



# WELL-BEING

## Column

## Dealing with mental illness

Learning that you have a mental illness can be painful and difficult to manage. Between the stigmas, fears and myths, you could quickly be faced with many difficulties and a feeling of loss and loneliness. Here are some pointers that can help guide you when the diagnosis is made.

### Learning about the illness

Did you know that about one in five Canadians, or more than six million people, will be affected by mental illness during their lifetime? There are still many myths about mental illness that are based on stigmas, not facts. The first step is to make sure that you understand the nature and implications of what is affecting you.

What are the symptoms of the illness and its consequences on my daily life? Is there a treatment? These questions and more will help you better understand how to confront it and also how to remove the guilt. You will find all the information you need from healthcare professionals, in books dealing with the topic, on specialized websites or from non-specialized (the Mental Illness Foundation, the Canadian Mental Health Association, etc.) or specialized organizations (the Quebec Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Foundation, the Quebec Schizophrenia Society, etc.).

### Sharing with loved ones

Despite its considerable prevalence, there is still a real culture of silence surrounding mental illness, a taboo that can cause some people to isolate themselves and suffer even more deeply. However, without being an obligation, sharing this experience with a parent, friend or trustworthy colleague can be very beneficial or even lifesaving. It is up to you to ask yourself and determine whether you want to talk to somebody about it and with whom. It all depends on the time, your personality and your ability to step outside your comfort zone.

People who are not used to this type of problem do not necessarily know how to react, so guide them by being open about your needs, whether it is somebody to listen to you, support, logistical assistance or just somebody to be there. Also make sure to choose

your words well so as to differentiate yourself from the illness. Therefore, explain to them that you *suffer from depression* instead of saying you are *depressed*.

Finally, if you choose to talk about your problems in the workplace, think carefully who to speak with about this. Remember that professional environments are often conducive to gossip and that you should choose people whom you fully trust. Therefore, a supervisor could be an ideal person to talk to, in that he will know how to help you if you need to adjust your schedule, take more breaks or manage a crisis situation.

### Asking for help

Asking for help can be one of the most difficult steps to take when dealing with mental illness. Fear, stigma and a feeling of weakness can often stand in the way of starting therapy. Tell yourself that when your car breaks down, you take it to a repairman; when you become short-sighted, you go to the eye specialist. The same goes for mental illness or any other problem that cannot be resolved with your existing knowledge.

Helping yourself often requires taking advantage of professional expertise. Your family doctor, support services and professional orders (psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, etc.) can act as contacts for finding and consulting a specialist. Self-help groups, telephone help lines and mental health organizations can also provide assistance or referrals. Should you experience severe emotional distress, a serious crisis or suicidal thoughts, contact emergency services or a hospital. Finally, do not underestimate the help your loved ones can provide.

### Conclusion

The support services offer you additional help and active listening. Do not hesitate to ask!