

Mental Health: An Introduction

OCTOBER 2023



Founded in 2017 with core support from the Toronto Central LHIN, the Ministry Of Health, Sinai Health, and the University of Toronto

Mission

Create workable solutions to complex health challenges

Vision

All people living with dignity and health

More information

Visit our [website](#) OR [contact us](#)

We are a not-for-profit health and social care innovation lab

- Bring an equity-based population health approach to the health system
- Strong ground game based on a deep commitment to understanding and working with communities
- Scalable, transparent, non-proprietary solutions that are developed and tested with communities
- Bridge and broker between partners and across sectors to break down silos
- Flexible delivery model, drawing on in-house and external subject matter experts
- Diverse and experienced team that spans health care, health policy, public health, community-based research, and design

Land Acknowledgement

As Health Commons, we acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and sacred territories and lands we call home across what is now known as Canada. Health Commons is located in Tkaronto, now known as Toronto, which is on the traditional territory of many Nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, Anishinaabe, Chippewa, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. Tkaronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands, and is Dish With One Spoon Treaty Territory.

We recognize that for many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, relationship with the land is profoundly important to their sense of self and place. We are grateful for teachings that have been shared with us about how the land and waters heal and nurture by gifting the languages, stories, songs, ceremonies, and protocols that guide and sustain many First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities and Nations.

We carry tremendous privilege in being guests on these lands, and are serious about our responsibility to understand, reflect on, and then take meaningful action to improve our relationships to these lands and to the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who are the original stewards of these lands and who continue to host us here. We are committed to doing whatever we can and are invited to do alongside communities to create space for healing, reparation, and wellbeing for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples and the lands, skies, and waters that surround and nourish us.

Statement on Positionality

This training is meant to generate a broad understanding of how we conceptualize mental health and wellbeing within Health Commons, across the diverse communities we serve, and is not intended to directly represent one specific group of people. We acknowledge the content will not be relevant to every person in every instance, and that it can cause feelings of erasure when people don't see themselves represented in something.

The intersectionality that we all carry as people with different lived experiences, worldviews, contexts, needs, and priorities is expansive, and we do our best within Health Commons to inform these training resources based on our shared lived experiences within and across communities and, most importantly, based on what is shared with us from community members and partners. Our commitment is to share back what we know to be true, using the information that has been gifted to us and that we have gathered over time through participation in different places and spaces.

We're not perfect and there is always something more for us to know. If there is something here that stands out to you as missing or misrepresented, we are always open to receive this feedback, but please know that you are not required to carry that labour on our behalf. We are committed to continuous learning and unlearning, and to engaging in dialogue with people about their feedback and to learning and evolving resources together with humility, love, and respect.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the partners who
helped us create this toolkit:



Confidentiality & Respect

Recognizing the nature of this training session, we want to make sure everyone in this room feels safe:



RESPECT

We recognize that each of us have different experiences and come from different walks of life. Please be respectful of your colleagues and their experiences.



CONFIDENTIALITY

We ask that what is shared in this room, stays in this room.



“I” STATEMENTS

When sharing experiences and stories, please use “I” statements so we are not making generalizations. [For example, “I think”, “I experienced”]



SAFETY

Throughout this training we may discuss challenging topics, feel free to step out of the room if you feel triggered or need a break.



SIGNS

If you would like to step out for some space and are okay, please signal with a thumbs up. If you would like to access support, please signal with a thumbs down and we will get you support.



SUPPORT

We have a standby support stationed at the back of the room, if you need to speak to someone and require immediate support.

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What Are Mental Health & Mental Illness?



Mental Health and Mental Illness

Mental health is a concept similar to physical health.

Everyone has mental health. It refers to a state of well-being. Mental health includes our emotions, feelings of connection to others, our thoughts and feelings, and being able to manage life's highs and lows.

Mental illness refers to all diagnosable mental disorders.

