



## **August Mental Health Monthly Topic: Mental Health and the Ocean**

Close your eyes, imagine an ocean, picture the blue water, hear the waves crashing on the rocks, smell the salty air, and feel the sand or rocks beneath your feet.

Did you do it? If not, that's okay. If you did, did you have a calm at ease feeling? In this blog I am going to explain how the ocean, and the beach, actually have scientific reasons for improving mental health.

In Nova Scotia you are never farther than 56 kms from the ocean, in any direction. People who are not from Nova Scotia usually say Nova Scotians are calm and friendly. There are studies to show that those who live close to the ocean are calmer and have less angry outbursts. There could be some truth to Nova Scotia's friendly and relaxed charm.

Why does the ocean positively affect our mental health?

- When we hear ocean sounds our brain's prefrontal cortex is activated. That is the part of the brain that is in control of our emotions, self-reflection, and parts of our executive function. The more this is activated the more brain connections we make and we can be better at planning and decision making.
- Ocean waves actually decrease cortisol, our stress hormone. When cortisol is deactivated we are calmer; it can trigger relaxing memories and help prevent future health problems.
- The vastness of the blue in the ocean has also been shown to decrease psychological distress and improve mental health.

We are privileged to be living in Nova Scotia; we have so many options to view, or take a walk, near the ocean. As a social worker in Nova Scotia, many of my clients use the ocean as a coping mechanism. The ocean is free and the Bay of Fundy is as close as a 15 minute drive from Greenwood and the positive effects of the ocean do not only apply to adults but to your children as well. A visit to the shore or a walk on the beach can be a win-win for the whole family.

The impact of nature cannot be ignored when talking about mental health. In today's world where social distancing and isolation are the norm finding new ways, or enhancing old ways, can have large impacts on our mental wellbeing.

If you are able, the next time you need a moment, try taking a drive over the mountain to see the shore. Breathe in the air and take in the sounds and the views. Becoming self-aware of what does bring you joy is so very important in the improvement of mental health.

If you are struggling, or would like to learn about more ways to improve your mental health, please reach out to the GMFRC.