

# Supporting Our Youth: Teen Stress & Anxiety

Health and Wellness Strategies for Young People

**CMHA York South Simcoe**



**Canadian Mental  
Health Association**  
York and South Simcoe  
*Mental health for all*

## Goals for Today

- Identify most common stressors experienced by youth and connection to mental health and mental illness
- Address the stigma associated with getting help and how this impacts our youth
- Define anxiety and depression and learn techniques for helping youth prevent and manage
- Recognize the signs of suicidal thinking, learn what supports are available and how to engage
- Learn strategies for engaging in safe, supportive and effective conversation with youth



# Why have the conversation?

- 1 in 3 people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime
- 1 in 5 people will experience a mental health problem each year
- By age 40, about 50% of the population will have or have had a mental illness
- 4000 people die by suicide each year in Canada



70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence





## What is Mental Illness?

- An illness that you can't necessarily see that impacts:
  - Thinking
  - Feelings
  - Behaviours
  - Ability to function (work, school, self-care)
  - Ability to relate and communicate with others



## What stops young people from getting help?

- **Stigma:** stereotypes, myths and misinformation
- **Access to supports:**
  - Knowing what supports are available
  - Recognizing need for help
  - Believing help will be effective
- **Trusting confidentiality;** concern about impact on family and other relationships
- **“Sick” and “not sick enough” ideology**



Stress is a normal response to life's changes, pressures, and challenges. It's a mind-and-body signal that helps you get ready for what's ahead.

What are young  
people stressed  
about?



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## How might we notice stress in young people?

- Increase in absenteeism at school and extra curricular activities
- Aggression
- Diminished creativity, initiative, disinterest
- A drop in work/school performance
- Problems with inter-personal relationships
  - withdrawal from friends/family
- Mood swings, irritability and isolation
- Lower tolerance of frustration and impatience
- Self-harm



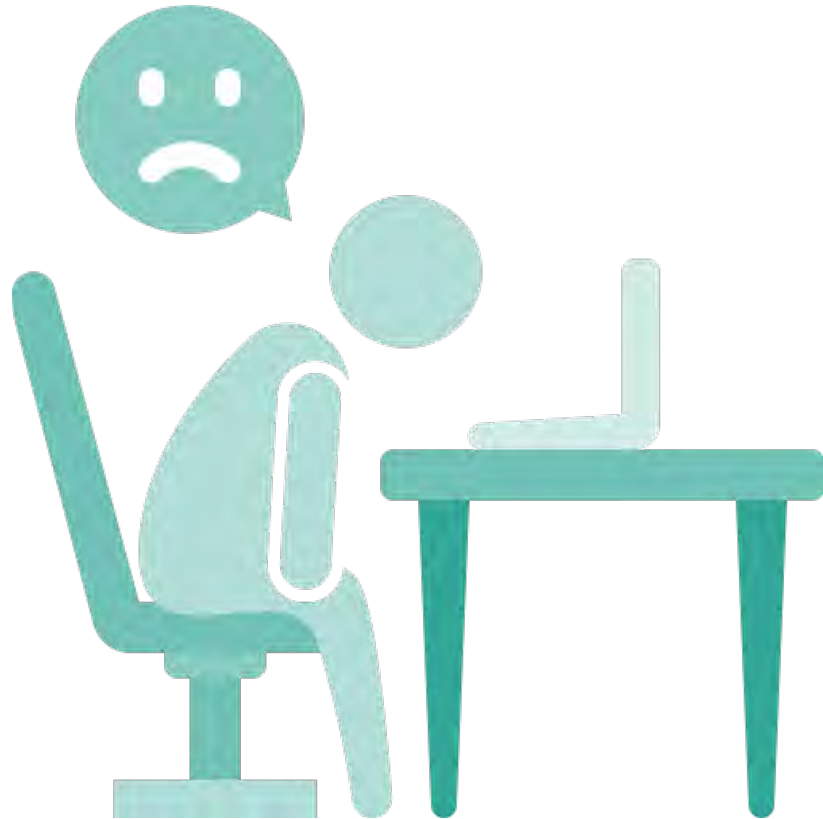
## What might be going on...