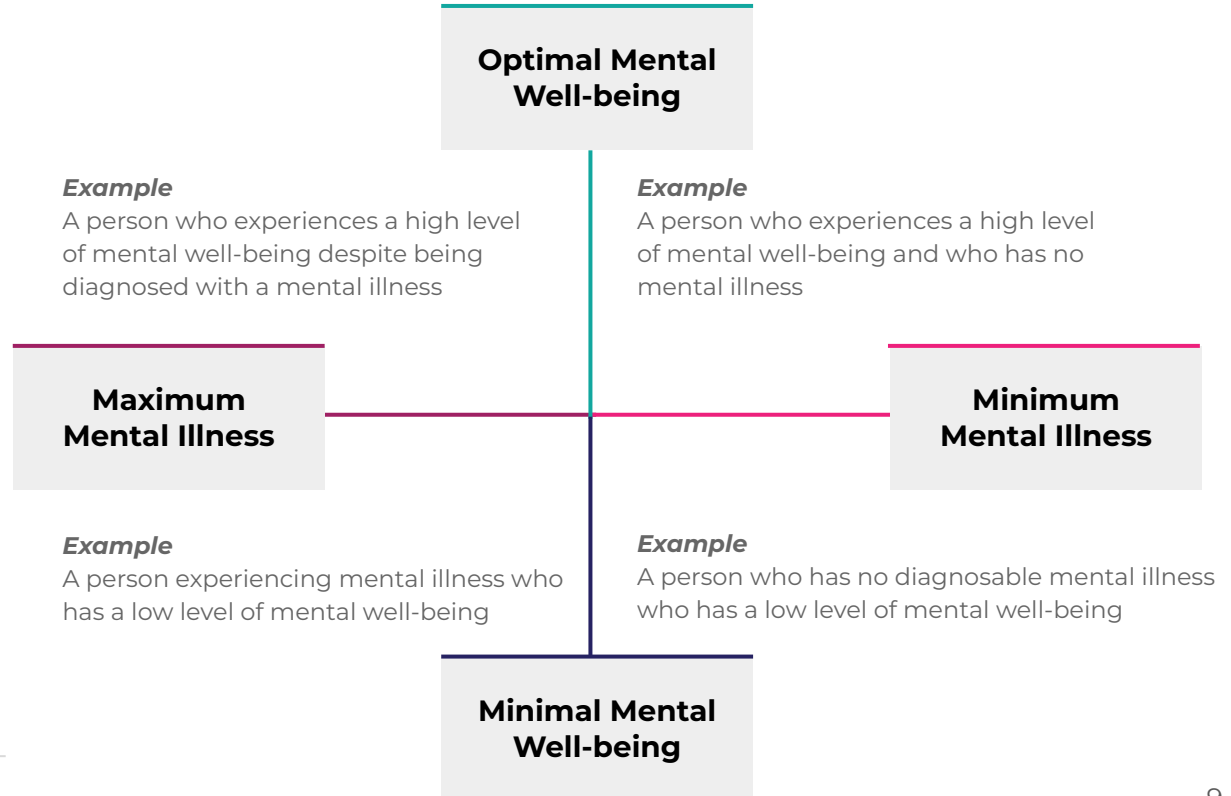


Diagram adapted from:

Together to Live: <http://www.togethertolive.ca/mental-health-continuum>

Causes of Mental Illness

➤ Mental illnesses are **caused by a complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors.**

➤ **Life events such as violence and trauma** during childhood or adulthood can give rise to mental health and substance use problems if supports for recovery are not available or sought.

➤ **Environmental factors play an important role** in our mental health: access to safe and affordable housing, meaningful education and employment, leisure activities, the support of a community, access to land and nature, freedom from violence, and good access to health care and mental health services all support good mental health.

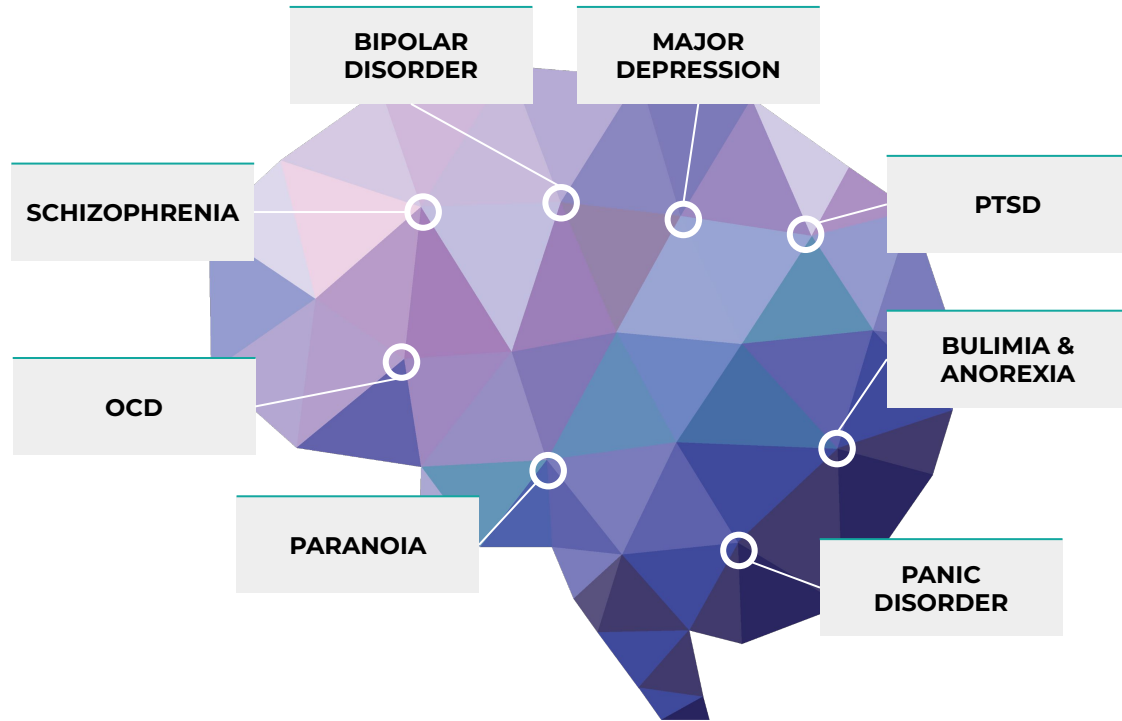
➤ Stigma and discrimination attached to mental illnesses and substance use problems present a serious barrier not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to access to employment, housing, and other basic necessities. **Stigma both creates and deepens social marginalization.**

