



Mental health awareness

Reflection guide

RIGHTS RESERVED. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without a written [or electronic notice] permission from the author.

Contents

Overview	5
Key takeaways	5
Main points:.....	5
Learning insights:.....	6
What areas do I need to improve on?	6
My action plan:.....	7
Job aids or activity materials	8
What is optimal mental health?	8
The dual mental health continuum	8
Temporary mental health problems	9
Mental disorders	9
The reality of mental disorders	9
Common mental disorders	10
The stigma surrounding mental disorders	10
What you can do to help when a colleague shares	11
Approaching a colleague who is showing signs of distress	11
Building a bridge to ongoing support.....	12
On the job	12
Personal resources.....	12
In the community	12

Conclusion 12

Overview

Objectives:

- Understand the continuum of mental health
- Identify the impact that mental health issues can have on a team member
- Develop best practices for supporting others who may be struggling with a mental health concern (or for helping ourselves)

Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

Job aids or activity materials

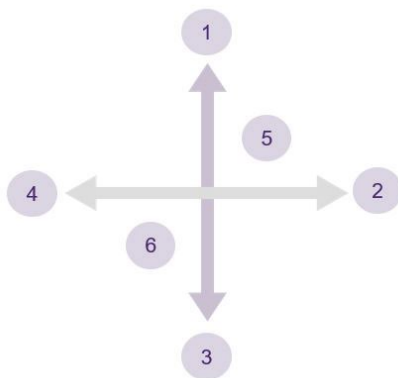
What is optimal mental health?

According to Health Canada, being Mentally Healthy means...

The capacity to feel, think and act in ways that enhance one's ability to enjoy life and deal with challenges.

- We feel well
- We can cope with stress
- We can achieve our personal goals
- It's more than the absence of illness or disease

The dual mental health continuum



1. Optimal mental health – “flourishing”
2. No mental illness symptoms
3. Poor mental health – “languishing”
4. Mental illness with symptoms
5. It's possible to have a mental health illness and still experience well-being
6. It's possible to experience poor mental health without a mental health illness

Temporary mental health problems

Extraordinary stressors that temporarily affect mental health and quality of life:

- Death or serious illness of a loved one
- Natural disaster
- Stressful changes at work
- Relationship struggles

Temporary mental health problems are often resolved through:

- Identifying the source of stress
- Personal coping strategies (exercise, improved sleep, self-care)
- Seeking support from family and friends
- Spiritual connection
- Professional support as needed

Mental disorders

Mental disorders are a persistent and serious disturbance in behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that are severe enough to affect day-to-day functioning

Mental disorders are complex and can be influenced by a variety of risk factors:

- Genetics
- Brain chemistry – an imbalance of natural brain chemicals
- Traumatic brain injury – concussion, skull fractures
- Exposure to trauma and chronic stress
- Unhealthy habits – sleep, diet, alcohol/drug abuse

The reality of mental disorders

- In any given year, 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental health or substance use disorder (Canadian Medical Association & Canadian Psychiatric Association, 2016)
- By the age of 40, 30% of Canadians will have or have had a mental illness (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2021)
- Depression and anxiety cost the Canadian economy almost \$50 billion a year in lost productivity (Conference Board of Canada, 2016)
- On any given week, at least 500,000 employed Canadians are unable to work due to mental health challenges (Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, 2018)

Common mental disorders

1. Major Depression – a disorder defined by persistent feelings of sadness and a loss of interest in activities that causes significant impairment in daily life (e.g., concentration, sleep, appetite, self-esteem).
2. Generalized Anxiety – a disorder defined by persistent and excessive worry about a variety of everyday life events, causing significant impairment in daily life (e.g., inability to relax, irritability, disrupted sleep, fatigue).
3. Substance Use Disorder - a medical term now used instead of “addiction” or “dependence” ranging from mild to severe. Generally defined by continued use of alcohol / drugs despite harmful consequences (health, relationship, school / work, legal), substance use disorders can involve physical dependence (e.g., increased tolerance and/or withdrawals when use is discontinued) and psychological dependence (e.g., urges and cravings to use)
4. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder – a disorder that can develop in response to exposure to a shocking or dangerous event, resulting in a variety of symptoms ranging from nightmares / unwanted memories, insomnia, irritability, and social isolation.
5. Adjustment Disorder - a shorter term condition in response to a stressful or unexpected event (e.g., breakup of a relationship, financial difficulty) in which the individual experiencing more stress than expected, impacting quality of daily life.

The stigma surrounding mental disorders

As a colleague, you can help to tear down stigma and encourage team members to obtain professional help:

- Only 1/3 of those who need mental health services in Canada actually receive them (Statistics Canada)
 - 44% of employees and 50% of manager’s report that their career options would be limited if the workplace were aware of a mental health issue (Lifeworks Mental Health Index 2021)
1. Self-stigma: shame, denial, and fear are typical reactions of someone with mental health challenges

2. Public: there is bias against people living with mental illness which leads to marginalization and discrimination
3. Associative: Close friends or family encounter shame and discrimination
4. Structural: Inequality is woven into policies and practices of institutional systems that constrain opportunities, resources, and wellbeing for stigmatized populations

What you can do to help when a colleague shares

- Actively listen
- Express empathy
- Suspend judgment
- Discuss / keep confidentiality
- Discuss solutions only after statements of understanding
- Build a bridge to resources – no 'hard sell'
- Agree on a follow up get-together

Approaching a colleague who is showing signs of distress

What does a supportive colleague do?

- Plan how you will begin the conversation
- Ask for permission to give feedback
- Provide facts and examples of observed behaviour and the impact on others
- Use "I" statements to explain your concern - you want to help
- Listen, express empathy and be supportive
- Reinforce your confidentiality
- Use statements rather than questions
- Respect boundaries
- Suspend judgment
- After understanding, build a bridge to professional resources

Building a bridge to ongoing support

On the job

- Leader
- Team members
- HR partner
- EAP

Personal resources

- Family
- Friends
- General practitioner
- Therapist

In the community

- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Mood Disorders Society
- Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)

Conclusion

- Supporting Mental Health issues in the workplace is as important as managing any other type of disorder/injury/trauma
- We do not need to be a specialist or a medical expert - as compassionate colleagues, we can support each other during difficult times
- Remember your role (what it is and what it isn't)
- Protect confidentiality
- Suspend judgment