Should you share your mental illness diagnosis?



Many people struggle with mental health issues alone and in silence. Despite changing attitudes, the fear that relationships will change or careers or reputations will suffer is real. However, whether dealing with a physical or mental issue, a strong support network is an essential part of any treatment plan – and that begins by sharing the diagnosis.

If you're wondering who needs to know about your illness, there are no rules. It's up to you.

Here are a few ideas that may help guide your decisions:

- **Remember you're not alone.** At least one in five North Americans experiences a mental illness in any given year. That means one in five of your neighbours, co-workers or friends is dealing with similar issues.
- **Not everyone needs to know**. If you need time off work to deal with any health issue, you need to inform your employer. You may choose to receive the support of a close family member or friend first.
- **You don't have to share everything.** You decide what – and what not – to share. If you feel uncomfortable with a question it's okay to say "I'd rather not talk about that right now."
- **Practice makes perfect.** Disclosing an illness can be nerve wracking, so practice what to say with someone close to you or with your therapist or counsellor. It's a good way to prepare for any questions as well as help you decide who to tell.
- **Be prepared for negative reactions**. Some people will have a tough time accepting your diagnosis and condition. There is little sense in arguing with others about your condition. Instead, suggest ways that individual can support you and guide him or her to appropriate resources, including an Employee Assistance Program.

If you or a family member needs help with, or information on, mental illness, contact us.