

# **MENTAL HEALTH HANDBOOK**

**FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS AND STAFF**

Understanding mental health concepts  
and integrating them into policymaking  
and every day practices.

REVIEWED BY SENATOR STAN KUTCHER AND MP YA'ARA SAKS

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## Introduction

It is clear to Canadians that mental health should be a priority. Increasing attention has been paid to mental health and mental illness over time, and it has become increasingly evident that in order to serve the public well, parliamentarians and their staff need to have a robust understanding of mental health and mental illness. This resource was created to help parliamentarians and their staff develop the mental health literacy needed to achieve this goal. Whether you are addressing constituent concerns, making health related policies and legislation or applying mental health strategies in your own life, mental health literacy serves as the foundation for informed conversations and better decision making about mental health.

**Mental health literacy is a component of health literacy and is comprised of four elements:**

- Knowing how to obtain and maintain good mental health.
- Basic understanding disorders and treatments.
- Reduction of stigma.
- Knowing how and when to access care [1].

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# Important Terms

## UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

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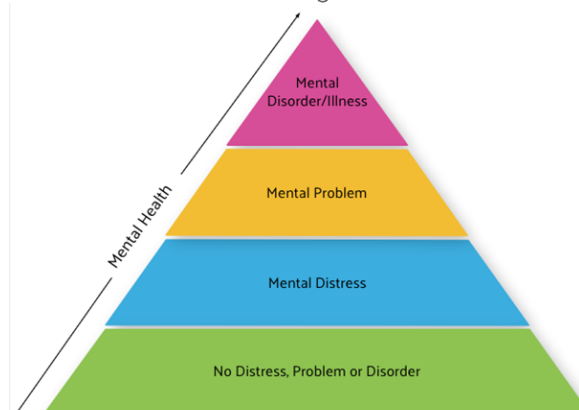
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### What is Mental Health?

Mental Health can be understood as “having the capacity to be able to successfully adapt to the challenges that life creates for people” [2] It is our brain that learns, recalls and executes these capacities through its enablement of our emotions, thinking and behaviours that help us adapt to these life challenges and opportunities. Too often, mental health has been considered to mean “feelings happy” or “feeling good”. Mental health is not about feeling good all the time. It consists of a wide range of situationally appropriate states that include negative, neutral and positive emotions and thoughts. For example, feeling upset after a conflict with a friend is not a sign of poor mental health. It is a situationally appropriate response, which is a part of good mental health.

Good ‘mental health’ is essentially ‘good brain health’; the brain and the rest of the body cannot be separated. Understanding this connection and supporting mental health through paying attention to our physical health, and vice versa, is essential. Remember that mental health is not the opposite of mental illness. Individuals with a mental illness still have mental health. In fact, many individuals with a mental illness may have better mental health than those without. They have had to learn coping skills that may make them more adaptable to life’s challenges than those who have not learned such skills.

It is important to consider the 4 interrelated categories illustrated in the diagram below.



# Mental Distress

Mental Distress (popularly referred to as 'stress') is a signal from our brain and body that we are facing a challenge in our environment that we need to change or adapt to. This is a normal, expected and indeed necessary part of adapting to our environment. Examples may include giving an important speech, arguing with a colleague, driving through a winter storm, having a conflict in a personal relationship, meeting a deadline or the challenges of daily living during a pandemic. In addition to what may often be intense thoughts and feelings (such as feeling worried, frantic, unhappy, aroused), mental distress may manifest with physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches and restlessness.

Mental distress is common in our everyday lives. By successfully responding to these stressors we problem solve, develop new skills, successfully adapt to changing circumstances and build resilience. Avoiding everyday stressors may interfere with the learning of necessary adaptive skills. Sometimes learning can be painful and challenging, but that does not mean that it should be avoided or that the experience of distress requires professional intervention. Support from family, friends and colleagues provides us with what we need to help us address life's challenges and learn how to become resilient.

# Mental Health Problem

Mental Health problems arise when we encounter a situation that overwhelms our coping mechanisms for an extended time. These are typically substantial life stressors (such as divorce, death of a loved one, loss of employment) that are typically accompanied by intense, prolonged and situationally appropriate negative emotions (such as anger, grief, or hopelessness) and negative thoughts (e.g. "I'm not good enough", "this will never get better", or "it's hopeless"). Physical symptoms such as insomnia, fatigue, muscle pains and loss of appetite frequently occur.

Everyone at some point in their life will encounter a mental health problem that will negatively impact their day to day functioning. Mental health problems can be mitigated through support from personal relationships, support from organizations we belong to (such as religious communities), speaking with a counsellor, or simply the passage of time. Mental health problems are not mental illnesses and they do not typically require psychiatric intervention, but assistance from a health professional is often helpful.

