



*Simcoe/Muskoka
Literacy Network*

Mental Health Awareness Resource

**Compiled by Simcoe Muskoka Literacy Network
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Introduction

Mental Illness is a fact of life for 1 in 5 Canadians. This can affect all areas of a person's life, especially in the area of education. You may encounter people with a mental illness every day and not be aware of it, or you may become aware of their illness and be uncomfortable with your own ability to help them.

In this resource, we have compiled information gathered from a variety of sources including

- information from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHC) - presentation by Aleta Armstrong, MMHC in Barrie
- the Online Community of Practice mental health awareness webinars in 2016 and 2015
- the Mental Health Guide for Adult Literacy Facilitators (2017) project of Project READ Literacy Network

We hope that these will show you how you can help in everyday situations or when someone in your program is in crisis.

General Information

Mental wellness refers to a positive state of well-being in which a person's systems of feelings, thoughts, and actions are working optimally to allow them to function fully in the world. When we are mentally well, we can participate in all the activities we need and want to do. We have a sense of health and well-being that allows us to engage in and enjoy life.

Mental illness refers to a state in which a person's systems of feelings, thoughts, or actions do not always work at an optimal level for them to function fully in the world. A mental illness can affect a person's ability to carry out daily tasks, engage fully in relationships, or undertake commitments at school or work. They cannot always participate in all the activities they need and want to do.

When a person's functioning is limited, their sense of self and their well-being is affected, which can lower self-esteem.

Health practitioners may use the terms issue, condition, or disorder, to describe a mental illness. Thinking of mental wellness and mental illness as similar to physical wellness and physical illness can help to demystify and destigmatize mental health.

Mental illness is an illness like diabetes or cancer, only it shows symptoms differently. A person may not even be aware they are suffering from a mental illness.

The Canadian Mental Health Association describes mental illness as follows:

Mental illness is a medical term used to describe health problems that affect the way we think about ourselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around us. They affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.

Mental illnesses can disrupt a person's life or create challenges, but with the right supports, a person can get back on a path to recovery and wellness.

Common Mental Illnesses and Disorders:

Depression

Bipolar disorder

Anxiety disorder

Obsessive/compulsive disorder
Panic and Phobias
Post-traumatic stress

Some common symptoms are

- confused thinking
- delusions
- thoughts of suicide
- difficulty concentrating, making decisions, remembering things
- feeling helpless, overwhelmed
- suspiciousness
- extreme highs and lows
- excessive fears or worries
- growing inability to cope with daily challenges and activities
- increased anxiety, agitation, frustration
- excessive fatigue, lack of energy
- rapid, pressured speech
- numerous unexplained physical ailments
- social withdrawal
- excessive risk taking

What can you do?

This will vary with the condition.

Find a quiet space with limited distractions and onlookers to talk with the person.

1. Speak to the behaviour you have noticed and how you can help

I notice....

- you've missed quite a few sessions...
- you fall asleep in class
- you looked frustrated when completing this worksheet
- you are down today

I'm concerned....

- You're not sleeping
- When did you begin feeling this way?
- Did something happen that made you feel this way ?

What can I do that will help you?

2. Actively listen to what they have to say.
 - a) Empathize with their feelings and be supportive
 - b) Take note of eye contact, body language
 - c) Show them you're listening
 - d) Summarize back to them what you have heard
 - e) Don't judge
 - f) Stay calm
 - g) Share your story
 - h) Do not diagnose

How can you support learners with mental illness on an ongoing basis?

- a) Check in on a regular basis to see how they are doing.
- b) Let them know when you notice they seem to be coping better.
- c) Provide regular opportunities for them to talk.
- d) Foster resilience by
 - getting to know students
 - observing for triggers, behaviour that indicates a rising issue
 - becoming aware of warning signs of relapse
 - focusing on their strengths
 - set high expectations - show you believe in their ability to succeed
 - celebrate willingness to try; honour mistakes as part of the learning process
 - work through adversity - develops coping mechanisms

Strategies to de-escalate when someone displays strong symptoms:

(from: **Having the Conversation** webinar)

1. Introduce: give your name and title and may ask for their name. May I call you _____
2. Identify your purpose of approach - I notice _____; is there anything I can do to help?
3. Listen and validate their feelings or show you understand
 - a) Agree with some part of the truth or ask for more information
 - b) Acknowledge their feelings
 - c) If you can't agree with anything, repeat what they have said
4. Set a plan to assist, team approach is always helpful
Set Clear Limits: Be concise, keep it simple, give them time to process; may need to repeat request.
Bottom line: you working together to accomplish individual's goal. May offer him choices
5. Remember to debrief with staff afterwards

These and many more strategies are discussed in the following webinars and Mental Health Guide:

Online Community of Practice Webinar 4 : Mental Health - Having the Conversation (Dec.8, 2016)

[Watch playback](#)



[Having the Conversation](#) (webinar slides)



[Questions Practitioners Can Ask to Assist Clients With Mental Health Challenges](#)

Online Community of Practice Webinar 5: Mental Health Awareness 2 - Classroom Strategies (Dec. 4, 2015)

[Watch playback](#)



[Mental Health Awareness 2 Classroom Strategies](#) (webinar slides)

<https://e-channel.ca/practitioner/resources/online-community-practise-resources>

(towards the bottom of the page)

Yes I Can - Mental Health Guide for Adult Literacy Facilitators (2017)

This very thorough [guide](#) provides information and strategies for supporting adult learners living with mental health conditions or disorders. It was designed as an on-line resource, as it has over 900 pages of information, checklists, document templates, etc. It provides information on a wide variety of mental health conditions and disorders, as well as strategies for supporting learners with mental health concerns, and many links to resources.

Also available:

Recording of the [webinar](#) for “Yes I Can – A Mental Health Guide for Adult Literacy Facilitators” - offers more information about the Mental Health Guide resource and how to use it in the learning environment. We suggest listening to the recording when you start looking through the Guide.

[Q & A Chat Summary from Mental Health Guide webinars](#) - provides a summary of the questions and answers that were discussed during the Mental Health Guide webinars.

The guide suggests using a learning agreement with learners that notes the things that may make it difficult for the learner to learn, what might help the learner at these times, and when it might be best to just try again tomorrow. When the practitioner notices a learner is struggling, they can ask if the learner feels this is one of those days mentioned in the agreement. This can start further discussion to help the learner decide what to do next.

Helpful links for reference

Canadian Mental Health Association <https://ontario.cmha.ca/>

Mental health conditions

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/document-category/mental-health-and-addictions-conditions/>

<http://www.cmha.ca/get-involved/find-your-cmha>

Canadian Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

<http://camh.ca>

Schizophrenia Association of Ontario

<http://www.schizophrenia.on.ca>

Depression Centre

<http://depressionhurts.ca/en/default.aspx>

<http://ladepressionfaitmal.ca/fr/default.aspx>

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addictions

<http://www.cclt.ca/Eng/Pages/default.aspx>

ConnexOntario Health Information

<http://www.connexontario.ca/home/services>

Additional education resources (more related to the standard school classroom):

For Educators

<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/talk/educators/index.html>

Addressing Mental Health Disorders in the Classroom

<http://www.teachmag.com/archives/7220>

PORTICO Canada's Mental Health and Addictions Network

<https://www.porticonetwork.ca/learn/mental-health-in-the-classroom-resources-for-teachers>