

Seeking help and finding support

Overview

How do we decide that what a person is experiencing is outside the range of the normal ups and downs we all go through? When is it time to seek assistance from professionals?

Seeking help and finding support for mental health issues can be a tricky business. From the outside, it's often not clear when intervention is necessary, and people who are experiencing distress may themselves not always be aware of what's going on, and can be reluctant to come forward for fear of being labeled.

When people know that they will not be discriminated against or harassed, they are much more likely to seek help. Early intervention is important and increases the chances of a quick recovery.

This lesson will address the issues around help seeking, as well as providing ideas about ways in which that help and support can be accessed, within the school and beyond.

Learning objectives

- To understand that people need support to deal with stressful life events and situations
- To learn to distinguish between “normal” responses to stress and difficulty, and those that may indicate a need for additional support from professionals
- To get students to consider who they could talk to if they were worried about their own mental health, or that of a friend or relative
- To identify support personnel in the school relevant to mental health
- To become familiar with the range of community-based healthcare services and groups available to support people who are experiencing mental illness and their families and friends

Major concepts addressed

- Mental illnesses, like chronic physical illnesses, can be effectively addressed
- Stigma acts as a barrier to people seeking help for mental health concerns
- Getting help early increases the chances that a person will make a full recovery from mental illness
- Recovery from mental illness is possible, when a range of supports, beyond formal treatment, are available

MODULE 5

Preparation

Teacher Background and Preparation

- Read through all activities and handouts before class
- Preview video Courageous not crazy Part 3: Help and support
- Compile list of community mental health resources for students

Activities

Activity 1: Video and activity sheet: Help and support - Youth Experiences (15 mins.)

Activity 2: Getting Help (15 mins.)

Activity 3: Support Strategies (10 mins.)

In advance

- Fill out template of community mental health resources
- Preview video
- Set up computers or DVD to view video
- Photocopy handouts for Activity 1 Video activity sheets, Activity 2 What if... scenarios, Checklists 1, 2 and 3, Activity 3 Support strategies (one for each student)
- Cut Activity 2: What if...scenarios into cards

Materials required

- DVD or web-based video of Courageous not crazy Part 3: Help and support
- Handouts: Activity 1 Video activity sheets, Activity 2 What if... scenarios, Checklists 1, 2 and 3, Activity 3 Support strategies



Template - Community mental health resources

The following mental health related resources are available in many communities including youth oriented programmes. Find out the contact information for these resources in your community and distribute to students. Your local CMHA branch can provide assistance.

School resources:

- Guidance counselor
- Social worker
- Nurse
- Peer support

Local community resources:

- Crisis/distress lines
- Mental health lines
- Youth centres
- Drop-ins
- Community health centres
- Hospitals/clinics
- First episode centres
- Peer support groups

Mental health organizations (provincial and national):

- Canadian Mental Health Association (www.cmha.ca)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (www.camh.net)
- Mood Disorders Society of Canada (www.mooddorderscanada.ca)
- Schizophrenia Society of Canada (www.schizophrenia.ca)
- Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada (www.anzietycanada.ca)

Kid's Help Phone - 1-800-668-6868

Kid's Help Phone is Canada's only 24-hour, national bilingual telephone counseling service for children and youth. Provides counseling directly to children and youth directly between the ages of 4 and 19 years and helps adults aged 20 and over to find the counseling services they need.

MODULE 5



Remind students that communicating their concerns about coping and dealing with mental health and other difficulties is really hard, and takes a lot of courage.

It's a good idea to anticipate potential student disclosures and to be prepared to deal properly with these situations.

Ask the school social worker or a CMHA public educator to be on hand if possible.

Activity 1:

(15 min.)

Video and activity sheet: Courageous not crazy Part 3: Help and support

Purpose:

- To learn more about young people's real life experiences getting help to deal with their mental health problems

How to:

- 1) Explain to the class that you will be watching a video made by youth from Laing House, which focuses on their experiences getting help and finding support to deal with their illness.

Hand out the activity sheets and give the class a minute or two to read over the questions. Tell them that they are not expected to take notes while they're watching the video, but should keep the questions in mind as they watch, so that they can discuss the answers afterward.

- 2) Show the video and discuss the students' answers to the questions as a group.

Conclude the activity by addressing any questions that students may have after watching the video. Ask students if they can see any similarities among the different individuals, even though they have different mental illnesses.

Courageous not crazy Part 3: Help and support

How did the youth in the video find help?

Did their friends and family notice there was something going on? What did they notice?

Did any of the youth talk to school staff like teachers or counsellors?

What does it mean to be supportive?

Did any of the youth attend a self-help or peer support group? If so, what was that like for them?

What kinds of supports/services seemed to help the most?

How can you help a friend?

MODULE 5

Activity 2:

(15 mins.)

Getting help*

Purpose:

- To describe a range of scenarios in which it would be important to tell or refer a problem to an appropriate adult.

