

## Promoting Positive Mental Health and Reducing Stigma: Starting Courageous Conversations

### What is Mental Health?

- Just as everyone has physical health, everyone has **mental health** as well. Simply put, mental health means having the capacity to be able to successfully adapt to the challenges that life creates for people.

### What is a Mental Illness?

- A **mental illness** is a medical condition resulting from changes in usual brain function. It affects a person's thinking, feelings, and behaviour in a way that is clinically significant and causes that person difficulty in everyday life.
- Having a mental illness is not a choice; it is the result of a complex interplay between a person's genes and environment.

### Stigma

- People can have a mental illness, and, at the same time, have good mental health.
- Unfortunately, many people still do not understand mental illnesses. This can lead to **stigma**, causing discrimination, fear, and avoidance of those with mental disorders.
- Many people have expressed that the stigma surrounding mental illness is more difficult to live with than the illness itself.
- Mental Illness is not a reflection of a child or youth's personality, or of a person's ability to parent. It is also not a reflection of one's socio-economic status or lack of support. Mental illness means that a child or youth's brain is not functioning as it should.
- With the right supports and treatment, people with mental disorders can get well and stay well.

### Steps Toward Decreasing Stigma

- Learn more about mental illness; use credible information from reliable resources.
- Recognize that the language we use matters. Be careful not to misuse psychiatric terms. Avoid using words such as "crazy" that may perpetuate stigma.
- Speak openly, and responsibly, about mental health and illness. Start courageous conversations with your child or youth; validate their feelings and encourage them to seek help if they need it.

### How Can Parents Help?

- While we may not always be able to prevent mental illnesses, there are things that caregivers can do to promote positive mental health, and build resilience in children or youth; it starts with **connection**.
- A child's positive relationship with trusting and caring adults is the key to successful emotional and social development.
- Reliable and consistent relationships with caregivers create the belief that a child is important and sets the foundation for self-esteem and resiliency.
- Children and youth are exposed to many new stimuli and environments as they develop; having a structured and predictable response from caregivers provides them with a sense of safety and security.
- With reasonable expectations from caregivers, young people can develop a sense of self-responsibility and learn the skills necessary to cope effectively with challenges.

### Resources

- Teenmentalhealth.org (2018). Mental Disorders: <http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/>
- Canadian Paediatric Society (2018). Your Child's Mental Health: [https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/mental\\_health](https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/mental_health)
- Kelty Mental Health (2013). Healthy Living Toolkit: [http://keltymentalhealth.ca/sites/default/files/78822\\_hl\\_toolkit\\_2nd\\_edition\\_web.pdf](http://keltymentalhealth.ca/sites/default/files/78822_hl_toolkit_2nd_edition_web.pdf)
- The Psychology Foundation of Canada (2016). Kids can cope: Parenting resilient children at home and at school: <https://www.dsb1.ca/Programs/MHWP/Programs/Documents/Parenting%20Resilient%20Children.pdf>
- Call Health Link Alberta: 811
- CYFAMH Intake: 780-342-2701
- Youth Addiction Services Edmonton: 780-422-7383
- Mobile Response Team: 780-427-4491
- Call 211 – Alberta Community resources
- CMHA Edmonton Distress Line: 780-482-HELP (4357)
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868