# Mental Illness

A mental illness (also known as a mental disorder) is a medical condition that is diagnosed by a trained health professional (such as a family physician, psychiatrist, or psychologist) using internationally established diagnostic criteria. Mental Disorders/Illnesses arise from complex interactions between genetic and environmental factors and are rarely caused by one factor alone. Some examples of mental disorders are: Schizophrenia; Bipolar Disorder; Major Depressive Disorder; Anorexia Nervosa; Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Worldwide, 15-20 % of the population will have a mental illness [3].

People with a mental illness need rapid access to proven effective treatments. Most people who receive the best available care show significant improvement, can learn to manage their illness and lead productive and successful lives. Just like some other chronic diseases, some mental illnesses may not respond to available treatments and may progress into severe, prolonged and intractable conditions.

## Use the Right Words!

We can confuse others and ourselves with how we talk about mental health. Be careful not to use the phrase “mental health” if we mean “mental illness.” There is no stigma against mental health but there is stigma about mental illness. Don't use words that suggest pathology to describe normal emotional states. For example, instead of saying you are depressed, identify if you are sad, disappointed, discouraged, disheartened etc. Instead of saying you have anxiety, identify if you are feeling tense, unsettled, perturbed, worried, nervous, distraught etc. Try to use the words that most clearly describe the nuanced feelings you are having.

Remember: successfully dealing with emotions begins by correctly naming them.

**For more evidence-based information about using the right words, access these free resources:**

- Language Matters: The Importance of Using the Right Words When We're Talking About Mental Health (English downloadable pdf): <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/schoolmhl/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/final-using-the-right-words.pdf>
- Language Matters: The Importance of Using the Right Words When We're Talking About Mental Health (French downloadable pdf): <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/schoolmhl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/final-using-the-right-words-french.pdf>

# What is Treatment and When is it Needed?

Similar to all illnesses, treatment for mental disorders should be based on best available clinical research and provided by properly trained health care professionals. Treatments involve psychological (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) physical (such as medications) and psychosocial (such as supported housing) interventions. More than one type of treatment may be provided and these should be tailored to the needs of the individual and properly monitored to evaluate outcomes and any adverse effects that may occur.

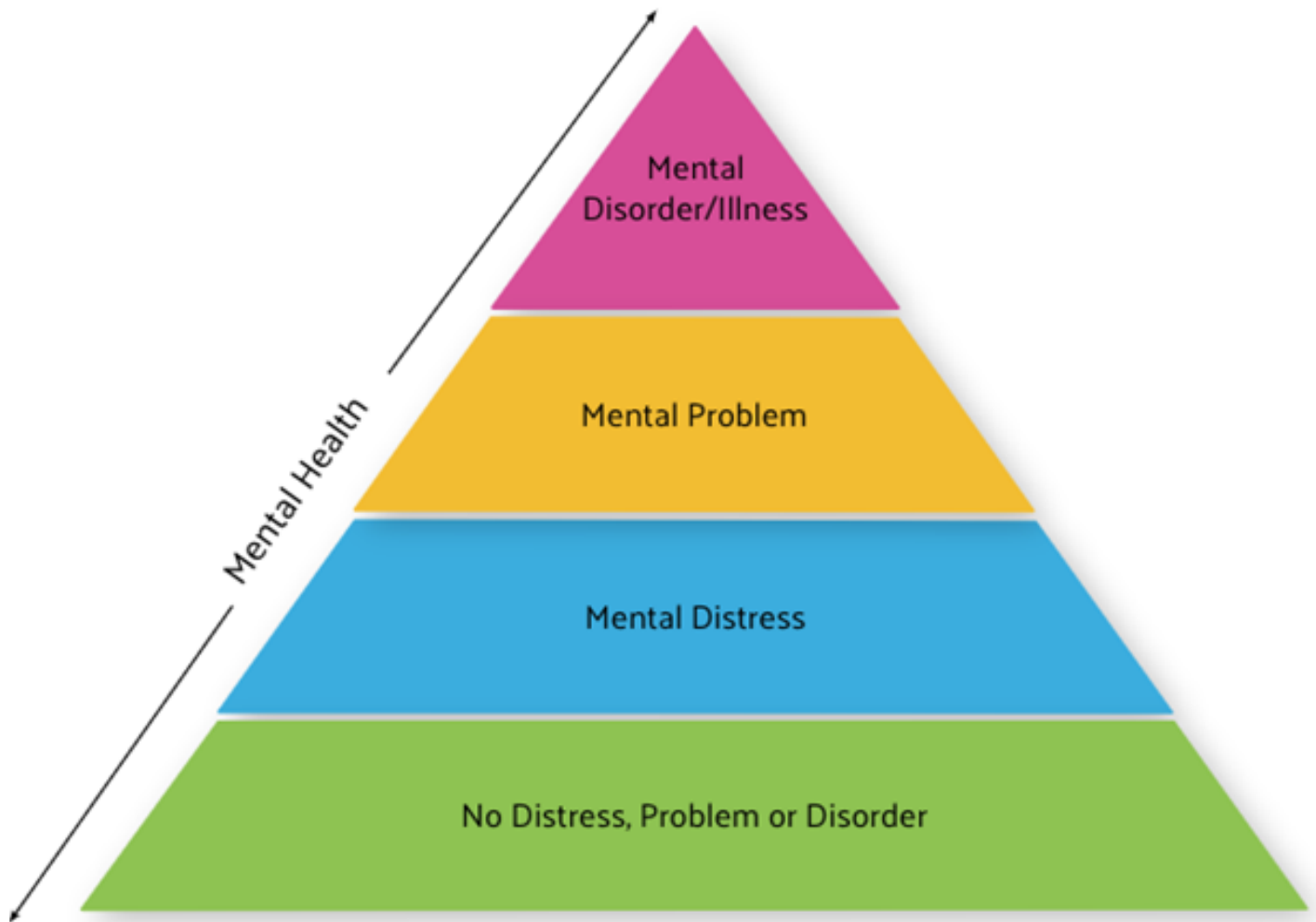
All treatments aim to reduce symptoms, improve functioning and prevent recurrence. A respectful relationship between provider and recipient is key. Family members may be involved if appropriate or necessary. Most treatments take some time to become effective and providing information about treatment options and components should be a core element of treatment provision. Applying common self-care interventions (such as exercise and sleep hygiene) can complement but not replace evidence-based treatments.

