

# Conversations You Need to Have about Mental Illness

Talking  
with a  
friend

Talking  
with a  
co-worker

Talking  
with your  
teen

**camh** Canada's Leading Hospital  
for Mental Health

## What is CAMH?



The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) is the largest teaching hospital in Canada focusing on mental illness and addiction. Our research investigates the causes, treatments and prevention of mental illness and addiction at all life stages — from childhood and adolescence, when symptoms of illness most commonly appear, through to adulthood and into old age.

CAMH relies on community support from people just like you. If you'd like to learn more or make a donation, visit [camh.ca](http://camh.ca)

## CAMH by the numbers

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CAMH is  
Canada's #1  
mental health  
research  
hospital

426  
physicians

3,461  
staff

37,065  
patients  
treated in  
2018

More than  
100 scientists  
and 500  
research  
staff

Emergency  
Department  
visits  
increased 87%  
since 2012

## What does a mental health problem look like?

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We all feel sad, worried, scared or suspicious at times. But these kinds of feelings may become a problem if they get in the way of our daily lives over a long period. Mental health problems can affect anyone, regardless of their age, educational background, income level, gender or culture.

Mental health problems can affect our feelings, our thoughts, our physical well-being and our actions. Although the signs of a mental health problem are often not visible, you may observe some changes in the person.

# Feelings

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## Do you think the person is experiencing some of these feelings?

- Have they been sad or irritable for more than two weeks?
- Have they been talking about excessive worries, fears and anxieties?
- Have they had extreme mood swings—from feeling really great to feeling really low? Really angry?
- Have they been acting apathetic or uninterested in things?
- Have they shared feelings of hopelessness or despair? Maybe they've been crying a lot?

# Thoughts

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## How might their thinking be affected?

- Are they having distorted or confused thoughts?
- Do they have strange beliefs not based in reality (delusions), or are they hearing, seeing or smelling things that aren't there (hallucinations)?
- Do they have difficulty remembering things and concentrating, which affects work or studies?
- Have they started making poor decisions?

1 in 5 Canadians  
experience a mental illness  
or addiction in any given year—  
we all know and love someone affected.



## Actions

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- Have they started drinking or using other drugs excessively?
- Do they seem agitated and restless?
- Do they often appear dishevelled?
- Have they been withdrawing from activities and friends?
- Do they cry often?
- Do they have many physical complaints, such as headaches or stomach aches, with no clear cause?
- Have they been having difficulty sleeping?
- Have they made a significant change in eating habits?
- Have they been talking about harming themselves or ending their life?

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## Our Vision

Transforming lives

## Our Purpose

At CAMH, we care, discover, learn, and build

## Our Values

Courage. Respect. Excellence.

### **Access CAMH**

Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
1 800 463-2338, then press 2

**CAMH Emergency Department**  
250 College St, Toronto, ON

### **Experiencing a crisis or emergency?**

Visit your local emergency department or call 911

## Talking with a friend

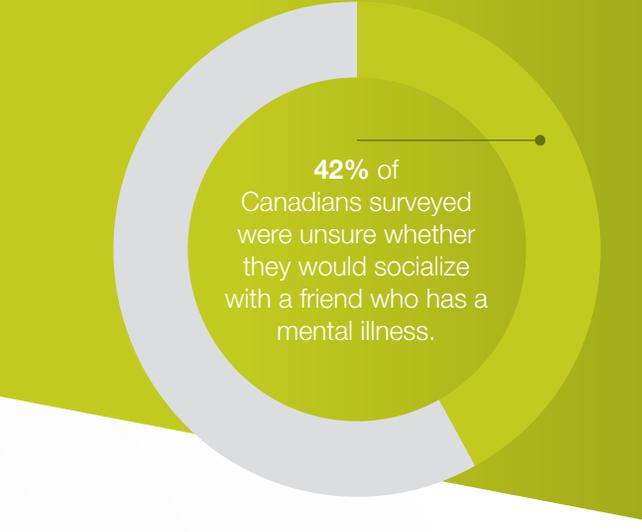
Start by telling your friend what you have noticed or what is concerning you.

**“I have noticed you don’t seem to be sleeping much, and you are skipping meals. Is everything OK?”**

Suggest going for dinner or a coffee, if this is the kind of thing that you normally do together, or ask what they would like to do.

If you have struggled with feelings your friend might identify with, you could tell them how you felt, and how you coped in the past.

If your friend does mention that their distress might be mental health related, ask if there is a doctor, counsellor or community or spiritual advisor that they could reach out to.



42% of  
Canadians surveyed  
were unsure whether  
they would socialize  
with a friend who has  
a mental illness.

## What not to say



**“Just relax.”**  
**“You’ll get over it.”**

These comments could come across as judgmental or dismissive. Instead, just show your friend you’re there to offer support.