➤ The symptoms of **mental illnesses can be treated and very often managed effectively;** with the right supports, people with mental illnesses can thrive.

Examples of Mental Illness

- Major depressive disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Eating disorders
- Substance-related disorders

Are you interested in learning more about mental illness? [CAMH has free courses](#) on different mental illnesses.



Adapted from the graphic
from [drugrehab.com](#)



Impact of Poor Mental Health or Mental Illness

Without the right supports, people with mental illness and substance use problems, their caregivers and their families can experience great suffering.

We need a robust mental health care system with a wide range of programs and services, including health promotion and wrap-around supports like housing and employment services, **to ensure that people receive the preventative care, treatment and supports they need to recover and thrive.**

- Mental illness and substance use are leading causes of disability in Canada
- Mental illness can cut 10 to 20 years from a person's life expectancy
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for people aged 15-24
- 67,000 deaths per year in Canada are attributable to substance use
- Disease burden of mental illness and substance use in Ontario is 1.5 times higher than all cancers put together

Mental Health and the pandemic

1 in 10 Canadians report that their mental health worsened “a lot” as a result of COVID-19. 1 in 5 Canadians aged 18+ screened positive for a minimum 1 of 3 mental health challenges:

- Major depressive disorder (MDD)
- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

During the pandemic, 38% of Canadians reported experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation and there is a 4 times higher prevalence of MDD, GAD, and PTSD compared to those who did not experience loneliness.

- 21% ages 18-34 and 25% ages 35-54 increased their alcohol consumption



The Social Determinants of Mental Health



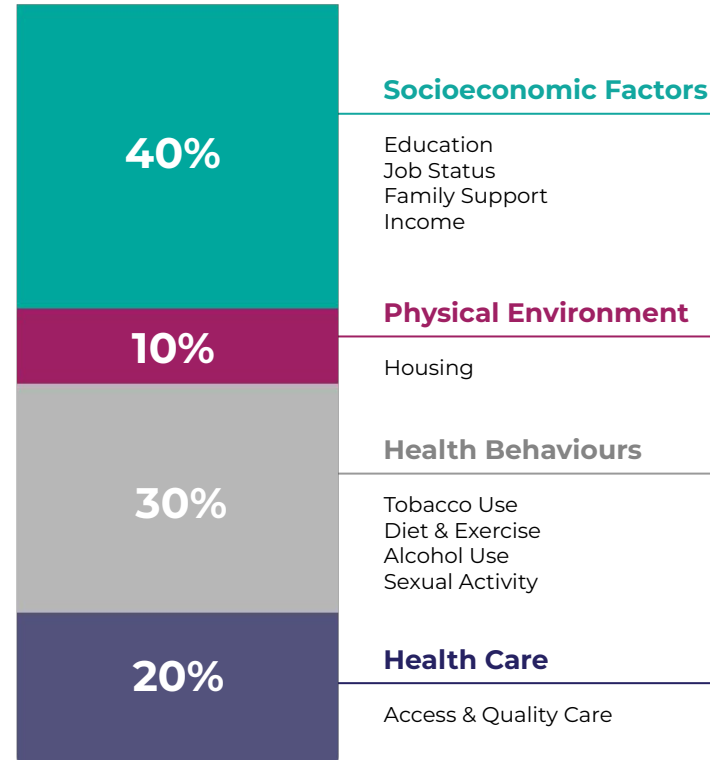
The Social Determinants of Health

Do you believe that health inequities are inevitable?

