



Mental Health Disorders: Facilitating Communication

What is mental health and how can it be defined?

Mental health is a dynamic balance between different spheres of life: social, physical, spiritual, economic, emotional, and mental.

It enables us to act, to realize our full potential, to face the normal difficulties of life and to make meaningful contributions to our community.

It is influenced by living conditions, prevailing collective values, and personal values.*

Mental illnesses are caused by a complex interaction of genetic, biological, environmental factors and personality traits.

According to Santé Québec, mental illness consists of signs and changes that affect a person's thinking, mood, or behavior, that can be observed by those around them. It can also manifest itself through distress or suffering. People with mental illnesses may also feel unusually confused, forgetful, helpless, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared.

Little Brothers

*Santé Mentale Québec - Chaudière Appalaches (2021)

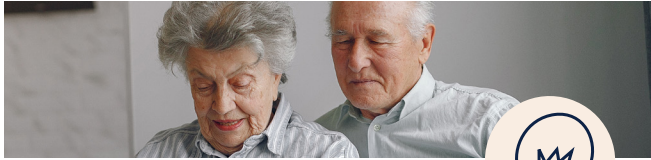
Towards a better understanding of seniors

According to l'Association des parents et amis des personnes atteintes de maladie mentale (AQPAMM):

Some persistent misconceptions support the idea that mental health problems are inherent in aging, and that depression and anxiety are normal in older adults. This is not the case, however, as the prevalence of mental health disorders is no higher among seniors than it is in the general population.

With age, however, the situation is complicated by the simultaneous presence of physical health problems, often chronic, cognitive disorders and mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety.

This combination of issues exists in addition to the natural process of aging. This makes it difficult to get a good clinical picture since mental health has an impact on physical health and vice versa.



Good practices

- Prepare for the visit (mentally and physically), be ready for the unexpected;
- Exchange greetings, share your news;
- Establish a "contact" routine to make the person feel secure and then respect it;
- Encourage the sharing of emotions. Take your time, be calm and genuine;
- Show the older person what they mean to you, that you understand them, and how much you care about them;
- Change the subject by using humour, if appropriate;
- Keep in mind the aspects over which you have control: the physical environment, "ambiance", possible activities, support from friends and relatives;
- Use touch to provide comfort if the person seems receptive;
- Don't hesitate to seek help from the person's healthcare network, friends and family, for difficult situations.

Things to avoid

- Speaking on the person's behalf;
- Treating the person as a child;
- Confronting the person or expressing doubts;
- Questioning repeatedly;
- Arguing with the person.



Attitudes to adopt



- Keep in mind that your presence makes all the difference.
- Acknowledge the person's efforts without judgment, accept them and live with them.
- Share your observations and follow the guidelines! As a volunteer, you are the eyes and ears of your organization.
- Keep in touch with your coordinator who is available to gather information about your companion's health and provide you with perspective and support for challenges you may encounter.
- If you are a close caregiver, make sure you have support from professionals and periods of respite to take care of yourself. Let go of non-essential issues.
- Identify your limits and respect them.

Additional resources

Telephone

8-1-1 (24/7) or 2-1-1 (8am to 6pm, 7 days a week)

Info-aidant: 1 855 852-778, daily from 8am to 8pm. <https://www.lappui.org/en/>

FADOQ: 514-271-1411

Réseau Alternatif et Communautaire des Organismes (RACOR): 514 847-0787 (Montreal) or racor@racorsm.org, <http://racorsm.org/en>

Online

Les Petits Frères, *Factsheets: Complex Health Disorders*, <https://www.petitsfreres.ca/programmes/tcs/> (in French only)

Association canadienne pour la santé mentale - Filiale de Montréal. (2020).

- *Une fois à la maison, qu'est-ce qu'on fait?*, <https://bit.ly/ACSM-outil-maison>, 26 mars 2020. (in French only)
- *How do you cultivate... resilience?*, <https://acsmmontreal.qc.ca/en/news/how-do-you-cultivate-resilience/>, 4 June 2020.
- *Merci à toutes les personnes proches aidantes*, <https://bit.ly/ACSM-merci>, 3 novembre 2020. (in French only)