

MODULE 5

Activity #4 Handout

Support Strategies

Here are some strategies for supporting someone with a mental health problem/illness:

- Be supportive and understanding.
- Spend time with the person. Listen to him or her.
- Never underestimate the person's capacity to recover.
- Encourage the person to follow his or her treatment plan and to seek out support services. Offer to accompany them to appointments.
- Become informed about mental illness.
- Remember that even though your friend may be going through a hard time they will recover. Stand by them.
- If you're planning an outing to the movies or the community centre, remember to ask your friend along. Keeping busy and staying in touch with friends will help your friend feel better, when they're ready.
- If you are a close friend or family member of someone who has a mental illness, make sure you get support as well. Crisis training, self-help and/or individual counseling will help you become a better support person.
- Put the person's life before your friendship. If you think the person needs help, especially if he or she mentions thoughts of suicide, don't keep it a secret – even if the person asked you to.

If a friend mentions thoughts of suicide or self-harm, you **NEED** to tell his or her parents, a teacher, guidance counselor or someone else who can help. It's better to have a friend who's angry with you for a while than to keep their secret and live with knowing you could have helped but remained quiet when your friend was in trouble.

Recovery – What Helps People With Mental Illness Get (and Stay) Better?

Recovery is an ongoing, slow process, and is different for each person. Research on recovery shows that there are a number of factors which people often mention are important:

- The presence of people who believe in and stand by the person who is in recovery.
- That person's ability to make their own choices about important things like treatment and housing.

Other factors that can support recovery include:

- Mutual support (self-help groups)
- Social opportunities (church groups, drop-in centres, volunteer work, participating in community life)
- Positive relationships (accepting and being accepted, family and friends and communicating with them in a positive way)
- Meaningful daily activity - being able to work, go to school
- Medication (sticking with a treatment plan, working with doctors to find the best medications with the fewest side effects)
- Spirituality (involvement in a faith community or individual spiritual practice)
- Inner healing capacity and inner peace (finding a sense of meaning and purpose, even in suffering)
- Personal growth and development (hobbies, self education, taking control of one's life, exercise, personal goal setting)
- Self-awareness (self-monitoring, recognizing when to seek help, recognizing one's accomplishments and accepting and/or learning from one's failures)