“Studies show that 40% of an individual's health is determined by socio-economic factors such as education, occupation, or income. 30% is determined by health behaviors such as diet, exercise, or substance use. 10% is determined by one's physical environment, such as their community, house, or workplace. Finally, only 20% is determined by their access to healthcare and the quality of that care.”



CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO



What are the Social Determinants of Health?

The Government of Canada defines the **determinants of health** as a “range of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that determine individual and population health”. The Social Determinants of Health are the conditions in which we live and work. These conditions include...

Economic Stability

Income, employment, job security, working conditions, housing, food security, social safety net

Social Context

Gender, racism, discrimination, ableism, aboriginal status, citizenship, status, social protection, social exclusion, structural conflict, culture, early childhood

Education

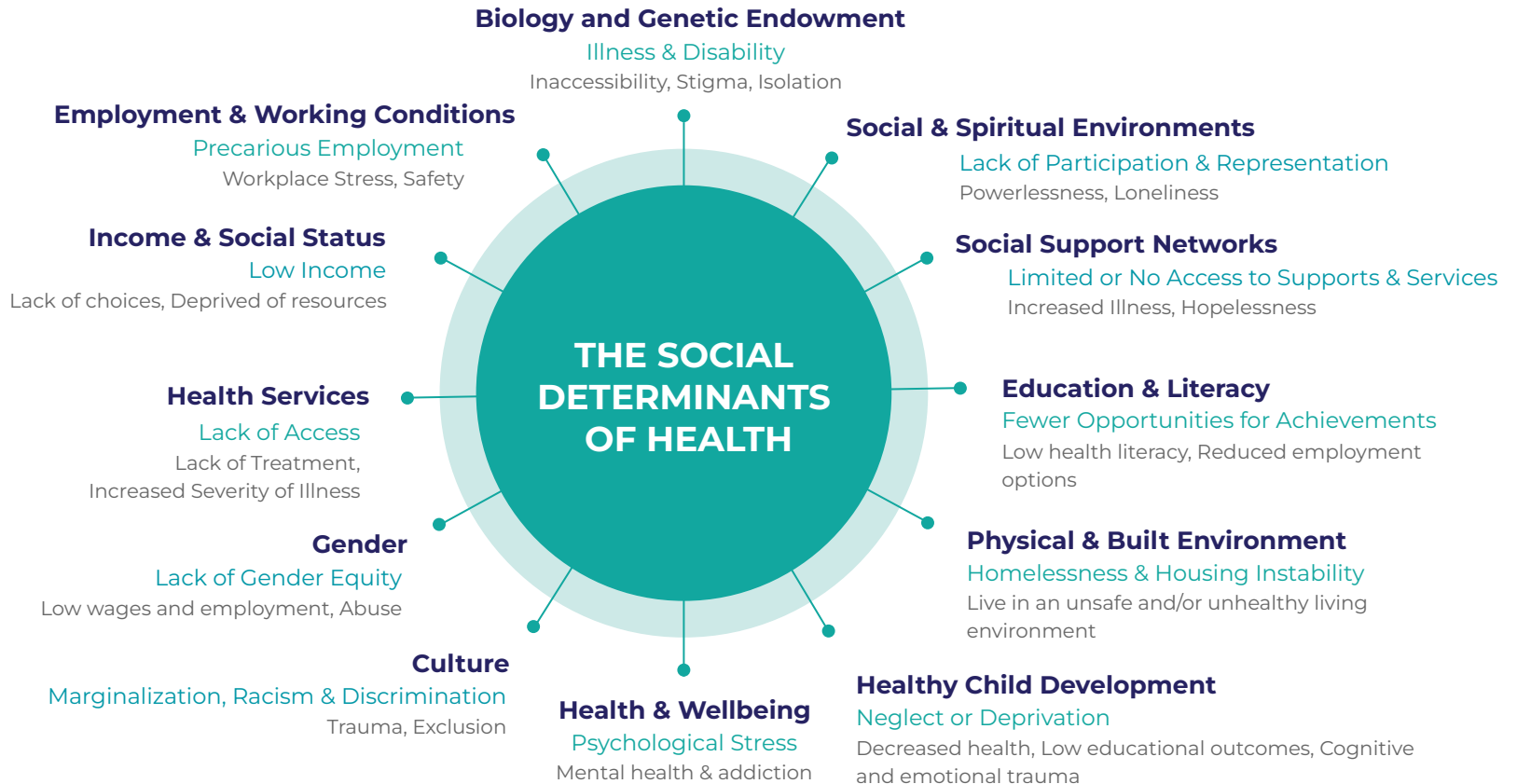
Education, literacy, health literacy

Environment

Basic amenities, physical environment, sanitation, water, pollution, contamination

Health Care

Access to affordable health services of decent quality



Take a look the graphic above (adapted from a graphic created by United Way Halifax) to understand the Social Determinants of Health in more detail

How the Social Determinants Impact Our Mental Health

When our approach to achieving health is limited to individual lifestyle and making “healthy choices” we take an individual perspective.

