



# CMHA's 62nd ANNUAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK 2013

## Youth Mental Health

# Fact Sheet: Youth Mental Health

*Did you know that up to 70% of young adults living with mental health problems report that the symptoms started in childhood?*

### So why is your mental health so important?

Mental health is an essential part of your overall health. Just as physical fitness helps your body to stay strong, mental fitness helps you maintain a state of good mental health. Mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness. It's a state of well-being.

When you are mentally healthy, you enjoy your life and environment, and the people in it. You can be creative, learn, try new things, and take risks. You are able to cope with difficult times.

It's important to be aware of your mental health. Without awareness, it's difficult to pinpoint why you are so stressed or having problems coping.

### Having positive mental health means you are able to:

- **Enjoy life.** You live in the moment, learn from the past and plan for the future. You focus on what you can influence or control, rather than things you cannot predict or change.
- **Be resilient.** You are optimistic and bounce back from challenges. You keep your perspective when dealing with serious events in your life.
- **Strive for balance in your life.** You juggle competing demands and aspects of your life. You know when your balance is off and make changes to restore it.

- **Work to achieve your full potential.** You recognize and develop your strengths and interests.
- **Be flexible.** You're able to feel and express a range of emotions, and to change your expectations and approaches to solve problems.<sup>1</sup>

### Getting help

Have you ever felt:

- so angry or so sad that you can't cope with day-to-day life?
- like your body is unattractive and letting you down?
- unsure which way to turn, and like a deer caught in the headlights?
- that you need alcohol or drugs to feel better and get through the day?
- like you are constantly fighting with people or have pulled back from those you care about?
- overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness and helplessness?

A lot of young people experience these feelings and they can be overpowering at times. But once you acknowledge that you might have a mental health issue, you can get the help and support you need, and feel like yourself again.

### Tips for positive mental health<sup>2</sup>

- Have positive, respectful relationships with family and friends.
- Talk to people you trust when you're feeling down or stressed.
- Learn some ways to relax and cope. Choose safe and healthy ways to deal with negative feelings – like going for a walk or listening to music.
- Practice positive self-talk. Don't be so hard on yourself. We all make mistakes.
- Do things you enjoy.
- Eat healthy foods, be active and get enough sleep.
- Help others – it will make you feel good too.
- Make informed decisions about alcohol and drugs.

<sup>1</sup> www.YouThrive.ca

<sup>2</sup> Headroom project: The Centre for Health Promotion of Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN), Australia

## Finding your support system

The first steps are always the toughest, but knowing where to look for help is a good start. Here are some places where you can begin:

- **Internet:** Go online and find out about reputable, confidential mental health resources. Many provincial governments or community agencies across Canada offer anonymous telephone or web chat services.
- **Library:** Borrow books, videos and audio books on mental well-being and mental illness.
- **Family and friends:** Share your feelings with family and friends, and let them be part of your team. If you belong to a faith group, talk with someone you can confide in.
- **Educational events:** Attend workshops and education sessions hosted in community centres, agencies, schools, colleges and universities.
- **School supports:** Talk to a school counselor, teacher or the principal of your school.
- **Community resources:** Check out community mental health clinics or contact mental health organizations.
- **Family doctor:** Talk to your family doctor. He/she is a great resource and can link you to other professionals, if needed.

### How CMHA and other mental health organizations can help

Learn how to take care of your mental health.  
Get the facts about mental illness.  
Find help for yourself or others.

CMHA can help. We have a remarkable team of more than 10,000 volunteers and staff across Canada providing vital services and support to well over half a million Canadians every year.

For **more information** on how to maintain your mental health, to find **Mental Health Week events in your community** or to **donate to CMHA**, go to [mentalhealthweek.ca](http://mentalhealthweek.ca).

Or contact your local CMHA, or any other community mental health agency/organization, to obtain information on available supports and services close to you.

## For parents/caregivers: How they and others can support your mental health

The journey from child to adult can be complex and challenging. Young people often feel tremendous pressure to succeed at school, at home and in social groups. At the same time, they may lack the life experience to know that difficult situations will not last forever.

Parents/caregivers and other adult role models can help young people manage their mental health and navigate this time of dramatic change by:

- **Developing positive relationships:** Taking the time to learn about a young person's individual interests and sharing in activities can help build bonds that can be conducive to open communication. As a young person develops their identity, non-judgmental and supportive relationships are critical, particularly in difficult times.
- **Engaging youth in developing leadership:** Young people have strengths that can be encouraged through opportunities to problem-solve, make decisions and organize activities and events. Providing youth a directing role can help them gain new skills and celebrate successes.
- **Giving emotional support:** Listening to a young person should be active, not reactive. Ask questions to help them sort through their feelings, rather than reacting immediately with your own thoughts. This can create a safe space for

a young person to explore their emotions and thoughts. Watch for difficulties in coping and signs that additional support may be needed. (See sidebar below.)

- **Modeling self-care and help-seeking when a personal problem arises:** Parents/caregivers can reflect on ways in which they can reduce their own stress and find support for their own mental health. These may include participating in recreation activities, learning a new skill or sharing household tasks. Developing supportive relationships and seeking help from other adults can set a good example for young people.

### Signs and symptoms of possible youth mental health problems:

- Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Changes in school performance, falling grades.
- Inability to cope with daily problems and activities.
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits.
- Excessive complaints of physical problems.
- Missing a lot of school, stealing, damaging property or problems with the law.
- Low self-esteem and negative body image.
- Prolonged feelings of unhappiness and thoughts of self-harm or death.
- Uncontrollable outbursts of anger.

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