

## Member Mental Health

Good mental health contributes to our enjoyment of life, to physical health, and to the ability to handle stress. However, stigma and discrimination keep mental health issues in the shadows, prevent people from seeking care, and lead to poorer quality of care. (*Toward Recovery & Well Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2009.*)

Each year, about one in every five Canadians will experience a diagnosable mental health problem or illness. Mental health problems and illnesses are believed to result from a complex interaction among social, economic, psychological and biological, or genetic factors. (*Toward Recovery & Well Being: A Framework for a Mental Health Strategy for Canada, Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2009.*)

The term "mental health" covers a wide range of issues, including but not limited to:

- Anxiety Disorder
- Bipolar
- Depression
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Seasonal Affective Disorder

### **Common Signs of Mental Health Issues**

Because mental health is such a complex issue, it is difficult to provide a comprehensive list of mental health symptoms. However the following may generally be considered common symptoms of mental health concerns.

### **Common warning signs in adults**

- Decline in work or school performance or poor attendance
- Prolonged depression (extreme sadness or irritability)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows
- Having too much energy
- Exaggerated feelings of self
- Excessive worries and anxieties
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in personal hygiene
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Delusions (strongly held beliefs that have no basis in reality)
- Hallucinations (hearing, seeing, smelling, or feeling something that isn't real)
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Denial of severe problems
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments
- Excessive or unhealthy substance use
- Excessive concern about germs, cleanliness, time, or eating.

(<http://ourhealthyminds.com>)

### **How to Take Care of Your Mental Health**

- Get enough rest
- Learn about good nutrition and practice it
- Exercise to relieve stress and lift your mood
- Take part in activities with family and friends
- Build self-esteem
- Build healthy relationships
- Set realistic standards and goals.

([www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org))

### **What you can do to Help a Colleague**

First, don't assume your co-worker has mental illness if they behave strangely or you observe changes in their behaviour. All of us have many things going on in our lives outside of work that at times may pre-occupy our thoughts and possibly behaviour. Remember, it's not your role to diagnose. If your co-worker confides to you that he/she is struggling with a mental health issue but hasn't sought help:

- Encourage him/her to seek professional assistance - your board's *Employee Assistance Program* (EAP) may be a start
- Be respectful of the confidence shared with you
- Be supportive
- Contact staff in Professional Services (PRS) at the ETFO provincial office for confidential advice at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836.

### **Resources**

- School Board Employee Assistant Programs (EAP)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health ([www.camh.ca](http://www.camh.ca))
- Canadian Mental Health Association - Ontario ([www.ontario.cmha.ca](http://www.ontario.cmha.ca))
- Canadian Mental Health Association ([www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca))
- Ontario Teachers' Insurance Plan ([www.feelingbetternow.com/otip/](http://www.feelingbetternow.com/otip/))

### **The Role of the Local**

The ETFO Local office plays an important role in supporting members with mental health needs. The type of assistance provided will depend on individual situations. Your local will ensure that your rights are protected and work to address any difficulties experienced as a result of mental health illness.

### **Summary**

Good mental health is an important component of a well-balanced life. If mental health issues are affecting your ability to cope at school, or threatening the continued employment of a colleague, help is just a phone call away. PRS staff provide confidential advice and guidance to members on these issues.

**Staff in Professional Relations (PRS)**

**Can be reached at 416-962-3836  
or 1-888-838-3836**

**See also ETFO's website –  
Advice for Members**

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