- Lack of connection to friends, family and school
- Isolation, loneliness, confusion
- School problems, problems with peers
- Bullying and harassment
- Grief after the loss of a loved one, break up, divorce
- Impact of early family experiences – abuse, neglect
- Questioning sexuality

## What are some things you can say to help them cope with stress?

- When did you begin feeling like this?
- How can I best support you right now?
- You are not alone in this. I'm here for you.
- You may not believe it now, but things can improve and I am here to help.
- I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.





## Could it be more than stress?

Feelings and behaviours may be signs of an underlying mental health concern or illness if they:

- are intense
- persist over long periods of time
- are inappropriate for the age of the youth
- interfere with their day-to-day life

# Anxiety

Anxiety is cause for concern when symptoms are persistent and severe and cause distress to the young person's daily life.

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety
- Panic Disorder
- Various Phobias
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

## Symptoms of Anxiety: described by young people

- Feeling as though you are in a tunnel
- Twirling, twisting, and chewing one's hair
- Feeling itchy
- Tapping your feet
- Rocking back and forth
- Pulling your own hair
- Picking at your skin
- Chewing pencils and pens
- Constantly checking your phone
- Nail biting
- Stressing out, freaking out, panicking, flipping out, being frazzled, worried, under pressure





Is digital media use  
linked to teen anxiety?





## Encourage balance, not restriction

- Encourage a balance between digital media use rather than harsher restrictions
- Where in-person interaction isn't possible, opt for forms of digital communication where real-time social cues are present ie. FaceTime and voice calls
- Seek ways to practice emotional regulation through everyday activities like talking through emotions, journaling, artistic expression etc.





# Anxiety & Depression

It's common in teens to find that they are depressed as well as anxious. That is in part because an anxious lifestyle can be so distressing, or so limiting, that it leads to depression.

[childmind.org](http://childmind.org)

**“If I was trying to describe depression to someone who has never experienced it ever, it’s like trying to explain a colour that they can’t see.”**



# Offering Help for Anxiety & Depression

## Where to start?

- Help them build strong connections
- Normalize mental health issues
- Help youth identify their feelings
- Encourage coping skills and activities
- Seek professional care if you are worried

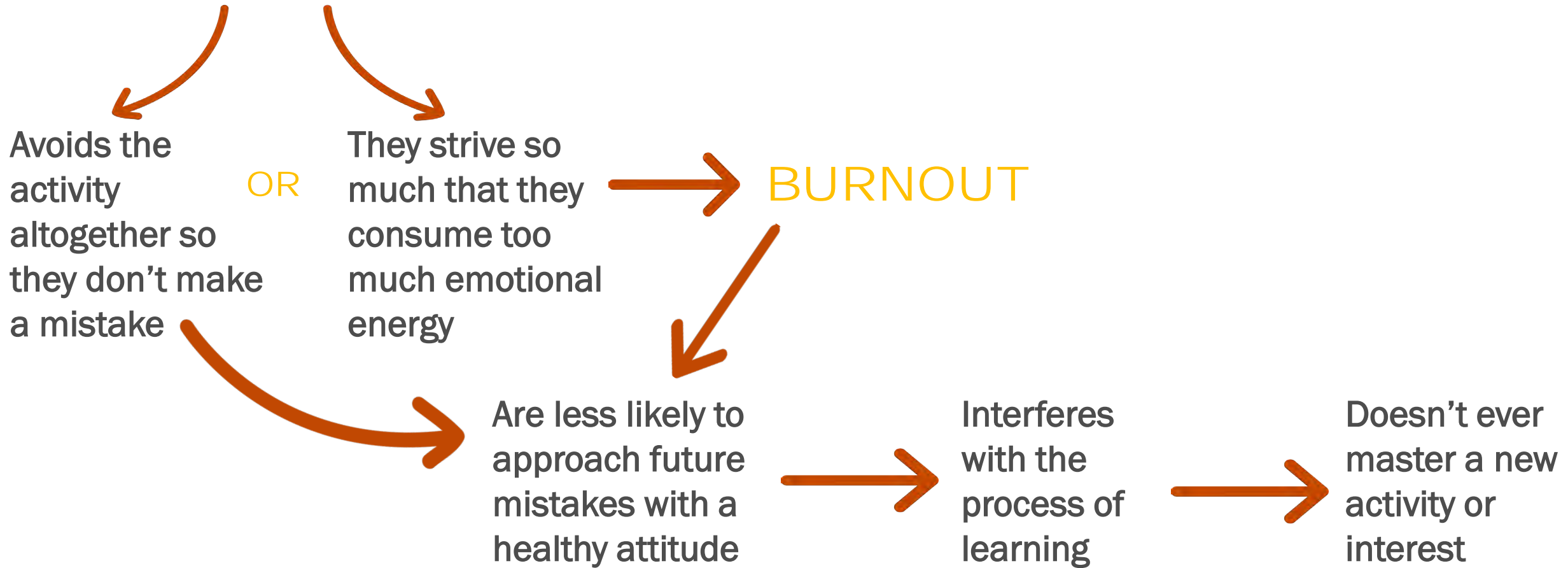
## Perfectionism: what it looks like in young people

