Boost self-care with positive relationships



Despite our best efforts to eat well, get plenty of sleep and exercise regularly, there will be times when we feel physically sick and are not functioning well. Most of us know that ignoring our symptoms will only make us more sick and that the best thing to do is let people know we're ill, go home and take care of ourselves.

So why don't we do the same when we're mentally unwell?

The importance of self care

There are things we can do to support both our physical and mental health, for example a healthy diet, plenty of sleep and exercise. But where good mental health is concerned, there's another important factor – relationships. Positive relationships with partners, family members, friends, co-workers and neighbours help increase our self-esteem and give us a sense of community and purpose. However, unhealthy relationships (those that are combative, judgemental, belittling etc.) can worsen our mental health. Building a great social support system often means eliminating toxic or negative people from your life.

But no matter how much people care for us, they can't help if we don't speak out and that can be hard. The stigma that still exists around mental illness prevents many of us from admitting we are mentally ill or that we need treatment. Allowing people to help and support us is the first step to recovery.

Here are some tips to help you start reaching out to your social network:

- Start with the person in your life you know loves you unconditionally (your spouse, best friend or parent). He or she can support you as you share your diagnosis with others.
- Tell one person at a time.
- Be prepared for different reactions. People may be sad, confused, upset or shocked.
- Understand that not everyone will offer the same level of support.
- If people don't react as you expected, be sure you have someone to turn to, like your best friend or therapist.

Self-care isn't being selfish. It's about being kind to yourself and allowing others to be kind to you. Your openness and willingness to accept help may encourage others to do the same. For information on mental health and self-care, contact us.