada. Retrieved on July 4, 2023, from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/communicating-about-substance-use-compassionate-safe-non-stigmatizing-ways-2019.html>



As content is updated when new evidence emerges, visit the Ottawa Public Health mental health, addictions and substance use health services and resources [website](#) to access the most current version.

Appendix 6

Tips for talking about substance use

There are many reasons why someone may use substances. Not everyone experiences harms from substance use. Addictions and substance use disorders are treatable medical conditions, not a choice.



Tip 1: Check in with yourself.

Think about your own feelings, worries and experiences. Put yourself in the other person's shoes. How would you feel receiving this information? This might help you decide the best approach (i.e. speaking face to face, writing a letter, talking by phone, or sending a text message or email).

- *“How ready am I to have this talk?”*
- *“How can I prepare myself?”*
- *“What is the best way, place and time?”*



Tip 2: Pick a calm time and place where both people can feel safe and comfortable.

Avoid times or places where you might feel stress or not have privacy.

- *“I was wondering if I could talk to you about something that means a lot to me. Is now a good time?”*



Tip 3: Speak kindly.

Sometimes our words can shame people and can make them feel like they do not deserve to receive help. Use language that respects people's worth and dignity like [Person First Language](#).



Tip 4: Say what you notice without judgment.

- *“I know that things haven't been easy lately, I have noticed...” (say what you have seen or noticed).*



Tip 5: Show that you care.

- *“I care about you. I was wondering if you wanted to talk about where you are at? And how I can support you?”*



Tip 6: Listen.

No one wants more problems in their life. Remember that you may not agree with or like what they say. But listening without arguing, lecturing, shaming, blaming, bribing or punishing helps people to stay in a place of caring. Hear their reasons, feelings and what they have gone through, try not to focus on “fixing” anything.



Tip 7: Remind them how strong they are.

- *“Its’ ok not to be ok. Challenges with substance use are not a choice. This does not make you a bad person. You are resilient and (list their strengths). Remember that time you (examples of moments of strength)? We all deserve to receive and accept help when we need it.”*



Tip 8: Offer help.

Offer to connect them with support: [AccessMHA](#) is for anyone 16 years of age and older who is looking for mental health and/or substance use/addiction services. [1Call1Click.ca](#) is available to assist infants, children, and youth from birth to 21 years of age, and connects them and their families with the right mental health and addiction services. Visit [Mental Health and Substance Use resource list](#) for additional supports and services. If you notice the person has been feeling stressed or the person shares that they are using substances to cope with stress, offer to help them think about other ways to relax.

- *“There are supports in our community that can help. We could call them together, if you want?”*
- *“I’ve noticed you’ve been feeling stressed lately and was wondering if you wanted to brainstorm some ways to help you relax?”*



Tip 9: Be open to talk more...

It is not realistic to expect one talk to resolve anything. Let them know you are there for them.

- *“I am here for you. I want to support you. Know that you can talk to me anytime ...”*



Tip 10: Be kind and take care of yourself.

Talk to someone you trust or reach out for help yourself if you need it. The person may not be ready to talk or seek help. They may become angry or defensive. While this may feel hard, don’t take it personally. Don’t force it. There is no “perfect way” to do this. Know that it is not your job to “fix” anything. Small steps are still steps. This talk could be a step towards increasing their wellness.

Resources: Visit [Families for Addiction Recovery](#) for more tips on supporting a loved one. Visit The Community Addictions Peer Support Association ([CAPSA.ca](#)) to learn more about how stigma affects people and for stigma related resources.



Learn how and where to access Naloxone, reduce health risks using party safer tips, how to identify and respond to an overdose and find information on local supports with our [online Party Safer course!](#) Take it at your own pace and get a certificate of completion.

Appendix 7

Party safer tips

You don't need to drink alcohol or use substances to enjoy yourself at a party or an event! If you choose to consume, follow the Party Safer tips below to reduce your risks and share these tips with your friends:

Know how to ID an OD

- Overdoses can happen to anyone. [Learn](#) the signs and symptoms and how to respond. Overdose deaths are preventable.

Carry naloxone

- Any illegal substance such as MDMA or Cocaine can be mixed with fentanyl or carfentanil. You can't see it, taste it or smell it, and even the smallest amount (i.e. the size of a grain of salt) can cause an overdose. Find out how to get a free naloxone kit at www.stopoverdoseottawa.ca.

Have a plan if using substances

- An overdose is a medical emergency, if you are alone there will be no one there to help you. Some options include visiting one of several Supervised Consumption Services (for locations and times visit stopoverdoseottawa.ca), having a friend or family member with you, calling the National Overdose Prevention Line at 1-888-688-NORS (6677) or downloading and using the FREE Brave app (www.thebraveapp.com) for anonymous harm reduction support (works with iOS and android phones).

Plan a safe ride or walk home

- Substances impair coordination, attention, judgement and reaction time. All of these are important for keeping yourself and others injury free. Before consuming substances make plans with a responsible friend/family member for a ride home, or plan a ride. If there is a well-lit route home, you can also plan to walk with trusted friends.

Prevent STBBIs by using condoms and/or dental dams

- If you are engaging in sexual activity, make sure you and your partner use a condom and/or an oral dam. This will help protect against Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections (STBBIs). Order free condoms at www.sexitsmart.ca.

Only you can give consent for yourself

- People who are under the influence of substances like alcohol, asleep, unable to understand what they are saying yes to or under severe pressure are not able to consent freely and willingly to participate in a sexual activity. Remember: consent can always be withdrawn. For information on consent, visit our [consent page](#).

Stay with friends you trust and look out for each other

- You can play an active role in keeping each other safer and preventing violence by choosing to respond safely to a potentially harmful situation. If you have a bad feeling, get help!

