

# Taking Care of Young People's Mental Health

Promoting the mental health of children and adolescents means giving young people a solid foundation on which to grow as individuals. It also means preparing them to face the demands of life and feel with themselves, others, and their environment.

## / Foundations for Growth

### Having High Self-Esteem

Loving yourself as you are, with your own strengths and weaknesses, is key to mental health. You contribute to the self-esteem of young people every time you:

- Show affection to them
- Emphasize their qualities and strengths
- Accept them as they are
- Attach importance to their needs
- Listen to them with interest and seek to understand them
- Recognize their efforts
- Value their curiosity and ideas
- Encourage their initiatives
- Promote their autonomy, self-discipline, and sense of responsibility

Constructive criticism and encouragement in working through difficulties help people develop themselves. On the other hand, unconstructive (negative) or excessive criticism, hurtful words, and unrealistic demands lower young people's self-esteem.

### Knowing How to Face Challenges

It is normal to want to protect your children, but overprotection damages their self-confidence and encourages them to be fearful. Young people must gradually learn to recognize difficulties and dangers on their own, and react to them properly. Therefore, they should be encouraged to face challenges, make decisions, and assume the consequences of their choices. They need to have opportunities to succeed, but also to learn from their mistakes and failures.

### Having People To Count On

Family and friends enrich an individual's life. Well-supported children are able to count on many people for encouragement and help in their development.

#### ENDORSED BY:

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+ Taking care of yourself +



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## / Tools to Develop

### Taking Care of Yourself

Eating healthy foods, doing physical activity every day, getting enough sleep, consuming alcohol in moderation and avoiding drugs and smoking: the best way to pass these healthy habits on to your children is to adopt them yourself!

### Knowing How to Communicate

Effective communication is crucial to building relationships with others, making your needs known and sharing your experiences. Promote your children's communication skills by:

- Taking the time to listen to them
- Helping them find the words to express what they are feeling
- Respecting their emotions, perceptions and opinions, and by expressing yours constructively
- Teaching them the importance of listening to others

### Learning to Manage Stress

Over time, high stress may contribute to the development of physical and mental disorders. For that reason it is important to teach young people stress-management strategies.

- Recognizing the signs indicating that your stress level is too high, such as agitation, sadness, nightmares or stomach aches.
- Identifying the causes of your stress. Any situation that is new, unpredictable, threatening or beyond your control may be a cause of stress. For example, starting school, moving from one home to another or enduring conflicts with friends or parents.
- Learning to have an accurate and realistic perspective on the events, by paying attention to the positive aspects as well as the negative points of a situation.
- Having a network of people to whom you can talk in confidence about your joys and sorrows, your worries or your difficulties.
- Setting priorities.
- Maintaining a balance between studies, leisure activities and time spent with the family.
- Making time for yourself.
- Knowing how to relax, for example by doing physical activity or by listening to music.

# / Young People Are Not Immune to Mental Illness

In Canada, approximately 15% of children and adolescents suffer from a mental illness. **Anxiety disorders are the most common mental disorders among young people**, but depression can appear at any age, and illnesses such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia can emerge during adolescence.

When young people experience mental-health problems, their perceptions of themselves, their relations with those around them and their performance at school are affected. Knowing how to recognize the signs of mental illness is an important first step to helping them regain their balance.

## Recognizing the Signs of a Problem

By paying attention to **changes in a young person's mood and behaviour, as well as his or her physical condition**, it is possible to detect the problems he or she is experiencing. You should pay special attention if you notice that a child or a teenager:

- Becomes sad, irritable, or aggressive
- Seems afraid or excessively worried
- Lacks interest in daily activities
- Lacks motivation or concentration
- Complains of physical problems such as nausea, stomach aches, or headaches
- Lacks energy
- Has trouble sleeping or is constantly sleeping
- Loses appetite or has a large increase in appetite
- Withdraws from others
- Obtains poorer academic results than usual
- Abuses alcohol or drugs
- Displays risky behaviour (e.g. speeding or having unprotected sexual relations)
- **Expresses suicidal thoughts (this is an emergency situation, and the child or young person needs immediate help!)**

## Opening the Dialogue

A young person who exhibits unusual emotions or behaviour for a few days is not necessarily suffering from a mental disorder, but it is possible that he or she is having problems. **Listening without judgment is the first step toward helping him or her feel better.**

It is best to choose a quiet moment to talk about the changes you have observed. You can say that you are worried about his or her well-being and that you are there to help. If he or she refuses to open up, you can suggest talking to someone else. You can also ask others in the young person's circle whether they have noticed any unusual behaviour.