Knowing what questions to ask your healthcare provider can help you better understand and make decisions about your treatments.

## For more information about Evidence-Based Medicine, access these free resources:

- What is Evidence-Based Medicine? (English downloadable pdf): <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/product/evidence-based-medicine-patients/>
- Evidence-Based Medicine Part 1: Talking with Your Healthcare Provider (short animated video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMmgzhON14U>
- Evidence-Based Medicine Part 2: Becoming Health Information Savvy (short animated video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMmgzhON14U>
- Communicating with Your Healthcare Provider: What Every Person Should Ask (English downloadable pdf): <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/product/communicating-health-care-provider-every-person-ask/>

# Mental Health Literacy Pyramid



**For more evidence-based information about the interrelated mental health states, you can access this free resource:**

- Mental Health Literacy Pyramid Explained (short animated video):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgYmlsYmUIU>



# Obtaining and Maintaining Good Mental Health

With the popularity of the wellness industry, you will likely encounter many 'new' programs, apps, supplements or products promising to improve your mental wellbeing. Unfortunately, many of these products are not only costly, but they also have very little if any evidence to support their effectiveness. Robust research continues to support a handful of basic self-care factors that play a large role in helping you maintain your mental health.



## 1. Restorative Sleep

A consistent, restorative sleep is essential for both our physical and mental health. It is well established that adequate sleep confers numerous mental health benefits, including improvements in retaining new information and managing emotions. [4] During deep sleep your brain even cleans itself.

About 8-9 hours of sleep per night is ideal for most people, but you'll know how much is right for you. With busy lives and multiple responsibilities, it can be tempting to sacrifice sleep hours in order to check items off the never-ending to-do list; however, prioritizing a good night's sleep is key to daily productivity.

**NOTE:** Sometimes sleep problems can be an early sign of a health problem or mental illness. If you have been trying all these strategies and nothing seems to be working, make an appointment with your doctor to discuss your sleep and see if there is a medical issue that needs to be addressed.

# Sleep Hygiene is a term to describe good sleep habits. Here are some tips to set yourself up for sleep success:

## GET REGULAR

One of the best ways to train your brain and body to sleep well is to go to bed and wake up at around the same time every day. This regular rhythm will help you develop a consistent sleep routine.

## A COMFORTABLE SPACE

It is important that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. A cooler ambient temperature with enough blankets to stay warm may help with deeper sleep. Light-inhibiting curtains, eye masks and earplugs may also help.

## SLEEP RITUALS

Regular sleep rituals can help prepare you for sleep. This could be reading, listening to music, gentle stretching, meditation or having a warm cup of (caffeine-free) tea. Avoid engaging in stimulating activities before bed, such as having an important or emotional conversation, or watching an exciting tv show.

## CAREFUL WITH ALCOHOL

Although alcohol can initially make you feel drowsy, it is known to reduce the quality of deep sleep, making you feel less rested when you wake in the morning. Try not to consume alcohol within 3 to 4 hours of going to sleep.

## CURB YOUR CAFFEINE

Some people may be more sensitive to the awakening effects of caffeine than others, but all of us react to caffeine. In general, it's a good idea to avoid caffeine within 6 to 8 hours of bedtime.

## WRITE IT DOWN

Have something on your mind? Is your brain continually scrolling through your to-do list? Keep a pen and paper by your bed and jot down anything that's nagging at you. With the note there to read the next day, your mind may feel freer to relax.