## Talking with a co-worker

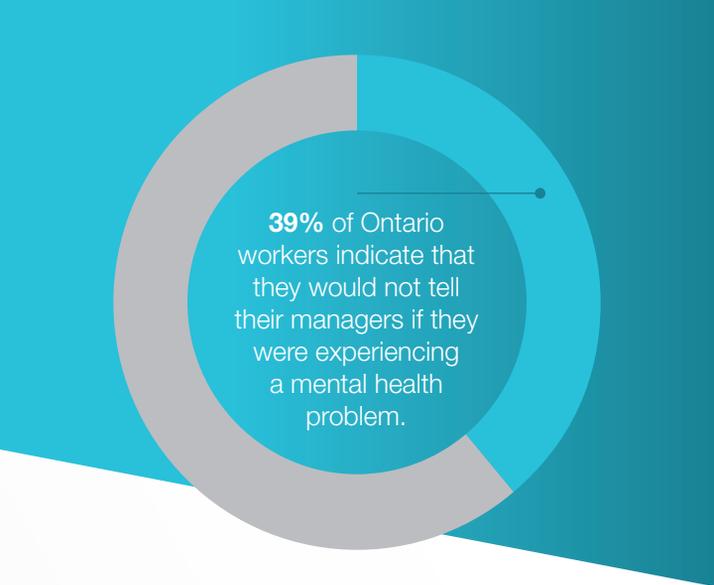
Ask your co-worker about what you have noticed or what is concerning you.

**“Are you OK? You’ve been acting differently, and I’m worried about you.”**

**“This isn’t like you. Has something happened recently that you want to talk about?”**

Even if your co-worker does not think there is a problem, your question may open up a conversation.

If they do want to chat, find a more relaxed time when you won’t be interrupted. Spend that time listening, without jumping in to problem solve or diagnose. Talk about the effects of their behaviour without lecturing. It is more likely you will be able to help if your co-worker trusts that you are doing this because you care.



**39%** of Ontario workers indicate that they would not tell their managers if they were experiencing a mental health problem.

### What not to say



**“I know how you feel.”**  
**“Maybe you just need a day off.”**

Don’t assume you know what the problem is, or that you experience workplace stress the same way your coworker does. Out of character behaviour may signify a mental health problem or some other kind of stress.

## Talking with your teen

Ask how she or he is doing. And be specific about what you've noticed that is concerning you.

**“It seems like you’ve been losing weight and becoming more withdrawn. Is everything OK? Do you want to talk? Or is there another adult you trust you’d be more comfortable talking to—maybe one of your teachers, or a counsellor, or your coach?”**

Even if they don't want to talk, tell them that you will be there for them if or when they do. It can be very upsetting to know a young person you care about isn't doing well, and it's natural to want to offer suggestions or solutions. But giving them space is the best way to gain their trust.

Be compassionate. And don't assume you know what they are feeling or thinking. Instead, invite them to tell you themselves.

Offer to do something together that you both enjoy. Support isn't always about talking, but about spending time together.



**What not to say**

**“Snap out of it.”  
“I went through the same thing when I was your age.”**

Statements like this may make them feel judged for not being able to make themselves feel better, or may not be well received by a teen who is trying to establish their own identity.

# The Next Steps...

## Seeking professional help

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A conversation is a great start, and an important way to let the person know they are not alone. But mental health problems can be just as serious as physical problems, and getting medical attention or other professional help is just as important. A family doctor or primary health care provider is often a good place to start.

There are many things you can do to continue to help:

- **Stay supportive.** Try to make it as easy as possible for them to get the help they need. Offer to help them find resources in their community or get to their appointments.
- **Stay in touch** and follow up regularly to see how they are doing. Being present can make all the difference.
- **Keep the conversation going.** Offer to connect them with counselling services such as ConnexOntario (MentalHealthHelpline.ca or 1 866 531-2600) or Kids Help Phone for children and teens (KidsHelpPhone.ca/teens or 1 800 668-6868).

## It could be an emergency

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If someone is talking about ending their life, perhaps even describing ways they could do it, this may be a medical emergency.

- **Listen to them and take them seriously.** Don't judge or minimize their feelings. Be positive and hopeful, and remember that suicide can be prevented.
- **Ask them if they are suicidal.** Don't be afraid that you will put the idea in their head. It may be a relief for them to talk about it.
- **Let them know help is available** and that the cause of their suicidal thoughts can be treated.
- **Make a safety plan with them.** Who will they call if their feelings get stronger? Who can stay with them to keep them safe? Make a list of phone numbers of people and services they can call if they feel unsafe.

If someone is in crisis and refuses help, call 911 to ensure his or her safety. **Do not leave them alone.** Try to stay calm until help arrives.