



Parent/Caregiver Handout

INTRODUCTION REVIEW

We all want good mental health for ourselves, our children, and those we care about. Mental health is a resource that can help us to flourish and enjoy life, even when challenges arise. When we are mentally healthy, we are able to feel, think, and act in ways that help us to feel strong, find meaning, and to seek support in tough times. Children and young people can learn ways to maintain good mental health, and to identify signs that might indicate that they are having difficulty in this area. They can also learn about mental illnesses that can occur and how to get help when problems with thinking, mood, or actions come and stay.

Students across the province have told us that they want to learn more about mental health and mental illness, and they want to learn about it at school ([#HearNowON 2019 report](#)). We believe that providing reliable and evidence-informed mental health information at school can help to encourage good habits for wellness, and may help to reduce barriers for students who may need support. When students learn together at school about mental health, it normalizes the experience of distress and help-seeking, and may support early intervention for those who may be struggling. It is our hope that providing you with some of the information your teen will be learning about in school, will open up conversations about mental health at your home/dwelling.

MH LIT: Student Mental Health in Action is a series of four 45-minute lessons about mental health and well-being for secondary school students. It can be delivered by classroom teachers and has been developed by School Mental Health Ontario with input from educators, students, and mental health professionals.

All of the lessons will follow a similar format. They introduce some new information, provide activities to help reinforce learning, and review the need to care for one's self, as well as the resources available should anyone need extra support.

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 1

This first lesson shares some facts about mental health and about mental illness. Some of the key messages are included here so that you might both know what teens are learning and use this information to engage in some discussion with your teen about mental health and well-being:

- ▶ We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health.
- ▶ Mental health and well-being are two separate, but connected ideas.
- ▶ We can have a mental illness, and be mentally well, or unwell.
- ▶ We can also have poor mental well-being without having a mental illness.
- ▶ With medication, therapy, lifestyle changes, you can still be mentally healthy.

Think of having diabetes. It is a chronic illness, but with medication and lifestyle changes, you can still be physical healthy. The same can be true for a mental illness, such as depression. Students learn about mental health and mental illness from this “dual continuum” perspective.



Caring for ourselves: The Student MH LIT lessons are kept at a general level. However, sometimes talking about mental health can give rise to strong feelings. You may want to check in with your teen to see if they want to talk about what they learned, and to encourage them to participate in some wellness activities. Personal wellness includes taking time to do things we enjoy and that make us feel a sense of well-being.

Additional support: For a few students, talking about mental health can bring up more difficult feelings (e.g., overwhelmed, anxious, sad). As part of every lesson, your teen's teacher will discuss how and where students can access both informal supports, such as trusted adults, as well as more formal supports, such as community professionals, or helplines.

Did you know?



Taking care of our physical health can help with our mental health! Spending time outdoors, healthy movement, and getting enough sleep can help young people to feel more mentally well.

70%

About 70% of people tell us that their mental health concerns first appeared when they were children or youth.



Feeling sad or worried about a difficult situation is not the same as having a mental illness.

For example, many young people have felt more distressed than usual during the pandemic. A mental illness is a condition that includes significant distress, over a period of weeks, and is associated with changes in thinking, feeling or actions.



Each year 1 in 5 Canadian children and youth experience a significant mental health problem. That means in the average classroom, there will be several students who are struggling with their mental health who could benefit from support.



There are a range of effective treatment options available for mental illness. No one treatment will work for every person, so it is important to find the right fit.

HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT YOUR TEEN'S LEARNING IN THESE LESSONS?

Continue the conversation at home or at your dwelling! Talking about mental health as a family is a wonderful way to extend the learning. Ask your teen about what they learned. Consider checking out additional resources on-line from reputable sources.

Here are some conversation starters:

- ▶ Can you explain to me what is the difference between mental health and mental illness?
- ▶ What did you learn about how to take care of your mental health? *You might consider making a list with your teen of things that provide them with comfort, a sense of calm, feelings of joy, etc.*
- ▶ Has the pandemic affected any of the ways you care for your mental health? If so, what other activities could you do instead?
- ▶ What are some free resources young people can contact if they need mental health support?



RESOURCES FOR PARENT / CAREGIVER LEARNING:

While students learn about mental health, you can learn about mental health, too! Here are some resources for parents/caregivers to get you started.

CMHO Family Care Centre <https://cmho.org/familycarecentre>

CMHA Ontario <https://ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/child-and-youth-mental-health>

AboutKidsHealth Resource Hub <https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/mentalhealth>

Mental health and well-being <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/about-mental-health.html>

School Mental Health Ontario <https://smho-smsso.ca/covid-19/parents-and-families>

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

You might consider cutting this out and putting on your fridge or another easily accessible family space.

Find help in your community through <https://cmho.org/findhelp>

Kids Help Phone

Call: 1-800-668-6868

Text: CONNECT to 686868

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line

Call: 1-855-242-3310

Black Youth Helpline

Call: 416-285-9944 or toll-free 1-833-294-8650

LGBT YouthLine

Text: 647-694-4275

Trans Lifeline

Call: 877-330-6366



MH LIT Student
Mental Health
in Action

SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS / CAREGIVERS:

Supports are also available for adults. If you feel you could benefit from support for your own mental health and well-being, connect with:

- ▶ Your family doctor
- ▶ Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), should one be available to you
- ▶ [Mental Health & Addiction Treatment Services](#) | Connex Ontario
Also available at 1-866-531-2600
- ▶ [Get medical advice: Telehealth Ontario](#) | Ontario.ca
Also available at 1-866-797-0000
- ▶ [Wellness Together Canada | Home](#) (portal.gs)
- ▶ [Ontario 211 | Community and Social Services Help Line](#) (211ontario.ca)

If you have questions about the lessons, please reach out to your teen's teacher or principal/vice-principal. Your school is there to help.

