

# Mental Health Key Messages

## **Key Message:**

Be able to identify the early signs of depression and/or dementia.

## **Why the message is important?**

Early identification of mental illness is important to determine treatment, or understanding. Prevention and promotion of mental health is an important message for older adults.

## **Details of the message:**

- It is not a normal part of aging.
- Depression and dementia often present the same symptoms.

## **Examples of how to support the message:**

- Talk about signs and symptoms of depression/dementia. Encourage anyone that is experiencing these signs or symptoms to visit their doctor and tell them about it.
- Use the 3D chart to determine the differences between depression and dementia.
- Have referral information available on where to get help.
- Who in the organization is the best person to discuss concerns you might have.

## **Key Message:**

Be sensitive to the many losses an older adult might be facing.

## **Why the message is important?**

Recognize older adults face a lot of loss and change in their older years. Loss of friends, family, pets, and income, having to move to an assisted facility or move in with family, or a change of level of health they were once used to are all forms of losses. It can create a lot of anxiety.

## **Details of the message:**

- Facing any loss can be difficult. As a person ages a person can experience many losses. Each loss may be more difficult to work through and the risk of depression or reduced mental health increases. Decreased mental health can affect the physical wellbeing of an individual.

## **Examples of how to support the message:**

- Review communication tools on ways to speak with older adults in a respectful way.
- Consider role playing activities on how to communicate.

- Build a trustful relationship with your participants by listening to their challenges.
- Focus on positive ways to move forward and not to dwell on what cannot be changed.
- Learn stages of change and stages of grief to help understand and empathize with individuals going through great change or a personal loss.

**Key Message:**

Have an understanding of the illness. Mental health vs. mental illness

**Why is the message important?**

Developing empathy for those undergoing mental health challenges will help to understand the individual's needs. Different circumstances can increase or decrease an individual's anxiety in certain situations. Knowing how to address confusion, forgetfulness, mood swings etc can help reduce anxiety in the individual and may help the group be more supportive of the individual.

**Details of the message:**

- Have a basic understanding of mental illness and definition of various mental illnesses.
- Understand changes in behaviour that may be affected by the illness.
- Have the sensitivity to the issues that face those with mental illness.
- Always promote good mental health as part of a holistic approach.

**Examples of how to support the message:**

- Provide informational brochures/displays to coincide with mental health awareness for example mental health awareness week in May, Alzheimer's Awareness month is January and International Alzheimer's Day is September 21<sup>st</sup>)
- Review the materials in the Aging and mental health, addictions, toolkit
- Use a staff/volunteer meeting to review the materials in the toolkit.
- Consider putting an article or simple definitions in communication materials.
- Learn ways to maintain mental health and promote them to the group for example learning to do something new and different such as a new language, doing Sudoku, or crossword puzzles.

**Key Message:**

Recognize opportunities to transition people who may be having challenges at their current level and; provide an alternative and more appropriate or flexible programming.

### **Why is the message important?**

Providing alternative opportunities could help alleviate embarrassment or uncomfortable situations where someone is beyond their capacity to perform an activity. For example a person may not be able to keep up with a bridge game due to an inability to focus or concentrate as result of being depressed.

### **Details of the message:**

- Sometimes people need to participate in a different program to be at a comfortable level for their capability.
- Be sensitive on how you approach suggesting alternative programming or introducing something different. They may take offense for being seen as being “lowered” or changed into another group, eg. When someone isn’t able to keep up at a bridge group, other members may get frustrated and it likely impacts on the participants own self esteem for not feeling worthy, or another loss of mental ability.
- Talk positively about other programming opportunities.
- Offer varying levels of programming where possible.
- Consistently suggest trying new programs, activities, as a way to maintain mental health.

### **Examples of how to support the message:**

- Suggest alternative programs by bringing brochures or flyers to introduce what else is available.
- Consider providing various levels of programming to meet the needs of various capabilities.
- Host some Try It events to introduce new activities/programs to participants.

### **Key Message:**

Know when and how to seek help from other professionals and provide referrals.

### **Why is the message important?**

Having a policy or protocol in place where staff or volunteers can safely approach a manager/supervisor about supports in the community is important for the referral process.

### **Details of the message:**

- It is important that activity leaders understand the organizations guidelines/policies about the need to speak with their managers/supervisors about problem solving or referrals when you notice signs or symptoms of mental illness with their participants.
- Know how to obtain more information on where an individual can go for further help. There are many supports available in the community.
- Be able to communicate clearly what you have experienced/observed about the individual that signals to you a concern.