Our own “healthy choices” are structured and influenced by where we live, grow and work. Your race, gender, disability, and citizenship status can influence what or if you can work, where you will likely live, how safe your neighbourhood is, how safe your job is, how much money you will make, and more. These in turn will impact whether or not you are able to live in a home or on the street, what food you can access, the quality of life you can provide your children and what schools they go to.

The Social Determinants of Health can influence your stress levels, exposure to psychological trauma, and physical injury. They define who has access to education, medical facilities and a clean environment. They determine who has power, resources, information and a voice in society.

Building Resilience at the Individual & System Level

Understanding the Social Determinants of Health enables us to recognize that work cannot only be done on the individual level.

We must think about how we might better equip our families, communities, organizations and government to better respond to mental health.

What world would you like to see?

Individuals

Families

Communities

Organisations

Governments

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Fulfilment & contribution

Promote mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, personal growth, purpose & civic contribution.

Psychological skills

Foster mental health literacy, social and emotional competence, self-care and resilience & encourage help-giving and help-seeking for stress, psychological distress or suicidal ideation.

Healthy behaviours

Encourage regular physical activity, high quality diet, good sleep hygiene.

Supports and connections

Promote secure attachment, positive parenting, social support, social participation and a sense of belonging.

Safety

Ensure freedom from child abuse, gendered violence, racism & discrimination.

Material Basics

Ensure equitable access to food, adequate income, education, work, stable housing, and holistic health care.

The Environment & Culture

Protect the environment and support people to speak their language and practice their language and their culture.

Stigma & Barriers to Mental Health Support

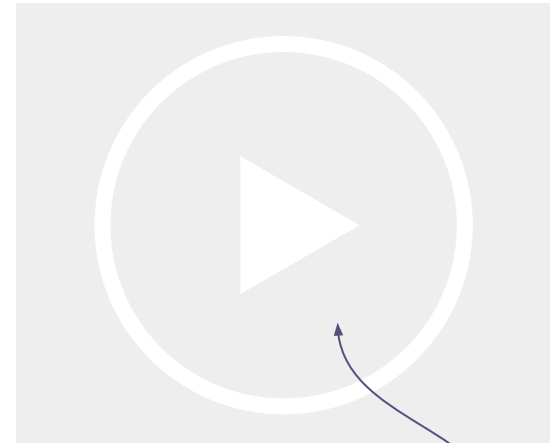


What is stigma?

Stigma is when a person is viewed in a negative way due to their illness. It can lead to discrimination, ranging from subtle remarks to violent behaviour.

Harmful effects of stigma and discrimination:

- Reduced hope
- Lower self-esteem
- Increased psychiatric problems
- Difficulties with social relationships
- Reduced likelihood of staying in treatment
- Increased difficulties at work



Click here to listen to Annalisa from
CMHA-Peel Dufferin talk about stigma

Types of stigma

Public stigma

This occurs when the public endorses negative stereotypes and prejudices, resulting in discrimination against people who have mental illness.

Self stigma

This occurs when a person with a mental illness internalizes public stigma.

Perceived stigma

This is the belief that others have negative cognitions about people with mental illness.

Associative stigma

This occurs when the effects of stigma are extended to someone linked to a person with a mental illness.

Structural stigma

This occurs when institutional policies or other social structures create fewer opportunities for those with mental illness.

Label avoidance

This occurs when a person chooses not to seek mental health treatment to avoid being associated with stigma.

Healthcare stigma

This occurs any time a health care professional allows stereotypes and prejudices about mental illness to negatively impact a patient's care.

What does stigma look like in our community?

Activity

What are some examples of stigma in our community? What have we heard when people talk about mental health? How does our community try to address mental health challenges?

Your Role in Providing Support



Early warning signs

- A dramatic change in appearance
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Excessive fear, anxiety or worry. Constantly feeling overwhelmed.
- Physical upsets
- Elevated mood
- Isolation, withdrawal or feelings of disconnection
- Decline in school or work performance
- Increase in risky or reckless behaviours or unusual behaviour
- Growing inability to cope with stressors
- Disturbances in sleep and appetite



What role can you play?

