

# The SOLUTION *source*

Thunder Bay Counselling Newsletter  
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## For You & Your Family

Winter 2017

**Our Winter newsletter will focus on the subject of mental health, how mental health impacts the workplace and stigma related to mental health.**

**Most people in Canada will be affected by mental health concerns, either directly or through connections with family members, friends or co-workers. What does this mean for us as individuals and for workplaces?**

## What is Mental Health?

**The Mental Health Commission of Canada** provides the following definition of mental health, which can serve as a goal for employers: “Mental health is a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to her or his own community.” (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012, Changing Directions, Changing Lives. The Mental Health Strategy for Canada Summary, 11.)



## Mental Health Issues: Impact on the employee and the workplace

According to Working Toward Mental Health 2017, a report by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, absenteeism and presenteeism due to mental health problems account for more than \$6 billion in lost productivity. Presenteeism refers to coming to work when you are not feeling well. The cost of doing nothing with regards to mental health in the workplace is higher than most employers imagine. One study revealed that mental health problems and illnesses account for approximately 30 percent of short and long-term disability claims.

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According to the CMHA (The Canadian Mental Health Association):

- Mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some time through a family member, friend or colleague.
- In any given year, 1 in 5 people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness.
- Mental illness affects people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures.
- Approximately 8% of adults will experience major depression at some time in their lives.
- A complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors causes mental illnesses.
- Almost one half (49%) of those who feel they have suffered from depression or anxiety have never gone to see a doctor about this problem.
- Stigma or discrimination attached to mental illnesses presents a serious barrier, not only to diagnosis and treatment but also to acceptance in the community.
- There is a significant impact on the employee. According to the CMHA : People may experience doubt. They may doubt their abilities or appear less confident. A person may have a hard time concentrating, learning, and making decisions. Symptoms may feed much bigger thoughts. For example, someone who can't concentrate may then also think that they can't do their job well or worry about losing their job. It's easy to see how these changes affect work performance.
- Mental health challenges can also have a big effect on relationships. People who experience a mental illness may withdraw from others, act in unexpected ways, take a lot of time off, or appear less productive than usual. This can strain relationships with supervisors and co-workers.

## Co-workers

Different mental illnesses have different symptoms, and people experience the same mental illness in very different ways. Some people may hide their symptoms, and some people may work well despite symptoms. If you've noticed changes and are concerned about a co-worker, it's best to express concern without making assumptions. If a co-worker is experiencing a mental illness, it's best to let them decide what and how much they tell others in the workplace. However, you can still offer support. Let your co-worker know that you're there to listen without judgement, and make your co-worker feel like they're still part of the team. Here are more tips for supporting a co-worker:

- Ask how you can help—and respect your co-worker's wishes.
- Continue to include your co-worker in the workplace's usual activities.
- Depending on your relationship, you can still keep in touch with a co-worker who takes time off.
- When a co-worker returns to work after time off due to a mental illness, make them feel welcome and appreciated. Saying nothing because you're worried about saying the wrong thing can make your co-worker feel worse.

(CMHA)

## Prevention

Working Toward Mental Wellness states that “if the stressors that cause these outcomes are prevented, or if an employee receives timely and effective treatment for mental illness, it is likely that the workplace will see a lower spend on benefits and disability, lower presenteeism and absenteeism, and increased productivity.” Given the human and financial cost of not addressing mental health issues, why then have mental health issues not been addressed to the extent that physical health issues have been?



# Normalizing Mental Health Issues:

## The Stigma of Mental Health Issues in the Workplace

The shame and secrecy that has shrouded mental illnesses has been around for generations.

The stigma around mental health challenges can create self-doubt and shame. When not taken seriously by their co-workers and others, individuals experience the mistaken belief that their condition is a sign of personal weakness, or that they should be able to control it on their own. Not true! That's like saying a person with a broken leg should buck up and just walk on it!!

### How Can We Reduce the Stigma?

Working towards Mental Health states that they found that only 23 percent of Canadian workers would feel comfortable talking to their employer about a psychological health issue. More than a quarter of Canadian employees believe that if they faced a mental health challenge at work and revealed it to others, it would jeopardize their career. Overall, employees perceive their employers to be less accommodating of mental health issues than physical health.

The first way that the stigma around mental health issues can be addressed is by education. Yes, the stigma has been around for generations but this is changing and it is changing through education and creating public awareness.

### Public Awareness

One campaign that is attempting to address mental well-being is the Bell Let's Talk campaign. The healthymindsCanada website states that "one of the key pillars of Bell's Mental Health Initiative is anti-stigma. As part of Bell's efforts to reduce the stigma of mental illness, the **Bell Let's Talk** awareness campaign has already begun to engage Canadians in the dialogue around mental health.

The campaign states that there are "five simple ways to help end the stigma and initiate a conversation."

### 5 Simple Ways

1. Language Matters - pay attention to the words you use about mental illness.
2. Educate yourself - learn, know and talk more, understand the signs.
3. Be Kind - small acts of kindness speak a lot.
4. Listen and ask - sometimes it's best to just listen.
5. Talk about it - start a dialogue, break the silence.

### Speaking out: Public Figures who are breaking the silence and helping to reduce the stigma

On February 13th, 2017, Thunder Bay-Superior North MPP, **Michael Gravelle** took the courageous step of announcing that he has been suffering from a yearlong battle with depression. He stated that he was temporarily stepping down from his role in order to take some time, effort, treatment and understanding to properly address this issue.

Another Canadian public figure who has worked tirelessly to address the stigma of mental health issues is **Margaret Trudeau**. She is currently an advocate for reducing the stigma with those who are challenged and especially those with bipolar disorder. Trudeau struggled for many years and finally in 2006 she announced her struggles.

Canadian born comedian **Jim Carrey** has had some rough patches in his life and has been very open about needing to take an antidepressant. Carrey asserts that he is no longer taking medication but "refuses to pretend that he is struggle free".

**Howie Mandel** stresses that mental health mindfulness isn't just for the sick. "We are all affected and we all need to find the coping skills to be the most productive, happy people we can be." He has been vocal about his challenges with OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder) for many years.

Even celebrities can experience the sense of loneliness often experienced by those with mental health issues. Actor **Ryan Reynolds** states that "the pressure of performance anxiety was isolating and constant".



Songster and writer, the late **Leonard Cohen** addressed his battle with depression throughout his lifetime. He described his as a "kind of mental violence which stops you from functioning properly from one moment to the next."

**Marc Beaulieu** of CBC Life states that "As visible people get more vocal, the consequence is a kind of welcome momentum in Canada. There seems to be no shortage of calls to action." Canadian sports journalist **Michael Landsberg** heads up an advocacy movement called #sicknotweak that champions a no shame approach to mental well-being.

## Keeping your Workplace Mentally Healthy: The Canadian National Psychological Health and Safety Standard

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace, developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), is the first of its kind in the world. The Standard is a set of voluntary guidelines.

Launched in January 2013, it has garnered uptake from coast to coast to coast, internationally and across organizations of all sectors and sizes.

The MHCC has developed a variety of resources to help organizations create more mentally healthy work environments. Many resources are available on the MHCC website.

(MHCC Website  
[www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/national-standard](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/national-standard))

**Helping people  
is what we're all about.**

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