**Examples of how to support the message:**

- Talk about existing resources in the community for care givers and individuals as well as how to access them for help.
- Create a protocol to follow if and when a situation arises where a concern for an individual is realized.
- Consider some role playing activities at a staff meeting/training on how to approach various mental illness situations.

**Key Message:**

Understand there is always a reason for a shift in behaviour.

**Why is the message important?**

Recognizing a change in an individual's behaviour usually indicates a change in someone's circumstances or health status, either mentally or physically.

**Details of the message:**

- Understand that changes in health can affect one's behaviour and attitude. There could be underlining problems such as elder abuse, loss of a family member or a change in their own health
- The risk of becoming depressed is greater for those with when Heart disease, Stroke, Parkinson's, Diabetes, or for those experiencing a loss of some kind.
- Insufficient sleep can cause depression.
- Recognizing a change in behaviour or attitude may indicate the individual requires more assistance than you can provide. Seek out the advice of a supervisor/manager to identify next steps if any are required.

**Examples of how to support the message:**

- Have a professional come to speak about how to maintain good mental health. Display information during mental health week in May such as posters or brochures.
- Put information into newsletters, or other communication materials.

**Key Message:**

Stigma (shame, disgrace, dishonour) is attached to some illnesses.

**Why is the message important?**

An understanding of how stigma impacts on a person with mental illness is important to understand since it often affect their self esteem or be a reason why they won't seek help.

**Details of the message:**

- Stigma is associated with many illnesses but having a mental illness is somehow more of a challenge, particularly for those with a language barrier.

- Mental illness is often called the “invisible illness”, since you cannot tell if someone is mentally ill unless they tell you.

#### **Examples of how to support the message:**

- Use CAMH stigma busters (see toolkit) as ways to show how people can talk about the subject.
- Educate volunteers and staff members on stigma by providing sensitization training to staff.
- Raise awareness by talking about the impact stigma can have on people.
- Participate in stigma busting activities by eliminating terminology such as “insane” or “crazy” by speaking up and saying it is inappropriate.
- Encourage all participants to become knowledgeable about various mental illnesses and how to assist individual’s living with mental illness.

#### **Key Message:**

Older adults need to be heard and listened to.

#### **Why is the message important?**

Every individual deserves to be treated with respect, dignity and understanding and is especially important if the person is communicating valid concerns about a change in their health or their feelings of personal worth.

#### **Details of the message:**

- Sometimes older adults are brushed off as being “just old” or they don’t have anything to offer or what they are saying doesn’t make any sense. Actions such as this indicate the individual is not worth your time or effort and their thoughts and ideas are not valued.
- When speaking with older adults consider they may have hearing or visual impairments that need to be taken into consideration to ensure communication can take place.
- Before giving information to an older person about a problem, check with your supervisor to see if you are permitted to do this. If you have an opportunity, ask the older adult if he or she would like more information (e.g., “Would you like to know more about how alcohol and medications can interact and cause problems?”).

#### **Examples of how to support the message:**

- Learn how to “listen” and how to identify their needs.
- Learn how to address potential situations that may arise in a program such as a participant raising their voice and/or being disrespectful to the instructor or another participant even if the behaviour is due to a cognitive disorder such as dementia.
- Encourage participants to listen to each other and treat each other in a respectful, courteous manner.

**Key Message:**

Be aware that Elder Abuse exists and learn to recognize signs and indicators of elder abuse.

**Why is the message important?**

Everyone in our community deserves to feel safe, live with dignity and be treated with respect. Recognizing elder abuse is important. Learning how to prevent and address is the issue according to your organizations policies/guidelines is an important step in eliminating elder abuse in our community. .

**Details of the message:**

- Abuse can occur in many forms - financial, physical, verbal and neglect.
- Most victims are abused by someone close to them, such as a partner, relative, friend or caregiver.
- A conservative estimate of elder abuse is that between 2 and 10% of older adults will experience one or more forms of abuse at some point during their senior years.
- If you suspect someone is being abused - speak to your supervisor for direction on how to address the issue.
- Be aware that elder abuse is a very sensitive issue. As with any abuse victim many may be unwilling or unable to report it for reasons such as isolation, dependency, fear, control.

**Examples of how to support the message:**

- Have a speaker come from Elder Abuse Peel.
- Display information on Elder Abuse throughout the year but especially during week of Elder Abuse in June.
- Educate your staff and volunteers by talking about Elder Abuse.
- Be informed of your organization/agency policy/guideline on how to report, and address potential elder abuse situations.
- Be able to identify signs of elder abuse such as isolation, anxiety, malnutrition, bruises, injuries, unpaid bills or missing property that cannot be reasonably explained.