

The five R's of mental health

Did you know that [mental illness is the leading cause of disability in Canada](#), surpassing cancer and heart disease? According to the World Health Organization, [depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and is a major contributor to the global burden of disease](#). Given that at least one in five of us will experience a mental illness in our lifetime, it is important to understand the five R's of mental health.



1. Recognizing risk

Our bodies and our minds let us know when we are not functioning at our best. Each mental illness has its own characteristics and symptoms, although there are some general warning signs that might alert you that you or someone you care about may need professional help.

Physical

- Difficulty sleeping or fatigue
- Frequent colds, flu, or infections
- Rapid weight loss or gain

Emotional

- Feeling irritable
- Feeling trapped
- Feeling incompetent

Intellectual

- Difficulty concentrating
- Procrastinating
- Excessive worrying

Personal well-being

- Isolating oneself from friends and family
- Excessive busyness
- Loss of sense of humour

2. Resilience

Part of good mental health involves being resilient. Resilience is the ability to recover from adversity and cope with life's challenges. On a daily basis, resilient people think ahead and don't shy away from considering fearful or unpalatable scenarios. They are flexible, adaptable, optimistic and have a sense of purpose. They also have good problem-solving skills, strong social networks, and learn from failure and persevere. The good news is resilience is something that can be developed and strengthened.

3. Recovery

Recovery is very personal and unique for each individual and depends on the individual's values, resilience, and inherent self-worth. However, every recovery involves the following:

- A good understanding of what is wrong
- The support of family, friends, and/or co-workers
- Good self-care – looking after one's physical, mental and emotional well-being
- Acknowledgment that recovery is not a linear process but a continual growth with occasional setbacks

4. Return to work

If you are returning to work after a mental illness, be sure to:

- Talk to your manager and be open about what you are able to do and what you are not able to do
- Know when to say “no” or ask for help – work with your manager on what you should do if you have a concern or find that you are struggling
- Expect a few questions from co-workers about how you are doing; prepare and rehearse an answer so that even if you are caught off guard, you can still respond in a respectful and professional manner

If you are a co-worker of someone returning to work after a leave of absence:

- Welcome your colleague back; support him or her and be friendly, warm, and respectful
- Respect the return-to-work plan; it sets clear expectations for your co-worker and perhaps even for the rest of your team as well
- Let people know when you feel their actions or words propagate stereotypes and myths; alternatively, discuss any concerns with your manager so he or she can address stigmatizing behaviours
- Ask and learn about the mental health policies and programs in your workplace

5. Removing stigma

[Stigma has been identified as one of today’s foremost obstacles to improved mental health care](#); it tragically deprives people of their dignity and interferes with their full participation in society. Stigma in relation to people with mental illness is often a combination of a lack of relevant knowledge (ignorance), attitudes (prejudice) and behaviour (discrimination). Simply put, stigma refers to an attitude. The resultant discrimination is the behaviour that exemplifies that attitude.

Unfortunately, stigma is a very real part of mental illness. Even though access to accurate information about mental illness increases each year through new research, training and various organizations whose mandate it is to educate the public, the shame attached to these disorders remains. And some mental illnesses seem to elicit more negative connotations than others.

What you can do to help remove stigma

- Educate yourself about mental health problems and learn the facts instead of the myths
- If your friends, family, co-workers or even the media make statements that are not true, let them know how their negative words and incorrect descriptions affect people with mental illness and only perpetuate stereotypes and myths
- Remember that the way we speak can affect the way other people think and speak; choose your words carefully and do not use hurtful or derogatory language
- People with mental illness can still make valuable contributions to society; let’s recognize and applaud the positive, not the negative
- Treat people who have mental health problems with dignity and respect; support their choices and encourage their efforts to get well

Mental illness does not discriminate. It can affect anybody. However, by taking the time to learn the facts and educating others, you are already in a better position to support those who are suffering from a mental illness and reduce the stigma they are battling against.