

## WHAT TO DO IN A CRISIS

If your loved one experiences serious episodes that cause problems, it's important to plan ahead for these problems. These plans—written during times of wellness—usually map out what will happen and who will be involved if a loved one starts to feel unwell. You may be included in a plan with your loved one's care team, but you can make a plan just between you and your loved one, too.

If you believe that a loved one is at risk of harming themselves or others and they won't seek help, you may get a mental health assessment through your province's or territory's mental health laws. In general, these laws let a doctor, judge, police officer, or justice of the peace order an evaluation if a person meets certain criteria. While this can be a helpful tool in a crisis situation, it can also be difficult and traumatic for everyone involved. Ideally, a loved one should have a plan in place that seeks action before these emergency measures are necessary. Contact your provincial or territorial ministry or department of health to learn more.

## A NOTE ON PRIVACY

Under Canadian law, an adult's health care team can't talk about medical information like a diagnosis or treatment in most situations without permission of the adult. This may seem frustrating at times, but these laws were designed to protect the rights of people who experience a mental illness. An open relationship with a loved one can go a long way in keeping everyone informed and supporting a loved one's care choices.

## INCOME AND HOUSING SUPPORT

When someone you love is diagnosed with a mental illness, you may worry about their financial future. If they are unemployed or don't make enough to support themselves, they may qualify for income supports. Some programs are provincial or territorial, and others are national. Talk with a loved one's care team, provincial or territorial services, or a local organization to see what's available. Your bank can also help with tools like a Registered Disability Savings Plan.

Mental illnesses can be barriers to good, affordable housing, but the right housing can give people freedom and independence. There are different kinds of housing options available with varying levels of supports. Contact the CMHA or other local mental health organizations to get more information on housing programs.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

**Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today.**

## SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE



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*Mental health for all*

Development of this brochure  
generously supported by



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When someone you love has been diagnosed with a mental illness, you feel a mixture of emotions. Concern, compassion, disbelief, anger, relief, anxiety, grief, love, guilt ... any and all of these emotions are understandable and normal.

You are not to blame for a loved one's mental illness. Mental illnesses are caused by many different factors that work together, such as genetics, biology, environment, and life experiences.

Loved ones can play a big part in helping a person recover, work towards their goals, and stay well. Care and emotional support go a long way in recovery and well-being. So can practical help, like managing doctor's appointments and other daily tasks. You can also play a part in helping a loved one maintain well-being. You and other close supporters may be the first to notice changes in a loved one's mood, behaviour, self-care, or other area that shows their mental health may be worsening. This means you can help your loved one find the right help early. You can also help them see hope at a time when they feel it the least.

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## WHO IS TAKING CARE OF YOU?

When a loved one experiences a mental illness, their care and support can take a lot of time and energy. But your own needs are just as important, too. If you aren't well, it's harder to help someone else regain wellness. Here are some tips to think about:

### 1. Accept your own feelings and know that you are not alone

It is natural to feel many different emotions when a loved one is diagnosed with a mental illness. Other people experience the same challenges and complicated mix of emotions, just like you. Let yourself feel whatever you need to feel.

### 2. Learn more

Take time to learn more about mental illnesses. This will give you a better understanding of your loved one's experiences and help you see what they may be going through. You can find reliable information online, through provincial or territorial health services, and through community organizations.

### 3. Stay connected

Embarrassment, social stigma, and fear can stop many family members from seeking help when a loved one is diagnosed with a mental illness. But that can isolate you at a time when you need the most support from others. Talk to trusted friends and family and let them know what you're experiencing. If you aren't sure where to go, try connecting with a community organization.

### 4. Join a support group

Support groups are a good place to share your experiences, learn from others, and connect with people who understand what you're going through. To find a local support group, contact a local community mental health organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). CMHA has branches all over Canada that offer a range of services that can help.

### 5. Take time for yourself

If you are caring for a loved one, your responsibilities may use up your physical and emotional energy. It's important to take time for yourself. It can help you recharge and give you a more balanced perspective toward any challenges you experience. Schedule opportunities that allow you to relax, have fun and get away so you can come back to your loved one with a healthier outlook. You can't care for someone else if you haven't cared for yourself first.

### 6. Seek help for yourself

Caring for a loved one who's unwell can be stressful. Long periods of stress can lead to mental health or substance use problems. Seek help if you find your own well-being slipping, and encourage family members to seek help if they need it. Mental illness can also have a big impact on family relationships. It's a good idea to seek counselling for the entire family.

### 7. Develop coping strategies for challenging behaviours

There may be times when a loved one shows strange or challenging behaviours that can make you feel confused, embarrassed, or scared. This can happen in public or in private. It's best to talk with your loved one's care team for strategies to manage challenging situations. Here are some tips:

- Learn more about your options.
- Plan the best strategies for the situation.
- Understand that this is not personal.
- Realize that some behaviours may be beyond your loved one's control. They may be as distressing to them as they are to you.

It's also important to tell your loved one (and their care team) what behaviours you aren't willing to tolerate. You have rights, too—you never have to tolerate dangerous or abusive behaviour.

