

## Providing Mental Wellness Support: The Basics

Mental health or mental wellness is the capacity of every individual to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance their ability to enjoy life and deal with challenges (Public Health Agency of Canada).

Just like physical health, we all have mental health. Mental health and physical health are deeply intertwined (think about a time you were physically unwell and how this impacted your mental health and vice versa).

A community approach to mental wellness empowers community members to be informed, comfortable and confident with discussing mental health and knowing where supports are available. The more folks who are educated and empowered, the safer our communities can become.

### How to Help: RECOGNIZE -> RESPOND -> REFER

**RECOGNIZE:** Look for signs that community members are struggling. Be proactive and initiate conversations: *“I’ve noticed that you haven’t been around a lot lately / are looking a bit blue / have expressed frustration with life. Is everything ok? Would you like to talk?”*

TIPS:

- Focus your concerns on objective observations you have had about the person (noticeable changes in their words, actions, body language).
- Consider the environment before engaging with someone. Is it private? Do you have the time and energy required?
- Check-in with friends regularly when you know they are going through big life changes (e.g., breakups or other losses).

**RESPOND:** Show the person you care by listening deeply, displaying open body language and having a non-judgmental & compassionate tone.

TIPS:

- Believe and validate their experience: *“Thank you for sharing this with me. That sounds very challenging. It’s super understandable that you are feeling this way.”*
- Check your understanding of the situation: *“It sounds like \_\_\_\_\_ is happening and you are feeling \_\_\_\_\_. Is this correct?”*
- Don’t minimize the problems. Don’t offer advice or solutions unless the person requests it. Be mindful to not redirect the conversation to be about something similar you have experienced.
- Just being with someone during difficult times can be incredibly supportive and therapeutic. For more info on empathy, look up Brene Brown’s empathy video.
- Key messages to get across: *“You’re not alone. This isn’t your fault. Help is available”.*

**REFER:** Discuss and encourage the person to seek professional and other supports.

**RESOURCES:**

Counsellors, Doctors, Community Services agencies, Interior Health (MH&SU), spiritual leaders, 12-Step Fellowships. Crisis lines (1-888-353-2273 & 1-800-SUICIDE)

**TIPS:**

- Try to normalize seeking help.
- Offer to accompany the person to set up their first appointment.
- If they aren't interested in seeking support right now, that's ok. Check back with them in the near future. ***"I can tell you aren't interested in talking about this right now (or seeking professional support). I want you to know that if you would like to talk in the future, I'll be there"***.

**Remember to take care of yourself.** Supporting someone dealing with mental health challenges can be draining and distressing for the helper. Take care of yourself after. Confidentially share your feelings and concerns with someone else (leave names out). Get enough exercise, nutrition and sleep. Seek support if you find yourself continuing to think about the person and situation.

**LANGUAGE MATTERS**

Choice of language can contribute to feelings of shame & stigma or it can show compassion.

<b>What not to say</b>	<b>Why not to say it</b>	<b>What to say instead</b>
Committed Suicide	Has the connotation of a crime and judgement.	Died by suicide. Took their own life.
Unsuccessful Suicide Attempt	Conveys judgement about the person's capacity.	Attempted Suicide
Depressed Person or Suffers from Depression	Essentializes the person in a negative light.	Person lives with depression.
Used to be an addict	Stigmatizing	Is in recovery

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