## POWER DOWN

Try to stay away from screens altogether for at least 1 hour before you go to bed. Remove your phone, computer, tablet, etc. from your room at bedtime. If you must keep them in your bedroom, disconnect them (for instance, put your phone in "do not disturb" mode) so that they don't interrupt you when you are ready to sleep.

## RESERVE YOUR BED FOR SLEEP AND SEX

The human brain is quick to make connections. Though it can be tempting to grab your laptop or phone to catch up on work, news or social media while you're cozy in your bed, please don't. You want your brain to associate your bed with rest and relaxation, not working.

**For more evidence-based information about health sleep habits, you can access this free resource:**

- Healthy Sleeping (downloadable pdf): [https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Healthy\\_Sleeping.pdf?](https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Healthy_Sleeping.pdf?)

## 2. Physical Activity

Just like sleep, regular physical activity provides multiple benefits for both our physical and mental health. One of the best ways to relax and de-stress is to get active. For instance, being active during the day helps the brain to be ready for sleep at night. Although vigorous exercise is best, any physical activity counts. In a nutshell, "what's good for your bicep is good for your brain."

Research shows that for the biggest impact, 30 minutes of vigorous exercise per day (ex. going for a run, playing soccer, spin class, or aerobics) is recommended. Note that any amount and kind of movement is better than none at all. If you're not there yet, start out by making simple changes such as:

- Taking a nature walk to start your day
- Fitting in a walk on your lunch break when possible
- Getting off public transit a stop early, or parking further from work or school and walking the rest of the way
- Taking the stairs whenever available
- Making sure to step away from the computer and take movement breaks throughout the work day
- Taking a walk with a friend instead of going for coffee or drinks
- Hopping on your bike for a ride around your community
- Walking your dog after work or school

Remember: exercise is not about losing or maintaining weight - it's about keeping your body and brain strong for now and for the future.

## 3. Healthy Eating

A well-balanced diet helps to keep you physically and mentally stronger. Here are some tips to consider for establishing healthy eating habits:

- Aim to include a wide variety of foods from the major food groups in your daily intake.
- Eat regular meals - yes, this means taking time for a lunch break!
- Stock your work bag or desk with small low calorie snacks as an alternative to that donut and coffee.
- Limit foods that are high in fat or sugar, or that are highly processed.
- Plan healthy meals ahead of time and shop accordingly.
- Share meals with others when possible. Connecting with colleagues, friends or family over a meal can be an important part of your day.
- Be realistic: it's okay to enjoy a treat now and then, especially when you know you've been taking good care of your brain and body.

Check out the updated Canada Food Guide for more information and inspiration: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Remember: just like exercise, healthy eating is not about losing or maintaining weight - it's about keeping your body and brain strong for now and for the future.

## 4. Strong Supportive Connections

With busy schedules and multiple demands, it can be easy to lose touch with people. However, making time to connect with others is an essential component of obtaining and maintaining your overall mental health. Having a reliable support network of people in your life is an important part of staying mentally healthy. Your support network may include family members, intimate partners, friends or work colleagues among others. Although in-person connection with the important people in your life is ideal, virtual or telephone time with others can be meaningful alternatives.

Feeling a little disconnected? Here are some connection points to get you started:

- Schedule regular 'catch up' times with loved ones: These may include a monthly coffee date, a weekly phone call, a nature walk or a visit at your home.
- Make a lunch date: Invite a work colleague to join you for lunch or for a walk.
- Reconnect: have you lost touch with someone you value? It might be time to send an email, text, or pick up the phone and let that person know you're thinking of them.
- Make a reservation: invite a friend or family member who lives alone for an in-person or virtual dinner. Reserve them a seat at the head of the table and enjoy some quality time together.
- Get involved: finding shared interests is a great way to build new connections with others. You might consider a sports team, club, faith group, or a volunteer organization.
- Be open minded: Be inquisitive and interested in others and their lives. This may lead you to new and potentially enriching life experiences and relationships.

## 5. Helping Out

Helping others can also be an important part of maintaining your mental health: good for you and good for them! Sounds like a win-win! And, remember: no grand gestures required. Helping in smaller ways can make a big impact. For example:

- Offer to shop or make a meal for someone.
- Consider volunteering opportunities. If your employer offers volunteer days for employees, use them.
- Shovel someone's sidewalk or walkway. Or offer to mow their lawn!
- Take the time to write a thank-you letter, positive online review, or positive feedback form for a front line worker or service provider.
- Send cute or funny pictures to brighten someone's day. A little humour can go a long way.
- Tell someone you care about why you are thankful for them.
- Hand write a letter or card: there's something particularly heartwarming about getting a personal note in the mail. Think of someone in your life who could use a pick-me-up and send them a post.