How-to:

- 1) Explain to students that they will be engaging in a problem-solving lesson in which they can speculate about the possible actions they could take in a range of situations involving young people in distress. They will explore the scenarios using a game.
- 2) Ask students to arrange themselves into groups of four to six. Get them to sit in a circle – on the floor might be easiest.
- 3) Hand out the set of cards from the Activity Sheet: What if... scenarios. Ask each group to lay out their What if... cards in a circle with enough room inside the circle to spin a bottle or pen.
- 4) In turn, each of the participants takes a spin, and reads out the card the bottle points to. The person whose turn it is speculates first about what to do in such a situation, then others help out by adding their views, questions or challenges.
- 5) When they have finished discussing the scenarios, ask the class to come back together and pose the following questions:
 - Was there any disagreement in the groups about what was best to do?
 - Which was the scenario most likely to actually happen out of those you discussed?
 - Which do you think would be the hardest scenario to deal with if it happened to you or a friend or family member?
 - What sorts of fears or concerns would stop people from seeking help or telling someone else in these situations?
 - What kinds of things would motivate someone to seek help or tell someone their concerns in the situations you discussed?
- 6) Distribute “Something’s not quite right” checklists and read them through with the class.

*Adapted from Lesson 4 of Coping - *MindMatters*.

What if.....scenarios

- | | | | |
|---|---|----|--|
| 1 | Your friend seems really down and talks about dropping out of school. | 8 | Your friend isn't acting like his old self. He seems really down, and has been doing strange things like giving his favourite things away. He recently told you that he thought that people he knew would be better off without him around, and that he'd thought about killing himself. After he tells you, he asks you not to tell anyone else about what he's said. |
| 2 | A friend has been on a long diet, is getting really skinny and never seems to eat. She thinks she's really fat and will not wear shorts or a bathing suit. | 9 | A kid in your class often gets completely ignored and occasionally teased and even bullied. No one will ever be seen talking to this person. The teachers don't seem to notice, and no one does anything to this kid when teachers are around. |
| 3 | Since your dad left, your brother/sister is spending almost all of their time smoking, drinking and watching TV, never wanting to do anything else. You have not told your friends about your parents splitting up. | 10 | A friend has started skipping a lot of school and seems pretty down. |
| 4 | There is a situation at school that is really stressing you out. Everyday when you wake up, you remember the situation and start to feel sick. | 11 | Your friend has a parent with mental illness. From time to time, when the parent isn't doing well, your friend has to do everything at home. None of your other friends know about the situation. Your friend doesn't even know that you know. Your mom found out through a neighbour. |
| 5 | Your friend says s/he would be better off if s/he ran away. Your friend has already been sleeping over at your house a lot lately. | 12 | A classmate who is not really your friend, but is not friends with anyone else either, has started acting really strangely. Other kids have been laughing and making fun, but underneath you think this is a bit scary, and maybe the person is not doing this on purpose. |
| 6 | Someone in your class has started smoking marijuana before school everyday. The friends who smoke with this person only do it occasionally on the weekends. People are joking about how s/he is behaving – out of it and spacey. The person seems pretty down to you. | | |
| 7 | Your friend has started taking different kinds of pills at school, and is asking other people for painkillers all the time. | | |

Something is not quite right: Getting help early for mental illness*

You have a feeling that something is “not quite right” about the way someone close to you is behaving. You’re worried, but you’re not sure if it might be serious, or if moodiness, irritability and withdrawn behaviour is a stage they’ll grow out of. Could drugs be involved? Do you think you might need a professional opinion to help you decide if there is a serious problem?

Getting help early

The chances are that there is not a serious problem, and that time, reassurance and support are all that are needed. However, if a mental illness is developing, then getting help early is very important.

Being unwell for a shorter time means less time lost as school or work and more time for relationships, experiences and activities which help us stay emotionally healthy.

Checklist #1 Difficult behaviour at home, at school or in the workplace:

Behaviour which is considered “normal”, although difficult:

People may be:

- rude weepy thoughtless irritable argumentative over-sensitive
- over-emotional lazy withdrawn rebellious shy

These behaviours may also occur as a normal, brief reaction to stressful events such as:

- breakup of a close relationship moving divorce other family crisis
- death of a loved one other personal crisis exam failure physical illness

Probably no cause for serious concern, but...

It is often best to try not to over-react. Try to be as supportive as possible while waiting for the “bad patch” to pass. If the behaviour is too disruptive or is distressing to other people, or if the difficult behaviour lasts a long time, then you could seek professional counseling, help or advice. Talk it over with your family doctor, school counselor, community or mental health centre.

Checklist #2 - What's the difference between just having a bad day and something potentially more serious?

