

Module 5:

Helping Self and Helping Others

- Everyone has mental health that can be supported and promoted
- There are many ways of seeking help for mental health problems and mental disorders
- Getting help early for yourself and others increases positive mental health outcomes



Helping Self and Helping Others



Almost all young people experience negative emotions, cognitions and behavioural challenges that are not necessarily due to a mental disorder. Usually, a compassionate ear, usual support and some helpful suggestions are all that is needed. Many mental health promotion activities may be helpful to enhance student mental health (see Module 6). However, if your student is facing a mental health problem, then additional support and counselling may be very helpful to them. Likewise, if your student is dealing with a mental / neurodevelopmental disorder, then professional treatment is what is needed. Being able to differentiate between these needs is important but not always easy.



Getting help early for yourself and others increases positive mental health outcomes

For a young person receiving mental healthcare, school life can be a challenge. Having teachers and students who understand best evidence-based treatments for mental disorders can be a big help. The word 'treatment' describes what a healthcare provider will do to help a person with mental / neurodevelopmental disorder. It has a number of components, including:

- Helping a person decrease their symptoms and improve how they are functioning
- Impacting and changing the functioning of the brain
- Being based on best available evidence for effectiveness, tolerability and safety
- Being provided by a health professional who has the training and competencies to apply and evaluate the treatment.



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Such treatments are called **standard treatments**, meaning that they meet the standards of numerous credible professional organisations due to the substantial amount of scientific research that supports its use. Often standard treatments have received regulatory approval such as medicines approved by Health Canada.

As a type of treatment, medications are chemical messengers that help the brain improve its functioning when it has been impacted by a mental / neurodevelopmental disorder and should lead to decreases in the associated signs and symptoms. This helps to improve the functioning of the individual with the disorder. This reset may also help decrease the likelihood that a specific mental illness (e.g. Generalized Anxiety Disorder) will come back.

Not every youth who has a mental disorder will require medication to treat it. Medications should rarely, if ever, be provided without concurrent provision of psychotherapy or psychosocial support. Based on the scientific evidence available, medications can be a necessary, but not sufficient treatment for young people who have a mental disorder.

Another type of standard treatment for mental disorders is psychotherapy / talk therapy that can be effective on their own and in combination with medications. Psychotherapy involves more than just talking, and is a collaborative process that helps people with mental disorders problem-solve, learn and use healthy coping strategies and adaptively change their negative and harmful thoughts, emotions and behaviours. Through this process, psychotherapy can even impact the chemistry and structure of parts of the brain affected by mental disorders. Psychotherapy can be provided in isolation for mild forms of certain mental illnesses, like Anxiety Disorders and Depressive Disorders. For more severe types or forms of mental disorders, psychotherapies are combined with medications to obtain better outcomes. There are many different types of psychotherapies, but some of those which hold the strongest evidence in youth include Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT).



In addition to the standard treatment, there is **complementary treatment** that has not met the standard of numerous credible professional organisations and / or received regulatory approval. These are provided in addition to standard treatments. There is some evidence that a complementary treatment may enhance the effectiveness or add additional health benefits to a standard treatment. An example of this is adding vitamin D at a dose of 1000 IU daily to SSRI and CBT treatment of Major Depressive Disorder. A complementary treatment cannot adequately replace a standard treatment.

Further, there are **alternative treatments** for which there is insufficient evidence that they are safe or effective when used instead of standard treatments. Alternative treatments are not typically recommended in evidence-based treatment guidelines.

How you can help:



- Identify and refer students at risk of mental / neurodevelopmental disorders



- Talk to students about your concerns and encourage them to seek help



- Adjust academic expectations for students



- Help students build relationships necessary to provide support



- Establish appropriate interactions with parents when addressing mental health and mental disorders

There are many strategies that teachers can apply to help students. One of the best ways you can help your student is to reduce stigma in your classroom. Watch what kind of language you use around your students and others. What we say and how we phrase it reflects our beliefs and the way we view people. People living with mental / neurodevelopmental disorders (including your students) are often put down, discouraged, demoralised and marginalised. Don't let your students feel that way in your classroom where you control the environment. By choosing the words that you use, you can fight stigma in your classroom and help your students feel safe and supported. For more information on useful strategies, please refer to <http://teachmentalhealth.org>. This resource includes a comprehensive mental health literacy learner resource for pre-service and practising teachers.



As a teacher, you can act as a trusted and knowledgeable adult, providing pathways to resources and support

Teachers can assist students and their families by connecting them with mental health professionals working in the school and by teaching about the healthcare services and groups in the community who provide treatment or healthy coping strategies. As a teacher, you can act as a trusted and knowledgeable adult, providing pathways to resources and support. Your willingness to teach these modules to students can go a long way in improving literacy around mental health and reducing stigma!