



Mental Health At Thornhill Secondary School

<http://www.cmha.ca/highschool/studentsH.htm>

What Is Mental Health

The term “child and adolescent mental health” refers to the social, emotional, and behavioural well-being of children and adolescents, and is considered an integral part of healthy development.

TSS: The Issues

Social

- Arguments between friends
- Social acceptance
- Making friends
- Social exclusion
- Sexual / Intimate relationships
- Pressure to fit in
- Exposure to drugs / alcohol

TSS: The Issues Family

- Parent Separation and Divorce
- Issues between siblings
- Loss of a parent or sibling
- Moving homes
- Pressure from Family
- Genetic pre-disposition to mental health issues
- Abuse
- Fighting / Conflict in the home

TSS: The Issues School

- Pressure to succeed
- Relationships with teachers
- Relationships at school
- Grades
- Exams
- Assignments
- Extra-curricular activities

- Why is it that we are happy discussing our physical aches and pains but not so keen to talk about our mental health?
- As a teenager you have to cope with lots of changes, both physical and emotional, and you need the support of friends and family to help you through.
- Most people experience mental health problems at some time, and they can affect your ability to handle day-to-day situations and enjoy life.
- Sometimes these problems can really get to you, and you may find you have a hard time dealing with them.

- Mental Illness - a diagnosable condition, like Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), or Schizophrenia, that usually requires medical treatment.
- Mental Health Problems - refers to the more common struggles and difficulties that affect everybody from time to time. Teens experiencing these types of problems may not require medical treatment, but can still benefit from some of the help and support.

The Worried Teen – What Is It?

- Worried or anxious teens are among the most common.
- All teens experience fears and worries from time to time, and there is nothing unusual about that.
- For example, when a teen often feels extremely frightened or distressed about situations that would not bother most other teens the same age, and this is not just an isolated incident but persists over many days or weeks, it may be a sign of a mental health problem.

The Worried Teen – Why?

- Older adolescents may appear tense and worried. They have many realistic, serious concerns; making the wrong decision now may make a lifelong difference to their lives.
- Look at the following decisions facing late adolescents.
 - Decide on post-secondary course and institution
 - Keep grades high enough to be eligible
 - Maintain extra curricular activities
 - Maintain social contacts, without affecting grades because of the above
 - Determine preferred sexuality
 - Seek out, enter, or maintain a serious sexual relationship
 - Seek out and secure first serious employment
 - Leave the security of home for school or work.

The Sad Teen – What Is It?

- Sadness is characterized by cognitive (pessimism, thinking difficulties, thoughts of worthlessness) affective (lack of pleasure, irritability, withdrawn and passive) and biological (low energy and fatigue) changes.

The Sad Teen - Why?

- Life moves in peaks and valleys. During adolescence the peaks are steep and valleys deep. We all get sad but soon bounce back to neutral and even occasionally climb a ladder of positive emotions and happiness. But for some adolescents, bouncing back from sadness becomes difficult.

Signs of Trouble



You (or a friend) are Feeling...

- really sad and hopeless without good reason and the feelings don't go away
- very angry most of the time, cry a lot, or overreact to things
- worthless or guilty a lot
- anxious or worried a lot more than other teens
- unable to get over a loss or death of someone important
- extremely fearful, or like you have unexplained fears or more fears than most teens
- constantly concerned about physical problems or physical appearance
- like you're detached from your life, disconnected from things and people around you
- like nothing matters to you anymore
- paranoid and suspicious of other people
- like your mind is being controlled or is out of control

You (or a friend) Show Big Changes

- do much worse in school
- lose interest in things you usually like doing
- have weird changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- avoid friends or family and want to be alone all the time
- daydream so much you can't get things done
- lose your motivation and energy
(or sometimes the opposite – if you feel like you've got way too much energy)
- feel as if you can't handle life or consider suicide
- hear voices talking to you or about you that you can't explain

You (or a friend) Are Frustrated By

- not being able to concentrate, think straight or make up your mind.
- not being able to sit still or focus your attention.
- worrying a lot about being harmed, hurting others, or about doing something "bad."
- feeling like you have to wash, clean things, or perform certain routines hundreds of times a day in order to avoid danger

You (or a friend) Behave In Ways That Cause You Problems

- using alcohol or other drugs.
- eating large amounts of food and then making yourself vomit or abuse laxatives.
- continuing to diet and/or exercise obsessively although you're already thin.
- repeatedly violating the rights of others or breaking the law without regard for other people.
- doing things that can be life threatening

Can You Recover?