# Self Care

Honouring the human need to rejuvenate is not a luxury; it is essential for both physical and mental health. With multiple demands, responsibilities and time commitments, it can be challenging to find time to disconnect, relax and do something to replenish your spirit. Yet, creating space for rest and relaxation are integral to maintaining your overall mental health. Taking time to relax on a regular basis can also help you recognize the strategies to use when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

## WHAT SELF-CARE IS NOT

Self-Care is not a prescribed set of relaxation products, rituals or clichés that the wellness or beauty industries may try to sell you at a premium price. Self-care is not limited to a bubble bath or an expensive day at the spa (although, if these are your preferred ways to relax, then by all means go for it!).

## WHAT SELF-CARE IS

Self-care is taking the time to do something you enjoy, simply because you enjoy it. There is no end goal, and no 'right' way to do self-care. How one person replenishes their brain and body may look very different from the next person. It might be listening to or playing music, enjoying the arts, reading a book, spending time in nature, going to Church, meditating - whatever you find to be relaxing. Figuring out what works best for you is not a static, one-time process. Don't be afraid to try out alternatives.



**"Self-Care is giving the world the best of you, instead of what's left of you."**

**-Katie Reed**

# Work Life Balance and Setting Time Aside to Disconnect

Creating a balance between work, particularly when more and more of us are working from home, requires us to encourage and create for ourselves, and our staff, the healthy management to enjoy life outside of work.

The average worker spends 50.2 hours on work related activities per week. (Source: 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving in Canada)

## **HAVING A CLEAR MANDATE FOR A WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN OUR MANAGEMENT MAKES SENSE FOR EMPLOYEES AND HELPS TO:**

- Attract and retain staff
- Reduce sickness and absenteeism
- Improve morale
- Increase productivity and work satisfaction

## **TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS TO WORK WITH STAFF ON SETTING A WORK-LIFE BALANCE:**

- Invite staff to have meaningful input into work environments
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities with staff
- Set schedules that respect life outside of working hours
- Assess the risks of work-related stress and take action when needed with available resources
- Provide opportunities for authentic interactions with staff outside of work responsibilities

## **WHAT WE CAN DO TO ENCOURAGE WORKERS TO DO FOR THEMSELVES**

- Take breaks, even small ones (eg: take a walk, do a breathing exercise, make some tea)
- Make to do lists (ones that are achievable and help you keep track of tasks to be done over time)
- Unplug from technology once in a while (or once a day for a set downtime)
- Build downtime into your schedule
- Choose activities that positively impact your work and personal life (yoga, online fitness class, outdoor activities like running, walking etc.)

Adapted from Source: CCOHS.ca Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety

# Communicating Your Boundaries

Learning how to be clear in communicating your boundaries can be difficult, but it is necessary. Clear and reasonable boundaries help you and those around you better understand and relate to each other.

## CONSIDER THESE TIPS:

- Setting clear and reasonable boundaries can be difficult, this gets easier with practice and time
- Take some time to write down what your boundaries are.
  - For example: What time do you no longer wish to receive work related calls or answer emails in the evening?
  - Do you feel comfortable sharing personal feelings or events with a friend or colleague?
- Who do you consider to be a safe ally (trustworthy) and who do you consider will be likely less supportive?
- Communicating boundaries requires being explicit and clear
- Explaining your boundaries can be done compassionately and with kindness
- You are not responsible for or required to manage the emotions of the person receiving your boundaries. But, how you communicate your boundaries with others can be done in a thoughtful rather than a thoughtless manner.

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# Stress Management

## KEYS TO HEALTHY STRESS MANAGEMENT

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### Understanding the Stress Response

The stress response is a signal in our brain and body that alerts us to a problem to be solved, or an adaptation to be made. It is there to help us adapt to our environments. Unfortunately, stress has a negative connotation that leads to unhelpful ways of thinking about and managing our normal and necessary stress response. While too much or too little stress is not helpful, much of the daily stress we experience is actually part of learning to adapt to life. You can find ways to harness your stress response to increase adaptation and build resilience, while concurrently learning how to distinguish this from stress that is not helpful to you. [5]