Stick to one substance at a time

- Using different substances together can increase impairment and risk of harms, such as overdoses, accidents and injuries.

Pace yourself and drink water

- Eat before consuming substances and have a drink of water for every alcoholic drink. It can take up to two hours to feel the effects of alcohol, so pacing yourself is important! Follow Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health*.

Start low and go slow

- If you are using cannabis, it takes seconds to minutes to feel the effects of smoking or vaping but 30 minutes to two hours to feel the effects from edibles (eating or drinking). Start with a small amount and wait at least 30 minutes or more to feel the effects. Consider using products with lower amounts of THC and equal or higher amounts of CBD. Find out more by reviewing Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Tips**.

For more party safer information, visit [TheLinkOttawa.ca/PartySafer](https://www.thelinkottawa.ca/PartySafer).

*Source: Health Canada. (2020). Canada's lower-risk cannabis use guidelines. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-medication/cannabis/resources/lower-risk-cannabis-use-guidelines.html>

**Source: Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA). (2023). Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health. Ottawa, ON: CCSA. <https://ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-05/CGAH-Drinking-Less-is-Better-en.pdf>



For more mental health supports and information visit:
OttawaPublicHealth.ca/MentalHealthandWellness.

Appendix 8

Youth mental health, addictions and substance use health resource list

It is important to ask for help when facing difficult situations. Some of the supports available include:

Crisis Lines and Chats

Services and language	Contact information	Age (years)
<u>Youth Services Bureau</u> (24/7 and Bilingual)	613-260-2360 or 1-877-377-7775 <u>Live chat</u>	12–17 and their families
<u>Kids Help Phone</u> (24/7 and Bilingual)	1-800-668-6868 or Text 686868 <u>Live chat</u> 7 p.m. to midnight	Birth to 20 and their families
<u>Good2talk</u> (24/7 and Bilingual)	1-866-925-5454 Text 686868	Post- secondary Students
<u>9-8-8 Suicide Help Crisis Line</u> (24/7 and Bilingual)	Call or text 9-8-8	All
<u>Distress Centre of Ottawa and Region</u> (24/7 and Bilingual)	613-238-3311	All
<u>Hope for Wellness Help Line</u> (24/7 and Bilingual)	1-855-242-3310 <u>Live chat</u>	All Indigenous people

Addictions and substance use health resources and counselling

Services and language	Contact information	Age (years)
<u>Le Cap</u> (French)	613-789-2240	All
<u>Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services</u> (English)	613-724-4881	+13
<u>Monfort Renaissance Service Access to Recovery (SAR)</u> (Bilingual)	613-241-5202	+16

Short-term Counselling Services

Services and Language	Information
CounsellingConnect.org (all ages): provides quick access to a free phone or video counselling session on mental health or substance use health. Support Groups also available.	Walk-in Counselling Clinic (all ages): offers free counselling in English, French, Arabic, Spanish, Somali, Cantonese and Mandarin. WalkInCounselling.com or 613-755-2277

Connecting to Supports

Services and Language	Information
1call1click.ca (birth to 21 years): helps individuals to access no cost supports for mental health, addictions and substance use health.	AccessMHA.ca (16 years and older): helps individuals to access no cost supports for mental health, addictions and substance use health.



Appendix 9

Sample peer leader evaluation

We want to hear from you! Please take a few minutes to answer some questions about the Youth Connections Ottawa (YCO) program. Let us know what you learned from the YCO program and what could make it better.

Things to know before you fill out the survey.

- This survey is optional.
- All survey responses are anonymous.
- You may answer some, none or all the questions.
- You can stop at any time.

1. Let us know how much you agree or disagree with each statement below about the YCO program you were in. Please check one box beside each statement below.

After being a part of the YCO program...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have a better understanding of mental health					
I have a better understanding of substance use health					
I have a better understanding of the impact of stigma related to mental health and substance use health					
I know more about positive coping skills and how to build resilience					
I know where to get support and information about mental health and substance use health					
I plan to use the skills I learned from the YCO program					

2. Was there any part of the YCO program that was particularly helpful to you or that you particularly enjoyed? Please write in comments.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. What can we do to improve the YCO program? Please write in comments.

[illegible]



Appendix 10

Sample initiative evaluation

Use this form to assess the impact of youth-led YCO initiative. Please complete an evaluation for each initiative.

Title of initiative:

Date of initiative (from when to when):	Number of peer leaders participating:	Number of youth reached:

Description of initiative:

Which of the following YCO initiative goal(s) did the youth-led activity or event mostly focus on:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Increasing resilience and help-seeking behaviour among youth in a safe and positive manner | ☐ Increasing knowledge on issues related to technology use and social media |
| ☐ Increasing knowledge on issues related to mental health | ☐ Preventing and reducing stigma related to mental health and substance use health |
| ☐ Increasing knowledge on issues related to substance use health | |

How successful was this initiative in reaching its goal(s)?

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Not successful | ☐ Successful |
| ☐ Somewhat successful | ☐ Very successful |
| ☐ I don't know | |

What were the main successes observed?

Would you carry out this initiative again? Briefly explain your rationale.

Do you have any suggestions for improving this YCO initiative?



CERTIFICATE

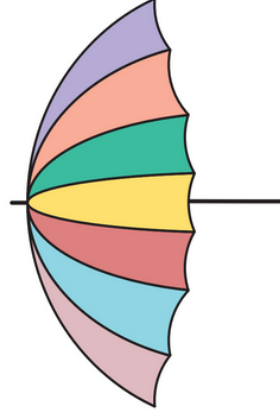
of Participation

This certificate is proudly
presented to

Awarded for participating as a Peer Leader in Youth
Connections Ottawa.

Adult Ally

Date





Public Health
Santé publique