



Parent/Caregiver Handout

INTRODUCTION

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.

The first two lessons in the series focus on increasing students' understanding of basic mental health and mental illness information, and signs of students' own mental health and healthy strategies to support it.

OVERVIEW OF LESSON 3

This lesson explores where to find mental health support and how to connect with it. School Mental Health Ontario was proud to partner with [Kids Help Phone](#) in its development. Content covered in this lesson includes:

1. How to identify when mental health support might be needed

- ▶ Students learn a good rule of thumb: if they notice a change in how they think, feel, or act that lasts more than two weeks and gets in the way of what they need to do and their enjoyment of their life, it is probably time to connect with an adult who can help.
- ▶ If students are not sure if they need support, it is suggested that they talk to a trusted adult or connect to Kids Help Phone to see if getting support help might be a good idea.

2. Why some people hesitate or do not seek mental health support, even when they need it

- ▶ Students learn about stigma. For example, students may avoid asking for support because they aren't sure who will find out or feel afraid that people might think less of them.
- ▶ There can also be negative and incorrect stereotypes about those with mental illness that can keep students from getting the support that they need.
- ▶ Students have a role to play in breaking this cycle of stigma and learn that asking for support is an important skill to have and use.



3. How to ask for support

- ▶ Students practice finding ways to ask for support. Conversation starters can be broad like, “I’m not feeling like myself, do you have a minute to talk?” or more specific like, “I’m feeling really worried all the time and I think I might need some support with that.”

4. Where to find support

- ▶ Students identify people and places they can turn to when needed. The supports available through Kids Help Phone (a free national support service available 24/7) are highlighted.
- ▶ Sometimes students will need urgent professional support like they might find at a hospital, but often support can come from a mental health professional at school or in the community (like a social worker or psychologist), a cultural or faith leader, a knowledge keeper, or a family member/caregiver, coach, or other caring adult. Support can come in many forms.

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

Continue the conversation at your home/dwelling! Talking about mental health with your teen is a great way to share information, reduce stigma, and support everyone’s mental health. Ask your teen about what they learned. Here are some conversation starters:

- ▶ What are some ways to start the conversation when you need support for your mental health?
- ▶ How can you tell the difference between “everyday stress” and when there might be a bigger issue? As your parent/caregiver, how could I tell? What should I look for?
- ▶ Why do you think there is stigma about something that so many people struggle with? Are there things we/I can do or not do as a family/caregiver to make it easier to talk about mental health? (Review materials before sharing with your teen)
- ▶ Who can you go to when you are feeling distressed? Who is in your circle of support? Is there someone at school, in our community (a caregiver or ally), or in the family that you would feel comfortable with?

Reassure your teen that you are there for them and will help them find the support they need, and that you know having a wide circle of support is important as they may wish to speak to different people at different times.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP IF MY TEEN IS STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH?

As a parent/caregiver, you can also help your teen by being watchful for signs that they might be struggling with a mental health problem and by assisting them to find support when needed, just as you would if they developed symptoms of a physical health problem.



In non-urgent situations, when your teen may be stressed, upset, worried, or experiencing other unpleasant feelings (but they are safe and at no risk of harm), here are some ways parents/caregivers can provide support:

- Stay calm. Mental health problems are common and with support can often be managed well.
- Try to take pressure off where you can. For example, reduce the number of chores or extra-curricular activities your teen takes on and try to minimize their exposure to worrisome news in the media.
- Listen to your teen if they share their thoughts and emotions. Just listening and reflecting back what you hear can go a long way to helping your teen feel heard and supported. Try not to judge, jump in with quick solutions, or minimize their concerns.
- Inspire hope. Even if you don't know the answers, or if solutions seem a long way away, reassure your teen that you will find a way through it together.
- Help your teen to look for positives and things to be grateful for. Sometimes when feelings overwhelm us, we focus on all that is wrong and forget to notice good things.
- Sometimes when we feel anxious or upset, deep calming breathing can help us to slow down and think more clearly. Try it at home using some of the activities presented in the [School Mental Health Ontario's Virtual Field Trips](#).

If you aren't sure if your teen needs additional support, connect to school or community resources to help you determine the next steps. For more suggestions about how to support your teen, see the following School Mental Health Ontario resources for parents and caregivers:

- [How to Talk With Your Child When you Feel Concerned](#) (webpage)
- [Noticing Mental Health Concerns for Your Child](#) (info sheet)

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS / CAREGIVERS

While your teen learns about mental health, you can, 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/>

About Kids Mental Health 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

If you have not already done so, you might consider cutting this list of resources out and placing it in an easily accessible space in your home or dwelling, such as your fridge or a cupboard.

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

Youth Line LGBTQ2S+

Text: 647-694-4275

Trans Lifeline

Call: 877-330-6366



SUPPORTS FOR PARENTS / CAREGIVERS:

Supports are also available for adults. If you feel you might benefit you can contact your family doctor or go to <https://www.ontario.ca/page/mental-health-services> to find local resources. You may also wish to visit [Wellness Together Canada](#). Parents can also contact [Kids Help Phone](#) for support.

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.