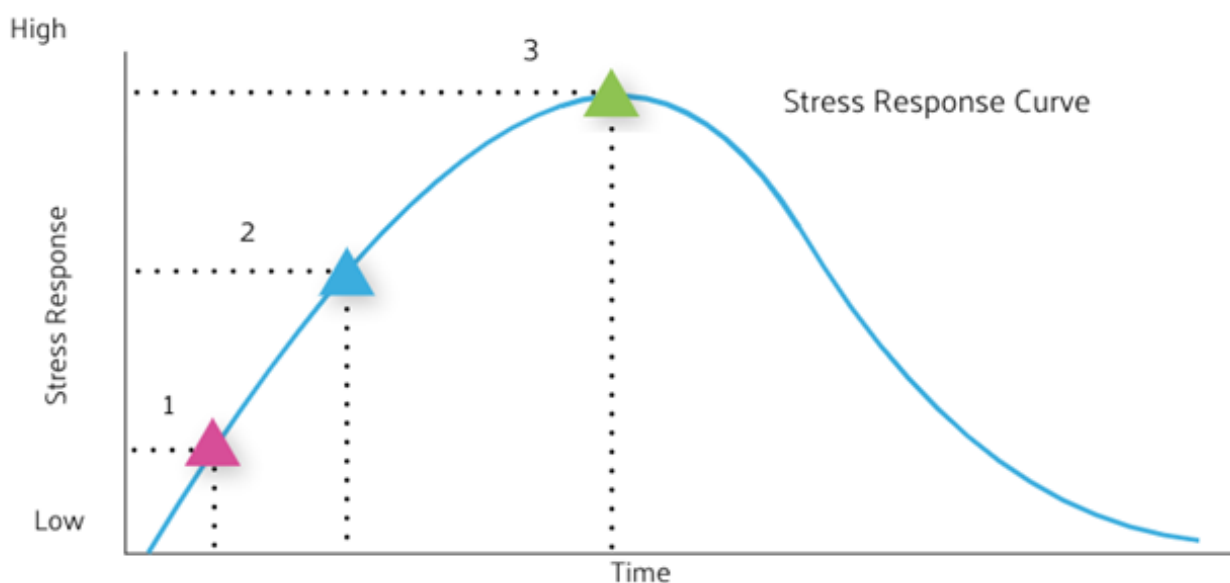
Using clear language to describe the stress response is pivotal. People often substitute the word “anxiety” when they mean the stress response; however, anxiety (a constant state of situationally inappropriate hyperarousal) is not the same as a stress response.

Most stress that we experience daily is actually good for us. The only stress that can really cause us harm is toxic stress – like abuse, neglect, violence, poverty; especially if we are experiencing it for a prolonged period of time. Regular everyday stress? That actually makes us stronger. Each time you a) experience a stressful situation and b) successfully cope with that situation, you’re making yourself stronger and more resilient.





## 3 Keys to Healthy Stress Management and When to Use Them



### 1. HOW WE THINK ABOUT STRESS MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

Imagine you have a stressor in your environment (ex. an upcoming work presentation or a traffic jam on your commute to work). Research shows that if we interpret this signal as negative (ex. “I feel stressed out” or “I can’t handle this”), our body’s response can be unhealthy, leading us to avoid the situation or to expect others to solve the problem for us. However, if we interpret the signal in a more encouraging way (ex. “My brain and body are getting ready to help me tackle an important challenge” or “I will find a way to get through this”) our body’s response will be more healthy, leading us towards adaptation and resilience, like the stress response intended.

### 2. DETERMINE WHAT THE PROBLEM IS AND DEVELOP SOLUTIONS FOR SOLVING IT

For example, the stress response in preparation for a work presentation may lead you to seek out research skills to review key concepts, or practice your talk ahead of time with a supportive colleague. When you solve the problem that triggered the stress response, it goes away. Then, you are left with new skills you can use in the future. You have successfully adapted!

### 3. REDUCE THE INTENSITY OF YOUR STRESS RESPONSE

Sometimes our stress response can feel quite intense (especially if our previous pattern has been to avoid stress) and at this point, techniques designed to decrease our stress response may be helpful. This is the time to draw on relaxation or calming strategies.

**For more evidence-based information on managing your stress response, access these free resources:**

- Healthy Stress Management: Understanding the Stress Response (downloadable pdf): <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/schoolmhl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/managing-the-stress-response.pdf>
- The Stress Response Explained (short animated video): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHjkEfwfECo>

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# Calming Strategies

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You may find it helpful to practice grounding, deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation exercises to help turn down the volume on your stress response. But again, remember: calming strategies are only one component of the 3 Keys to Healthy Stress Management. A few examples are shared here:

## GROUNDING: ENGAGING YOUR SENSE THROUGH THE 54321 TECHNIQUE

5. Name **FIVE** things you can **SEE**.
4. Name **FOUR** things you can **TOUCH**.
3. Name **THREE** things you can **HEAR**.
2. Name **TWO** things you can **SMELL**.
1. Name **ONE** thing you can **TASTE**.

Repeat as needed until you feel calmer.

## DEEP BREATHING: ENGAGING YOUR BREATH THROUGH BOX BREATHING

1. **Inhale slowly** for a count of 3 or 4
2. **Hold** for a count of 3 or 4
3. **Exhale slowly** for a count of 3 or 4
4. **Hold** for a count of 3 or 4

Repeat as needed until you feel calmer.

## HAND RELAXATION: ENGAGING YOUR BREATH AND BODY TOGETHER

**Clench** the muscles of your left hand into a really tight fist for 5 seconds.

**Gradually let go** of your fist (for about 15 seconds) while breathing slowly and concentrating on the way your hand feels.

**Repeat** using your right hand.

Often about **3 cycles** (left hand relaxation + right hand relaxation = 1 cycle) are enough to help decrease the stress response.