- The most important thing is to GET HELP!

- **BIOLOGICAL INFLUENCES**

- General Health
- Medical Treatment

- **PSYCHOSOCIAL INFLUENCES**

- Outlook on Life
- Friends
- Family

- **SOCIOECONOMIC INFLUENCES**

- Income
- Employment
- Housing

Who Can Help?

- Family
- Friends
- School Staff
- Family Doctor

How Can You Help A Friend?

- If you are worried about a friend, it's important to be supportive and to say things like:
 - I am very concerned about you.
 - You are saying things that I am really worried about, and we need to tell someone
- You need to let an adult, like a parent, teacher, or counsellor, know what's going on. Don't promise to keep secrets, especially if your friend is talking about suicide. As a friend, you must tell an adult so that they can get help right away.
- Offer to accompany your friend to talk with an adult they can trust.
- Let your friend know that you care, and that you haven't forgotten about them, even if they repeatedly try to put you off. Stay in touch and reach out to them.
- Stand by your friend during their recovery. Reinforce your positive feelings about them, and your confidence in their continued recovery.
- Find ways of having fun together that don't involve using drugs or alcohol.
- Offer to go to support groups or important meetings (such as with teachers, counsellors or doctors) with your friend, and to be another set of eyes and ears in meetings.

How Can You Help Yourself?

- Get smart
 - Find out more about mental health and mental illness.
- Talk it out
 - Don't keep your mental health problems to yourself. Share your worries and fears with someone you trust. Get as much help as you can. Use your parents, teachers, guidance counsellors, doctors as resources to get the help you want.
- Don't blame yourself
 - None of this is your fault. Having mental health problems doesn't mean that you are weak or a failure. It doesn't mean that you aren't trying. Whatever the cause, the important thing is to get help.
- Keep active
 - As much as you can, try to stick with your usual activities, in terms of both academics and leisure. Keeping your mind occupied and your day structured will help you recover and feel good about yourself.
- Find an advocate, or be your own.
 - express their ideas and concerns
 - get the information and services they need
 - defend and promote their rights and responsibilities
 - explore their choices and options.

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TAKE CARE

- Keep track of your moods and symptoms, and try to notice what kinds of things set you off
- Eat well, get plenty of sleep and stay physically active
- Avoid using alcohol and drugs. They definitely make things worse, and can be especially dangerous when combined with certain medications.
- Keep in touch with friends and try to get out of the house
- Be consistent with your therapies – including taking prescribed medications, and attending counselling.

DON'T GIVE UP

- Getting the help you need and finding the right combination of therapies can take a while, but it's definitely worth the wait. You will probably have to be persistent and patient.

Things may be pretty crazy for a while, and they may even get really bad before they get better. But remember, people recover from mental illness. Do everything that you can to help yourself recover, and give it time.

MYTH

People with mental illness are all potentially violent and dangerous

- Individuals with mental illness as a group are no more violent than other members of the general population. They are more likely to be victims of violence than the perpetrators. Despite sensationalized media portrayals, violence among people with mental illness is rare.

MYTH

People with mental illness are responsible for their condition

- Mental illness is an illness and is treatable like any other disease. It has nothing to do with willpower, and people cannot just “pull up their socks” and “get over it”. People do not choose to have a mental illness.

MYTH

People do not recover from mental illness

- Mental illness rarely causes someone to be continuously ill. With the right kind of help, many people with mental illness do recover and go on to lead healthy, productive and satisfying lives. Most students who are ill can successfully return to school and live normal productive lives given treatment and support.

MYTH

People with mental illness lack intellectual capability

- Mental illness is often confused with cognitive impairment or developmental disability. Mental illness does not affect an individual's intellectual capacity. People with mental illness usually have average intelligence.

MYTH

People with mental illness cannot handle stress

- The way a person responds to stress is highly individual. What is stressful for one person may not be for another. Students with mental illness have many effective coping strategies much like any other student.

MYTH

Mental illness is something to be embarrassed about

- Because mental illness is highly stigmatized in our society, many people feel it is a cause for embarrassment. As we increasingly embrace the reality that mental illness is no different than any other kind of illness, this myth will likely diminish.

Resources – Who To Go To At School

- IN ORDER:

1. Guidance
2. Special Ed
3. Your Teacher
4. Vice-Principal
5. Principal
6. School Social Worker

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