

## mental health.

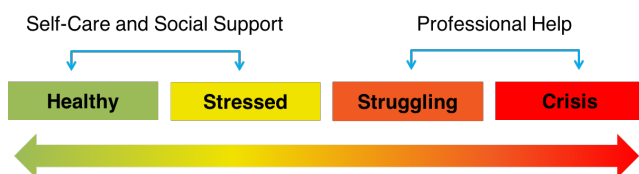
Mental health is the **biggest health issue** facing young people today. 1 in 5 people will develop a mental illness and a shocking 3 out of 4 youth who need help won't get it. The result is that suicide is the leading health related cause of death for people aged 15-24.<sup>1</sup> And yet, no one talks about it.

## everyone has it.

While 1 in 5 of us will suffer from a mental illness, **5 in 5** of us – everyone – has mental health.

Our mental health falls on a spectrum and where we lie on this spectrum can vary over time. Just like physical health, people aren't either totally healthy or horribly sick all the time. They often fall somewhere in between.

Mental health is similar except mental health is all about your thoughts, emotions and behaviours.



On the left side of the spectrum we're mentally healthy and in an optimal state. But as we move across there are more and more negative symptoms and we begin to lose control over them.

## mental illness.

Mental illness is clusters of patterns in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that can cause someone to struggle. Examples include depression, anxiety disorders, mood disorders (e.g. bipolar disorder), and schizophrenia.

Those with mental illnesses may be more likely to frequent the difficult areas of the spectrum. However, **recovery is possible** with proper diagnosis, treatment, and support.

## signs of struggle.

A person struggling with their mental health may exhibit noticeable changes that are unusual and long lasting for them. This can show in the form of:

### What people may DO

- Isolating and withdrawing (e.g. quitting a job, avoiding friends, dropping hobbies)
- Decrease in performance & self care (e.g. grades drop, personal hygiene dips)
- Unhealthy behavior changes (e.g. increase in drug or alcohol use, self-harming behaviours, changes in sleeping or eating patterns)

### What people may SAY

- Expressions of hopelessness (e.g. *"Everything sucks."* *"Nothing matters."* *"I hate myself."*)
- Expressing beliefs that don't make sense (delusions)
- Talking about things that aren't there (hallucinations)

### How people may FEEL

- Exhibiting long-term feelings of hopelessness, anger, worthlessness, or other extremes
- Showing loss of interest and/or numbness
- Rapid mood swings between intense emotions

## looking out for each other.

If you recognize that someone may be struggling, be sure to **act on it**:

1. Say that you've noticed changes.
  - *"I've noticed you haven't been coming to class."* *"You seem sad lately."*
2. Show them that you care about them.
  - *"I care about you and I'm worried about what I've seen. I think it's time to talk."*
3. Listen to what they have to say and don't judge.
  - We need to listen – try to avoid going straight to advice and "fixing" their problem.
  - Everyone's experiences and emotions are valid, and we all need to feel heard.
4. Ask them questions and reflect with them on their responses.
  - *"Can you tell me more about that?"*
  - *"That sounds really hard."*

## connecting others to help.

When looking out for a friend or family member's mental health, the most essential step is to connect the struggling person with the appropriate help they need.

- This is the **most important step!**
- Share that there are people they can talk to who can help (counsellor, family doctor, helpline), and that they don't have to do this alone.
- We can also offer to be with them as they take the first step in getting help.

**Remember:** we're not their doctor and our role in this moment is to purely show we care, ask questions, listen, and connect them to what they need. By doing this, we take appropriate care of both them and ourselves.

## looking out for ourselves.

**Self-care strategies** are a great way to be proactive in caring for ourselves and reducing the impacts of mental stressors. Some examples are:

- Building life skills like time-management
- Ensuring a healthy daily routine that involves exercise, a proper diet, and good sleep habits
- Taking on enjoyable hobbies like journaling, yoga, meditation, and/or sports

It is important to realize the most effective self-care strategies will look **different** for each person.

Sometimes, we can also really **struggle** with our mental health and these activities may be no longer enough. This is when our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours become intensely negative, long-lasting and have a significant impact on our lives. If this is the case, it's time to seek help and talking to someone is crucial. Some places to go for help are:

- Counseling centre or family doctor
- Parent or guardian
- Trusted friend
- Anonymous helpline (e.g. Kids Help Phone is available 24/7 at 1-800-668-6868)

## the stigma.

**Stigma** is often described as the most significant barrier to help-seeking.<sup>1</sup> Stigma is the negative attitudes and associations people have with mental health and/or illnesses and you can see it in:

- Words/language people use (e.g. psycho, freak)
- Beliefs people hold (e.g. people with mental illness are weak, lazy, dangerous)
- Dismissive messages ('suck it up,' 'get over it.')
- Harmful behaviours (avoidance, exclusion, bullying, harassment, discrimination)
- Sensationalized media and stereotypes
- The shame people may feel around struggling

This stigma and silence needs to end!

## no more silence.

If you want to take action on changing the mental health landscape and culture in your community, there are a few things you can do:

1. **Start a conversation.** Talk to at least one person. Share a statistic, tell them something new, and help normalize mental health!
2. **Look out for each other.** By opening our minds and remaining judgement-free, we can help to foster safe spaces that allow people to feel comfortable reaching out for help.
  - Keep in mind all the signs that someone may be struggling with their mental health.
  - Be sure to act if you see these signs and connect people to help if they need it!
3. **Get loud!** A pervasive, cultural shift is needed. This could be at school, in the broader community, or with governments. You can:
  - Start a club at your school, volunteer, or join a social media campaign.
  - Get involved with Jack.org - a network and national movement of youth transforming the way we think about mental health.

Like all social change, this will take time. But when people all over the country are learning more, speaking up, and getting involved - together we can make a **huge difference**.

<sup>1</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012.