Signs of Clinical Depression:

- Feeling miserable for at least 2 weeks
- Feeling like crying a lot of the time
- Not wanting to do anything, go anywhere, see anyone
- Having trouble concentrating or getting things done
- Feeling like you're operating in "slow-motion"
- Having trouble sleeping
- Feeling tired and lacking energy – being unable to get out of bed even after a full night's sleep
- Having a change in appetite
- Feeling like there's a "glass wall" between you and the rest of the world
- Feeling hopeless or thinking of suicide
- Always putting yourself down and thinking you're no good

If you often experience a number of these things, you may be depressed. Remember that you don't have to be alone with these feelings, and that depression is treatable!

Checklist #3 - Behaviours which are considered ABNORMAL for that person, and may seriously affect other people.

People may:

- Withdraw completely from family, friends, and workmates
- Be afraid to leave the house (particularly during daylight hours)
- Sleep or eat poorly
- Sleep by day and stay awake at night, often pacing restlessly
- Be extremely occupied with a particular theme, for example, death, politics or religion
- Uncharacteristically neglect household or parental responsibilities, or personal appearance or hygiene
- Deteriorate in performance at school or work
- Have difficulty concentrating, following conversation or remembering things
- Talk about or write things that do not really make sense.
- Panic, be extremely anxious, or significantly depressed and suicidal
- Lose variation in mood – be “flat” – lack emotional expression, for example, humour or friendliness
- Have marked changes in mood, from quiet to excited or agitated
- Hear voices that no one else can hear
- Believe, without reason, that others are plotting against, spying on, or following them, and be extremely angry or afraid of these people
- Believe that they are being harmed or asked to do things against their will, by, for instance, television, radio, aliens, God or the devil
- Believe they have special powers, for example, that they are important religious leaders, politicians or scientists
- Believe that their thoughts are being interfered with or that they can influence the thoughts of others
- Spend extravagant or unrealistic sums of money

Seek medical assessment as soon as possible. These types of behaviours are much clearer signs that someone needs to be checked out, particularly if they have been present for several weeks. They may be only a minor disturbance, but a mental illness such as a psychotic disorder may be developing.

MODULE 5



Make sure to emphasize that everyone has a personal responsibility to take action if a friend mentions thoughts of suicide. Young people should always share this information with a trusted adult - like a teacher, guidance counselor, coach, relative or parent - and never promise to keep the information secret.

Activity 3:

(10 mins.)

Support strategies*

Purpose:

- To provide students with strategies for supporting friends and others who are having trouble coping because of mental health problems or mental illness.

How-to:

- 1) Begin a discussion about the role that young people often play as supporters when they listen to their friends talk about their problems.

Ask students how they would like to be treated if they had a mental illness. Use the overhead as a starting point to encourage further discussion. Distribute photocopies of Activity 3 Support strategies and Recovery: What works? to each student. Read through the sheets with the class.

*Adapted from Lesson 4 of Coping - *MindMatters*.

Support Strategies -

Here are some strategies for supporting someone with a mental health problem/illness:

- Be supportive and understanding.
- Spend time with the person. Listen to him or her.
- Never underestimate the person's capacity to recover.
- Encourage the person to follow his or her treatment plan and to seek out support services. Offer to accompany them to appointments.
- Become informed about mental illness.
- Remember that even though your friend may be going through a hard time, they will recover. Stand by them.
- If you're planning an outing to the movies or the community centre, remember to ask your friend along. Keeping busy and staying in touch with friends will help your friend feel better, when they're ready.
- If you are a close friend or family member of someone who has a mental illness, make sure you get support as well. Crisis training, self-help and/or individual counseling will help you become a better support person.
- Put the person's life before your friendship. If you think the person needs help, especially if he or she mentions thoughts of suicide, don't keep it a secret – even if the person asked you to.

If a friend mentions thoughts of suicide or self harm, you **NEED** to tell his or her parents, a teacher, guidance counselor or someone else who can help. It's better to have a friend who's angry with you for a while than to keep their secret and live with knowing you could have helped, but remained quiet when your friend was in trouble.



Recovery – What helps people with mental illness get (and stay) better?

Recovery is an ongoing, slow process, and is different for each person. Research on recovery shows that there are a number of factors which people often mention are important:

- the presence of people who believe in and stand by the person who is in recovery.
- that person's ability to make their own choices about important things like treatment and housing.

Other factors that can support recovery include:

- Mutual support (self-help groups)
- Social opportunities (church groups; drop-in centres, volunteer work, participating in community life)
- Positive relationships (accepting and being accepted, family and friends and communicating with them in a positive way)
- Meaningful daily activity - Being able to work, go to school
- Medication (sticking with a treatment plan, working with doctors to find the best medications with the fewest side effects)
- Spirituality (involvement in a faith community or individual spiritual practice)
- inner healing capacity and inner peace (finding a sense of meaning and purpose, even in suffering)
- Personal growth and development (hobbies, self education, taking control of one's life, exercise, personal goal setting)
- Self awareness (self-monitoring, recognizing when to seek help, recognizing one's accomplishments and accepting and/or learning from one's failures)