



# About Mental Health

Mental Health is a sense of emotional and spiritual wellbeing that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, and personal dignity. It is the capacity of each and everyone of us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.



A mental health disorder or mental illness causes major changes in a person's thinking, emotional state and behavior and disrupts the person's ability to work and carry out their usual personal relationships.

# Common Mental Health Disorders



**Anxiety Disorders:** Affects almost 30% of the population in their lifetime.



**Mood Disorders:** Affects over 20% of the population



**Psychotic Disorders:** About 3% of world's population experience at least 1 psychotic episode in their lifetime and 1% develop serious psychotic disorders.

# Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a general state of apprehension or foreboding. Anxiety disorders are characterized by physical, behavioural and cognitive features. Physical features of anxiety disorders include jumpiness, jitters, increased sweating and heart rate, shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea. Behavioural features of anxiety include the need to escape or avoid a situation, agitation, clinginess, need for reassurance. Cognitive features include excessive and prolonged worrying, overly aware of bodily sensations, jumbled thoughts, nagging thoughts.



One of the most common emergency situations for an individual with an anxiety disorder is panic attacks. Panic attacks are intense anxiety reactions characterized by physical symptoms such as a pounding heart, rapid respiration, shortness of breath, heavy perspiration, dizziness, and weakness as well as feelings of terror/doom and an urge to escape. See the next page on how you can assist a person who is experiencing a panic attack.

# Mental Health First Aid: Panic Attacks

1

## Ensure safety

- Ensure safety of the person having a panic attack.
- Move to a quieter, private location and have them sit down.
- Call emergency medical services.

2

## Breathe

- Calm the person by encouraging slow, rhythmic and relaxed breathing in unison with your own.

3

## Bring balance

- Create a calm and non-threatening atmosphere by speaking slowly and firmly, making small, slow movements.
- Listen without judging.
- Remain calm.

4

## Explain

- Explain that they may be experiencing a panic attack and not something life threatening.
- Do not dismiss or argue about their experience.

**Assure the person that someone will stay with them until the attack stops and medical help arrives!**

# Mood Disorders

Mood disorders are a type of disorder characterized by disturbances of mood. People with mood disorders experience moods outside of the normal range that are longer in duration with more severe symptoms. They feel that their moods and emotions are out of their control and they experience significant distress in their social environment, work, and other areas of functioning. The two most common types of mood disorders include Depression and Bipolar Disorder.



One of the most common emergency situations for individuals who experience mood disorders is suicide. Of the individuals with severe depression, 15% die by suicide. Out of all the causes of death in Canada, suicide ranks the 9th highest! See the next page on how you can assist a person who is contemplating dying by suicide.



# Mental Health First Aid: Suicide Prevention

1

## Engage in conversation

- Connect with the person in a serious conversation about how they are feeling
- Make them feel comfortable and ask what is happening in their life
- Listen carefully for any signs that indicate suicide contemplation

2

## Ask about suicide

- Determine whether the person has thoughts of suicide by ask pointedly about suicide.
- Ask "Are you having thoughts of suicide?"
- Explore the reason for wanting to die

3

## Assess risk level

- Ask about their plan for committing suicide, such as, if they own a gun or have bought the drugs for an overdose.
- Inquire about prior suicide attempts or thoughts
- Find out about their supports. Ask "who do think you could turn to for help?"

4

## Plan for safety

- Engage the person in creating a plan to keep them safe and provide a sense of hope
- Help the person to agree to not killing themselves for a manageable period of time
- Provide them with a crisis line number or emergency number

**Ensure the person is not left alone!**

# Psychotic Disorders

Psychotic disorder is a mental health disorder that causes a person to lose touch with reality. It can cause severe disturbances in behavior, thoughts and emotions. A psychotic disorder can severely disrupt a person's life including their relationships, work and self-care.

You may encounter someone who is experiencing a psychotic episode. See the next page for steps on assisting someone who is experiencing a psychotic episode.





# Mental Health First Aid: Psychotic Episodes

1

## Ensure own safety

- Do not get involved physically to stop violence or to restrain a person.
- If safety is a concern, call the police or emergency medical services.

2

## Create a non-threatening environment

- Speak slowly and firmly.
- Make small, slow movements.
- Remove distractions such as turning off radio and TV.
- Allow the person freedom to move around.
- Ensure that you have easy access to exit.

3

## Bring balance

- Try and get the person to sit down. When people are seated, they may feel more at ease (recommended to sit side-by-side).
- Build trust by giving or sharing something (such as giving some water or a cigarette).

4

## Express empathy

- Express empathy for the person's emotional distress.
- Do not dismiss or argue or try to prove them wrong about their delusion or hallucination.

# General Mental Health First Aid

If you are faced with a situation where you are unsure of the actual issue, here is a general mental health first aid guide.



# General Mental Health First Aid

1

Assess the risk of suicide or harm

- Engage the person in a serious conversation
- Ask pointedly about suicide. Ask “Are you having thoughts of suicide?”
- Explore risk level by asking about their plan to die
- Engage the person in a plan for safety

2

Listen non-judgmentally

- Listen to the person without expression and judgement
- Do not express frustration at the person for having symptoms
- Do not give advice such as “pull yourself together”
- Avoid confrontation

3

Give reassurance and information

- Help the person to realize that they may have a real medical condition
- Let them know that help is available
- Tell them that skills can be learned to reduce the effects of stress and anxiety

4

Encourage getting professional help

- Advise the person to see a family doctor for support. They may also benefit from a referral to a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or counsellor.

5

Encourage other supports

- Encourage positive behaviors such as:
  - Enough sleep
  - Regular exercise
  - Reduce caffeine intake
  - Practice controlled breathing

For more information, see Module 1 on Recognizing Mental Health Disorders on:

<https://towardtheheart.com/peer-worker-training>



Peer-to-Peer Project,  
BC Centre for Disease  
Control