- Holding themselves to unrealistically high standards
- Having a heightened sensitivity to flaws or mistakes
- Interpreting mistakes as failure
- Tending towards rigid all-or-nothing thinking



# FEAR OF FAILURE

(producing feelings of shame, guilt, embarrassment etc.)



# Helping young people sort through distortive thoughts

## ASK:

- What things trigger your upsetting/negative thoughts?
- Are there combinations of factors that trigger these thoughts?
- Are there any changes that you can make in your life that would help you to avoid or deal differently with these thoughts?



# Youth Suicide Prevention

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15-19-year-olds, second only to all unintentional injuries (accidents) combined, including unintentional drug overdose.

(Statistics Canada, 2020)

## Warning Signs

- Talking about or making plans for suicide
- Significant mood changes
- Angry, annoyed, or frustrated easily
- Risk taking behaviours: drug/alcohol use
- Running away from home
- Withdrawal from enjoyed activities
- Changes in sleep

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Conversations,  
statements or  
thoughts to listen  
for



“I can't do anything right”

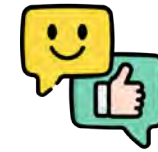
“I can't take it anymore”

“I wish I were dead”

“No one can help me”

“Everyone will be better without me”





Start the  
conversation.

Be as direct as possible



**Are you having thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself?**

**Do you have a plan? How would you do it?**

**Do you have the means available?**

**Have you ever thought about/attempted suicide before?**

**What stopped you?**



## Protective Factors for Suicide

- Open, non-judgmental communication with caregivers
- Accepting, supportive relationships with caregivers, family, and friends
- Positive school experiences and involvement in activities outside of school
- A positive relationship with a trusted adult who is not a family member (ex. a teacher, coach)
- Good self-esteem

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# Getting Help – what is out there?



- Kids Help Phone
- Family Services York Region
- Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youthline
- Bounce Back Ontario
- 310-COPE
- 211 Ontario
- 988 Suicide helpline
- CMHA – list of local supports, many with specialized focus
- Family doctor, walk-in clinics
- EFAP – Employee and Family Assistance Programs (available through some workplaces)
- Online resources – for personal and family support and education
- **MOBYSS (CMHA YRSS exclusive program for youth)...**

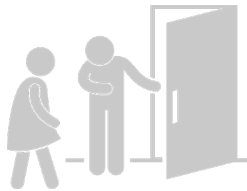


Accessible to youth 12-25, no health card needed, no fees charged, no wait times

<https://cmha-yr.on.ca/get-support/mobyss-12-to-25/>



Operates 5 days a week, 52 weeks a year



Is a welcoming, non-judgmental space that promotes wellness and inspires hope and resilience



Meets youth where they gather – schools, community centres, shelters – travels to under-serviced and/or rural areas



Specialist care provided by interdisciplinary teams trained in youth-specific mental health and/or addictions



First, and only, service of its kind in Ontario

