Ontario Centre of Excellence
for Child & Youth Mental Health
Centre d'excellence de l'Ontario en santé
mentale des enfants et des adolescents

TAKE GOOD CARE:

Leading and managing well-being in challenging times

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and sustained negative impact on the mental health of people across the globe. Here in Ontario, community-based child and youth mental health agency staff and leaders have worked tirelessly to support the unique needs of children, young people and families since the initial provincial lockdown in March 2020. They've done so while also managing their own mental health and family concerns.

More than 80 executive and senior leaders from the child and youth mental health sector joined us for a webinar in April 2021 to discuss strategies for avoiding burnout, supporting staff in addressing their mental health and maintaining their own wellness to continue to meet the challenges ahead. This document offers some highlights from that discussion.

Organizational approaches: Moving beyond self-care

Self-care is essential and provides a critical foundation for continuing to lead others and manage one's own wellness, especially in challenging times. Burnout is a systemic issue, though, so efforts must go beyond self-care to ensure that the child and youth mental health workforce is healthy and well.

Dr. Colleen Grady, Research Manager at the Queen's University Department of Family Medicine, and Karen Milligan, Executive Director at Ontario 211 shared their perspectives, strategies and tools for understanding and mobilizing staff towards creating more healthy, safe and compassionate workplaces. Here are some things to consider:

- be proactive — have conversations with your board of directors

- acknowledge and assess problems as they arise

- cultivate a community of caring and compassion

- align values with actions and work to strengthen culture

- measure and monitor staff wellness

- promote flexibility and work-life integration

- reconsider targets, deliverables or deadlines and adjust as necessary

- use tools and resources that adopt an organizational approach to mental health and wellness across your team (see examples of tools, resources and strategies below)
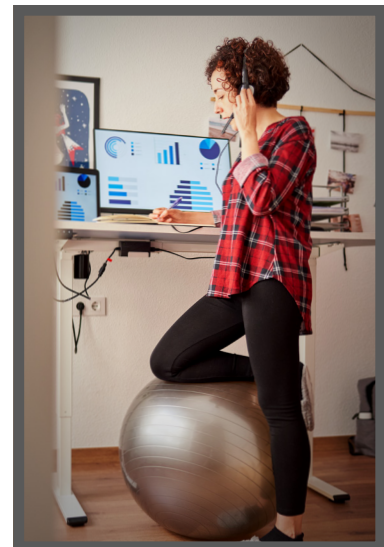
Perspectives from the mental health sector

Leaders in the mental health sector know about resilience, self-care and the importance of one's mental health. Terra Cadeau, Executive Lead for Child and Youth Mental Health Strategy and Partnerships at Hôtel Dieu Grace Healthcare and Karen Ingebrigston, Executive Director of Firefly shared their experiences.

- Prioritizing self-care, building resilience and addressing staff's wellness is a constant work in progress.

We need to acknowledge our own experiences (e.g. some are languishing one year into the pandemic), embrace our own difficulties, share experiences of grief and loss. Being authentic about how we are managing with our personal challenges can be helpful and even inspiring to staff.

- Promoting communication and staff autonomy and working toward equity are important factors that contribute to staff wellness and a healthy workplace.

Examples of tools, resources and strategies

Here are some tools and resources speakers and participants shared during the webinar.

National standard on psychological health and safety in the workplace
This standard was developed by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA), and the Bureau de normalization du Québec (BNQ) (2018) and can be used to help start conversations among leaders and staff on establishing a psychologically safe workplace. English and French resources are available.

Guarding Minds at Work
This resource was developed by the Workplace Mental Health Strategies in partnership with the CSA Standards Group, the Bureau de normalization du Québec (BNQ) and the Mental Health Commission of Canada to help organizations adopt the national standard on psychological health and safety. Free resources include assessments, report, action planning worksheets and evaluation methods. English and French resources are available.

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Not myself today

Developed by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), this program has various resources such as ambassador guides, information sheets, activities and other tools to build mental health awareness, reduce stigma and foster a safe work environment. English and French resources are available.

Improving joy in work

This resource was developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in the United States. It includes a white paper (Perlo et al., 2017), tools and videos for addressing burnout using a quality improvement framework. The context is healthcare in general and can be tailored to community-based settings.

Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOC)

The COPSOC assesses "psychosocial conditions and health promotion in the workplace" and was developed by the Danish National Research Centre for the Working Environment (2007). The third version (Burr et al., 2019, COPSOC III) is available and it has been translated into several languages, including French (Dupret et al., 2012).

Psychological PPE program

This is an online fee-based program spearheaded by Francois Mathieu and colleagues at Tend Academy to specifically address the stress experienced by healthcare providers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The website describes it as an "online program that provides evidence-based strategies and tools to protect your emotional and mental wellbeing during exposure to high-stress, high-pressure situations."

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