## Support Provides Strength

With understanding and support, a young person with a mental health problem can regain his or her balance. A health care professional, such as a doctor, a psychologist or a social worker can assess the situation and, if necessary, recommend an appropriate treatment and approach for recovery. Community resources can also help him or her cope with his or her problems. A list of resources is presented at the end of this brochure.

## Relaxation for Toddlers

Even very young children can learn easy relaxation techniques. They can be encouraged to breathe in and out while "inflating and deflating their tummy like a ball." And to train them in muscle relaxation, they can be told first to make themselves go "as stiff as uncooked spaghetti," then to try to let themselves go "as limp as cooked spaghetti."

"My 15 year-old son wasn't interested in anything any more. He had even given up basketball, his passion! I told him about how I suffered from depression at his age. This convinced him to meet with his school psychologist."

Vincent, age 35

## Begin Fighting Prejudices Early

Many young people hesitate to talk about their suffering or difficulties because they are afraid of being judged. By acting in this manner, they delay their recovery and suffer needlessly. This is why it is important to make them aware early on of the fact that **mental disorders are illnesses like other illnesses, which should be discussed without embarrassment.**

## Loved Ones Also Need Support

Living with a young person who is suffering from a mental disorder can be challenging, especially for his or her parents and brothers and sisters. In order to avoid burning out physically and psychologically, it is important to recognize and accept your own emotions, respect your own limits and ask for help.

It is also useful to remember that children's mental health is directly influenced by that of their parents. If you are suffering from a mental disorder yourself, establishing a balance between all aspects of your life and taking steps to recover will have a beneficial effect on your own well-being as well as that of your family.

## Preventing Suicide

If a young person seems to have mental health problems or other difficulties, you should not hesitate to ask him or her directly whether he or she is considering suicide. **If he or she has suicidal ideas, getting immediate help is crucial.**

You can accompany the young person in seeking help or do it for him or her if he or she is not able to do so. You can ask for help from, among other places, the **Association québécoise de prévention du suicide** by dialling **1 866 APPELLE (277-3553).**

**Important: in young people, the interval between thinking suicidal thoughts and acting on them may be very short. If a young person intends to act, dial 9-1-1 immediately and stay in contact with him or her until emergency help arrives.**

## Resources Available to You

### HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

- Your **doctor** or **pharmacist**
- The **CLSC** or **CSSS** in your area  
[www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoires/csss](http://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/en/repertoires/csss)
- **Ordre des psychologues du Québec**  
[www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/](http://www.ordrepsy.qc.ca/) / 1 800 561-1223
- **Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec**  
[www.optsq.org/](http://www.optsq.org/) / 1 888 731-9420
- Professional services at **school or work**
- **Info-Santé**  
Dial **8-1-1**  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Douglas Institute**  
[www.douglas.qc.ca](http://www.douglas.qc.ca)

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- **Tel-jeunes**  
[www.teljeunes.com/](http://www.teljeunes.com/) / 1 800 263-2266
- **Fédération des familles et amis de la personne atteinte de maladie mentale**  
(Federation of families and friends of people with mental illnesses)  
[www.ffapamm.com/](http://www.ffapamm.com/) / 1 800 323-0474
- **Mental Illness Foundation**  
[www.mentalillnessfoundation.org](http://www.mentalillnessfoundation.org)  
1 888 529-5354
- **Canadian Mental Health Association**  
[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)
- **Société québécoise de la schizophrénie**  
[www.schizophrenie.qc.ca/](http://www.schizophrenie.qc.ca/) / 1 866 888-2323

- **Revivre**  
Quebec Anxiety, Depressive and Bipolar Disorder Support Association  
[www.revivre.org/](http://www.revivre.org/) / 1 866 REVIVRE (738-4873)
- **Phobies-Zéro**  
Support and help group for young people and adults suffering from anxiety disorders  
[www.phobies-zero.qc.ca/](http://www.phobies-zero.qc.ca/) / 1 866 922-0002
- **Association québécoise de prévention du suicide**  
24 hours a day, 7 days a week everywhere in Québec  
[www.aqps.info](http://www.aqps.info)  
**1 866 APPELLE (277-3553)**
- In case of an **emergency, dial 9-1-1.**

### PASS THIS BROCHURE ON!

The information in this brochure should not be interpreted as providing a medical diagnosis, and should not take the place of consultation with a health care professional.

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Professionals and companies can order this brochure by calling 514-985-2466 or 1 800 985-2466, extension 0, or from their AstraZeneca representative.

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