# Checking In With Others

We can't always know another's mental state, or how they are thinking and feeling. It is important to regularly check in with our family, friends and colleagues.

## WHEN CHECKING IN, HERE ARE SOME CONSIDERATIONS:

- Ask permission to check in.
- Find an appropriate time and place (ex. when you have sufficient time to properly connect, not in front of others and not anchored around staff performance).
- Know your role: you are not expected to be a therapist or to offer advice on a particular matter. Your role is to listen and offer resources and systems of support.
- Build in these check-ins as part of your routine.
- Have additional resources available if needed (ex. <https://wellnesstogether.ca/en-CA/covid>) and <https://wellnesstogether.ca/fr-CA/covid>).
- Ask permission to circle back and follow up with that person.

## Not sure how to start the conversation? Here are some ideas:

- Is it okay if we talk?
- How are you?
- How are things going for you overall?
- How does the workload feel?
- How is your work/life balance?
- Are you taking time for yourself?
- Have you booked days off?
- How are you eating? Sleeping?
- Is there any way I can support you?
- Is it okay if I check in with you again in a few weeks to see how things are going?

# Should I Be Worried?

It is expected and absolutely normal for all of us to have times when we feel in a slump, with decreased energy, a more negative mood or increased tension. For these times, better self care such as a good night's sleep and talk with a friend may be all that is needed to rebound. Sometimes, someone's struggle does not resolve simply with more rest and fresh air.

There are some indications or 'red flags' that someone may be experiencing either a mental health problem (where they could use caring and practical supports) or a mental illness (where they need both assessment and treatment from a professional as well as the support of friends and family).

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# Understanding Signs and Symptoms

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Note that **signs** are what others can notice (such as someone speaking very rapidly) while **symptoms** refer to what someone is experiencing inside themselves, such as negative self talk, sadness, or hearing voices. There are times when a person may be really struggling with symptoms such as feeling hopeless, however there may not be obvious signs that they are struggling.

## Red Flags

Being aware of some red flags can alert us to check in on the well being of someone. Be careful to not make assumptions or follow checklists to diagnose everyone around you however! Doctors and mental health professionals have specialized training to assess many factors in many contexts before making any kind of diagnosis and treatment recommendations.

We can, however, be alert to potential signs that someone is struggling. Someone may also start to share their symptoms with us.

### **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE:**

- A noticeable and negative change from what is the norm for an individual (that lasts beyond a few days and is more than what would be expected for the circumstances). This can be a negative change in mood, thinking, or behaviour.
- Lower functioning in social, work or academic performance.
- Not taking care in personal hygiene.
- Withdrawing from others.
- increased, problematic substance use or gambling.
- Prolonged difficulty adjusting after the loss of a relationship or death of a loved one.
- Others close to the person expressing concern.
- The person speaking negatively about themselves, and expressing negativity and hopelessness, including thoughts such as life being pointless and not worth living.
- Difficulty sleeping and changes in eating and activity level.
- A history of experiencing a mental illness in the past, or family history of mental disorders.
- A recent head injury.

**Note a change from what is usual for that person. For example, someone who is known for taking pride in their appearance starts coming to work with uncombed hair and wrinkled clothes, whereas that may be the norm for easy going Dave down the hall!**

# How to Express Concern and Help Others

Be mindful that you may not know current stressors the other person is experiencing. Do not jump to conclusions about the reasons for what you are observing.

## **CONCERN FOR A FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND:**

- Draw on the relationship you have with them, and give examples of what you are noticing with care and concern.
- Encourage your loved one to seek help and offer to assist in finding help.
- Start with encouraging a call to their doctor for a good medical check up.
- Check in with them frequently, and encourage your loved one to expand their circle of support.
- If they are expressing hopelessness, ask them if they are thinking of harming themselves.
- If they say they are having suicidal thoughts, then it is a priority to connect them with professional help and discuss a plan they agree to for keeping them safe.

**For more evidence-based information on supporting family and friends, you can access this free resource**

- Downloadable pdf: <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/product/family-pack/>

## **CONCERN FOR COLLEAGUES OR STAFF WHO REPORT TO YOU:**

- Before meeting with your colleague or staff member, review any relevant office protocols and have contact information ready for further support and resources to suggest.
- Discreetly check with workmates if they also have concerns. Be sure to maintain privacy and confidentiality!
- Separate this conversation from anything related to a performance review.
- Bring up the topic when there is enough time to talk it through.
- Detail what you have been noticing and express sincere concern for their well being (ex. "Saya, can we talk? Ever since you have started working here, I have noticed your happy energy and that you usually like to arrive early and talk with others around the coffee station. Over the past number of weeks I have seen you arrive later, and go straight to your office without speaking to anyone. I am concerned about you. Are you okay?")
- If you have suggested a resource or referral, circle back to check if the suggestion met their needs or if further support is needed.