As a community health ambassador (CHA), our role is to help equity seeking communities' access resources. Community health ambassadors are uniquely positioned to create connections through trusted relationships. In this space, the CHA role has some parameters: you cannot assess, diagnose or treat issues you see in the community. Therefore, when working in the community, it is important to ***inform rather than direct people to services.***

Providing supports can be helpful when we:

- Provide a judgement-free overview of the types of services available so community members may make informed decisions
- Answer questions about available community resources and services, such as locations, hours of operation, eligibility, contact information, etc.
- Refer local residents to food, housing, employment programs, etc., that meet their needs. Where possible, make 'warm referrals' by connecting directly with agency staff to introduce the local resident (after obtaining their consent).

Three ways you can help someone

1

Validate, Normalize & Reflect

Acknowledge their emotions and normalize their experience. Reassure them they are not alone. Focus on the emotions, not the situation.

It sounds like you were angry...
It's normal to feel this way...
You are not alone...

2

Clarify, paraphrase & Summarize

Ask open-ended questions and briefly paraphrase and summarize what they have said to clarify and show that you are listening intently.

I hear you saying that...
It sounds like...






3

Encourage access to supports

Acknowledge their strength for sharing and re-state your support and empathy. Ask them what types of supports they want or need

I am here for you...
How would you like me to help you?

Principles to follow

-  **Active listening and good body language are essential.** Your posture speaks louder than your words. Show the person you are listening by facing them, looking at them, and leaning in to the conversation.
-  **Confidentiality is key to building trust.** In all cases except when a person may be a harm to themselves or others, you must keep what they share with you confidential.
-  **Empathy is crucial.** Resist the urge to “solve” problems. Sometimes, all someone needs is to have another person see them, listen to them, and be with them through their pain.
-  **People may decline your offer to support them with resources.** Respect their choices and autonomy but keep the door open. You can offer to write resources on a paper or to talk when they are ready.
-  **Meet the person at their level.** If they are sitting, sit with them. If you are speaking with a child, try to kneel down if you are able.

Helpful videos

How do you help a grieving friend?

Watch this video to learn the one thing that will help you support your friends in the most helpful and effective ways. She shares, you can't cheer someone up by telling them to look on the bright side, or by giving them advice. It just doesn't work. It seems counterintuitive, but the way to help someone is to acknowledge their pain and let it exist.

