THE CATALYST

Take the first step in seeking support for your mental health

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By: Rose S. Finch | Posted: April 21, 2022

Have you ever found yourself wondering if you need help for your mental health? I have. I was going through a bitter divorce. I couldn't sleep or eat, and I couldn't stop crying. At first, it seemed normal to be upset about the end of my 14-year marriage. I was told that these experiences often cause 'situational depression', a short-term, stress-related type of depression that can develop after you experience a traumatic event.

It took some time for me to recognize that I was out of my depth. After weeks of misery, sleepless nights, and having lost 20 pounds, I finally had to face the fact that I needed help. Why did I wait so long? There are many reasons, but I think that the most powerful one was the feeling of shame. Having to admit I needed help seemed to me like a defeat, like a personal weakness or a character flaw. The final insult on top of injury. Does this sound dramatic? Perhaps. But I guarantee you that I am not the only one. So many people struggle with asking for help with their mental health.

Most people know someone who has experienced a mental health problem. In any given year, one in five people in Canada experience a mental health problem. By the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, one in two have—or have had—a mental illness.

Recognizing that you need help and taking the first step is the most important thing you can do for yourself, and the people who care about you. It's never too early to seek advice.

When should you seek professional mental help? Some indicators are:

- Long-lasting sadness or irritability
- Extremely high and low moods
- Excessive fear, worry, or anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- An inability to cope with problems or daily activities
- Feeling of disconnection or withdrawal from normal activities

If you find yourself deliberating about asking for help, think of this: if your leg was broken, you wouldn't hesitate to see a doctor. Mental health is just like physical health: everybody has it and we need to take care of it. Talking about it is the first step. Reaching out to a trusted friend is always a good idea.

There are many different kinds of help, support, and treatment available. For myself, I took the first step through visiting my family doctor, but there are so many more options now. Some employers offer employee assistance programs (EAP) that can open the door to getting help. In Canada, you can get free professional mental health and substance use support through the Wellness Together platform, offered by Health Canada. Over one million people in Canada have used this service.

A number of mental health apps (software application) have come onto the scene as well, but presently, there is no framework for their accreditation. So if you decide to use an app, make sure to check into their credibility. When it comes to your health, it's always wise to make sure that you are consulting credible and trusted sources of information.

"Just as physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong, mental fitness helps us to achieve and sustain a state of good mental health". I know that for myself, once I started on the road to recovering my mental well-being, I knew that I would never turn back. Yes, sometimes the road is long. And sometimes there are blind spots, pit stops and setbacks. But sometimes the journey takes us places we would never have imagined.

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