# Assess if this is a Crisis or Emergency Situation

## **IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PROTECT THE PERSON AND OTHERS AROUND THEM IS REQUIRED:**

- If a person has lost touch with reality. They may be experiencing delusions - (disordered thinking) or hallucinations (when their senses are giving them inaccurate information so they are seeing or hearing things that are not present).
- If a person is threatening to seriously harm themselves or others.
- If a person is behaving in an unpredictable and violent way.
- If a person is under the influence of substances and their physical safety is at risk.
- If someone expresses fear that another is threatening their life.

Call 911 for assistance if there is immediate danger.

**Be sure to keep yourself safe while attempting to assist.**

## **FOR YOURSELF:**

If you find that attending to your own self care basics such as better sleep, good food and a good talk with a supportive person isn't enough to help you rebound, consider contacting your family doctor for a check up for both your physical and mental health. There may be a medical issue impacting your overall wellness. You may also consider seeking out the support of a mental health professional through provincial health, your Employee Assistance Program or a community agency.

We all need to attend to our mental health, just like our physical health. Despite our best efforts, a mental illness may arise just like a physical ailment can. None of us are immune to experiencing a mental health problem or mental disorder. We can all do our part to connect with others and have real conversations to reduce the stigma around mental illness, and to recognize when to access mental health professionals for further assessment and possible treatment. Improving our mental health literacy can help us to improve our own mental health, and contribute to the health of our families, friends and workplaces.

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# Mental Health Resources

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This is not a comprehensive list of mental health resources and is not meant to replace suggestions given to you by your health care provider. If you or a family member is experiencing a mental health crisis please call the health/mental health emergency number in your community or visit your local crisis center or hospital emergency department. For non-crisis mental health concerns, it is appropriate to seek assistance from your family physician or community health/mental health clinic.

The listing of any resource herein is not an endorsement of its value.

Neither the Senate, the House of Commons, the Government of Canada, the Alberta Health Services or any person or organization involved in the creation or distribution of this resource is liable for any outcomes that occur as a result of any person's use of any of these resources.

## **FOR FEDERAL EMPLOYEES**

Federal departments and agencies in the core public administration are required to make available to employees a confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP). An EAP provides free short-term counselling for personal or work-related problems as well as crisis counselling. To contact the EAP for your organization, please consult the departmental listing.

## **FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, HOUSE OFFICERS, RESEARCH OFFICES, THEIR EMPLOYEES AND MEMBERS OF THEIR IMMEDIATE FAMILY:**

To contact the EAP for your organization, please consult the [departmental listing](#).

1-800-663-1142

TTY : 1-888-384-1152

Hours of operations: service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

International (call collect): 604-689-1717

[www.homeweb.ca](http://www.homeweb.ca)

## **FOR SENATORS, THEIR EMPLOYEES AND ADMINISTRATION**

Contact the EAP for your organization.

Call 1-844-880-9137

[www.workhealthlife.com/](http://www.workhealthlife.com/)

If you have additional questions on available programs or policies, please contact the HR Service Centre at 613-943-3443 or HR-RH@sen.parl.gc.ca.

## **FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA (ALSO AVAILABLE IN FRENCH):**

The [Hope for Wellness Help Line](#) offers immediate help to all Indigenous peoples across Canada.

It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to offer counselling and crisis intervention.

Toll-free Help Line at 1-855-242-3310 or connect to the online chat at [hopeforwellness.ca](http://hopeforwellness.ca)

Phone and chat counselling is available in English and French. On request, phone counselling is also available in:

- Cree
- Ojibway
- Inuktitut

Native Youth Crisis Hotline - 1-877-209-1266

Answered by staff 24/7. Available throughout Canada and the U.S.

## **FOR VETERANS AND FORMER RCMP MEMBERS:**

The [VAC Assistance Service](#) is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. A confidential and free service available 24/7 to Veterans, former RCMP members, their family members, or caregivers to speak with a mental health professional immediately.

Call toll-free: 1-800-268-7708

TDD/TTY: 1-800-567-5803



# General Resources

## ONLINE

For a wide range of online resources for mental health and substance use support:

[WellnessTogether.ca](http://WellnessTogether.ca)

Access to Free, Live Counselling

Phone. Call 1-866-585-0445 (Adults) or 1-888-668-6810 (Youth)

Text (SMS). Text WELLNESS to 741741 (Adults) or 686868 (Youth) to connect with a trained crisis responder for support.

## PERSONAL BASED

Local branches of the **Canadian Mental Health Association** (CMHA) can provide a variety of services to people in need of mental health support. The CMHA's [Find your CMHA](#) page can be used to identify your local CMHA branch.

## NATIONAL HOTLINES

### Canada Drug Rehab Addiction Services Directory

A free online directory of alcohol and drug rehab programs and other addiction-related services in Canada

Toll free help line 1-866-694-6964

### Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868

### Canada Suicide Prevention Service

1-833-456-4566



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