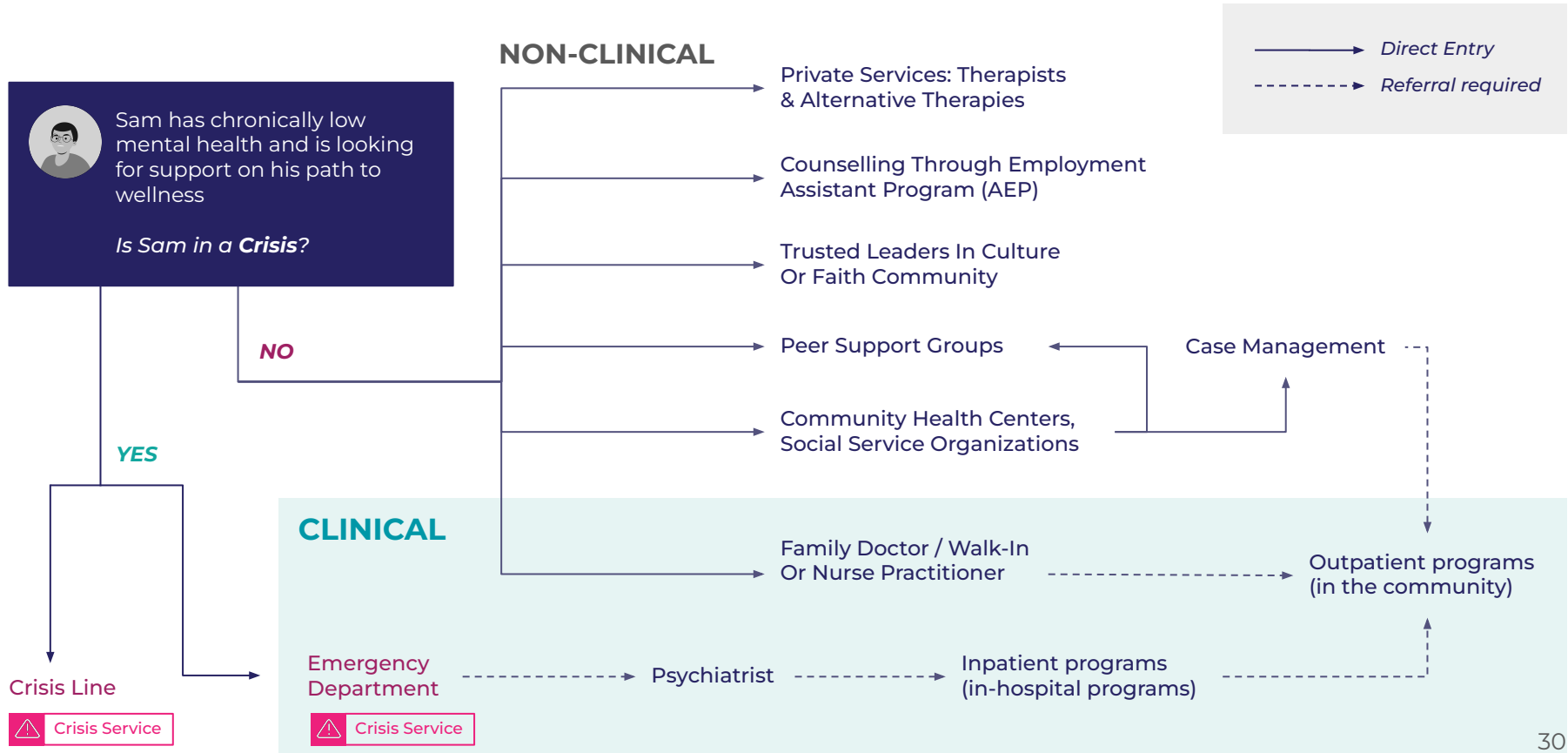


Brene Brown on Empathy

Watch Brene Brown talk about the four components of empathy; recognizing that a person's perspective is their truth, staying out of judgment, recognizing emotion in others and communicating back. Empathy drives connection, sympathy drives disconnection.



Pathways for mental health support



Some considerations when navigating supports



The pathway outcomes are not guaranteed. The pathways are presented in ideal conditions. Many individuals may not receive appropriate referrals, or any referrals at all. They may be unable to find services in their language or ones sensitive to their culture, age, race or sexual identity. Some services are inaccessible or have long waitlists. Other times, individuals may not meet the eligibility criteria.



Navigating mental health services can be easier when individuals have a friend, family member or community ambassador to advocate for them. Advocacy and support can be providing interpretation or transportation, searching for services, and following up with mental health providers to ensure the individual receives appropriate care.



Exploring many different options is often helpful. Mental health services are often complementary to one another. For example, you may suggest someone to see their family doctor for assessment and treatment, a registered psychotherapist for therapy, a peer support group for building a support network, a faith leader for spiritual support and a crisis line in case they feel distressed.

Role Play: How Will You Respond?



Hi, I'm Amandeep. I'm new to Canada and things have been really stressful since we moved here. I have no support here. I can't even find a job in my field. I feel worthless. I can barely sleep or eat because I'm so stressed. Sometimes, I struggle to get out of bed...what's the point?



Hey I'm Joe. I've had depression for 5 years. Last month my brother said he's really worried about me. He said I should get help but I don't know where to go. When I brought it up to my doctor, he just increased my dose. I don't know what else to do!



Hi, I'm Taylor. I'm not doing well in school. I'm scared to tell my parents I am failing math. I just can't focus. My mental health is spiraling. Sometimes, I just want my life to end. Everything is just so hard, why even try?



Hi, I'm Farah. Last month, I had a miscarriage. It's been very hard for me to talk about it with my friends and family. Its very uncomfortable having this conversation with the people I know. I just wish I could talk about it to someone who understands.

Learning More About Resources & Referrals



In this deck...

- Asset mapping tool
- A repository of services and supports

Other resources...

- [How to support someone who chooses not to seek help](#)
- [Supporting family members](#)

Building Resilience



The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma or significant stress.

- Nurture a positive narrative about yourself
- Set realistic goals and take action
- Reach out for help and make connections
- Schedule positive self care
 - Exercise, sleep and eat well
- Don't be afraid of failure. We all make mistakes
 - Accept that change is part of life
- Practice self compassion. Talk to yourself the way you would a friend
- Build emotional regulation skills

Self-care & Resilience

Our mental health journeys are never linear. Consistent self care will help.

Eating my favorite food

Reading a book

Painting

Listening to music

Gardening

Sitting in nature

Enjoying the sun

Taking a long bath

Cooking

Going to therapy

Go to the dentist

Turning off devices

Journaling and writing

Exercising

Having breakfast

Yoga

Dancing

Asking for help

Meditating

Decluttering

Dressing up

Asking for a massage

Drawing

Sleeping for 8 hours

Volunteering

Calling a friend

Listening to my body

Practicing gratitude

Watching a movie

Cuddling with my cats

Available Trainings

Considering more training?

Here are some further trainings you might want to consider if you would like to learn more.

- › [Mental Health First Aid](#)
- › [De-escalating Potentially Violent Situations](#)
- › [Columbia Suicidality Rating Scale](#)
- › [START Suicide Prevention](#) or [Applied Suicide Intervention skills training](#)
- › [Recovery-based assessment](#)

Talking to a child about mental health

Questions to ask your child

- What things are you finding hardest?
- Is there anything you want to talk about?
- When was the last time you were very happy?
- What makes you feel calm?
- How can you best cope with things that are hard for you?
- When is a time you feel sad?
- What difficulties are you having with?
- What can I do to help?
- Do you have any worries about the coronavirus?
- When is the best time for you to feel like you can have your own space?
- What have you enjoyed doing?
- What things would you like to do in the future?
- Would it be helpful if we printed such the suggestions?
- How do you feel about things changing?
- Has it ever felt about coping at home?
- What are you worried about you can't do or cope with?
- Can you think of anything that you can do or have?

Talking to a friend about their mental health

Worried About Your Friend?

If you've noticed someone is showing signs of a mental or substance use disorder, that's not always your friend's fault. It's not your responsibility, but it is your responsibility to reach out and offer support.

Do you have any of these common questions? You can use the card to a judgment-free space where they'll feel safe, supported, and listened to.

- I've been worried about you. I've noticed you're stressed, down, or acting differently. How are you doing? How are you feeling about things? How are you coping?
- I care about you and want to make sure you're okay. If you ever think about hurting yourself, you know you can come to me, right?
- If you don't feel comfortable talking to me, is there someone else you'd prefer to talk to, like your parents, siblings, or someone else who comes over?
- Do you know someone who's had an experience like yours? If you don't, can they put you in touch with someone to talk to?
- It seems like you are going through a difficult time, is there anything I can do to help?
- I want to be here for you. Do you need to talk about it?

You can make a big difference simply by letting your friend know you're there. Reaching your friend that asking for help is a normal part of life, and they can find support at www.samhsa.gov or by calling 1-800-622-6234 or 202-462-4000.

SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | 1-800-622-6234 | www.samhsa.gov

Talking to someone about your mental health

OFF THE RADAR: A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER STOPS SOCIALIZING

Change in appearance, someone who stops talking, or someone who stops socializing may be a sign of a mental health issue. Social media is a place to find support and change their social media profile picture to show you're still connected.

WHAT TO DO

- They might be able to help like you're having to go to a lot of effort. Be patient.
- Ask them what's going on, and what you can do to help them. Don't let things from your own mind get in the way.
- Send a private message asking how they are doing or trying to reach out to them.

IF SOMEONE DOES OPEN UP

- Don't give them the full story of your problem, just how you're feeling.
- Don't treat them any differently, being doing the same as you would for a friend.
- It's important to be an expert in all of the answers. A specific condition, do some research, and if they need further support, direct them to the SAMHSA or their GP.

START THE CONVERSATION

Mental health problems can start at an early age. It's not always obvious, but it's important to start a conversation. There's no shame in asking for help.

WHAT TO DO

- Talking about a family friend, relative or celebrity can be a good way to start a conversation.
- It's okay to ask for help rather than face them from behind a friend's screen, speak with your GP, or a professional in the area.
- Ask open questions (How are you doing?) rather than closed questions (Are you okay?).

FINE TO TALK

- If you feel like talking to someone and they're not, it's okay to ask them to talk. The result of a conversation is usually a positive one. It will be a good one. They may not be able to help you, but you can get help from the Samaritans or your GP. It's important to be honest with someone who will be able to help you. You can get help from the Samaritans or your GP.

Talking to someone about their mental health

CONVERSATION STARTERS

It can sometimes be difficult to know what to say to someone feeling anxious. Here are a few questions you can ask family and friends to start a conversation with friends and family.

- Is there anything you're worried about? Is there anything I can do to help?
- It sounds like things are hard for you at the moment. How are you coping?
- Are you looking for advice or would you rather I just listen?
- Would you like to do something to help take your mind off things? We could go for a walk?

More resources available at www.kicsters.co.uk/mentalhealth

SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | 1-800-622-6234 | www.samhsa.gov



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