

The image features a central white circle with a light blue border. Inside this circle, the text "PARTicipating in My Mental Health Care" is written in a blue, sans-serif font. The background of the entire image is a complex network diagram consisting of numerous small, light blue and dark blue circular nodes connected by thin, light gray lines. The nodes are scattered across the frame, with a higher density around the central circle. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on connectivity and community.

PARTicipating
in My
Mental Health
Care

Introduction

PARTicipating in My Mental Health Care toolkit is an informative, empowering, and actionable resource that was co-designed by **mindyourmind** and a group of youth and caregivers in Ontario. The concept and contents of this toolkit were based on a research project led by the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute and Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions and funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). The project focused on understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic changed how young people learn about supports for mental health and addictions and how they access those supports. For more information, see [An Overview of the PAR Research Project](#).

The project used a participatory action research (PAR) approach, which involved people whom the research was about as important leaders and “PAR-tners” in the project team. Thank you Alisha, Ellen, Elora, Erin, Raissa, Sara, and other PAR-tners for your valuable contributions to the project and the toolkit you see here.

PARTicipating in My Mental Health Care was designed to help young people in Ontario and across Canada find and access mental health and addiction services and support best suited for them. This toolkit includes a variety of information, reflective activities, and fillable worksheets that can be personalized to support youth as unique, active participants along their mental health or addiction care journey.

Terms used in this toolkit: We use the terms young people, young person, or youth to describe people between childhood and adulthood (the exact ages can vary). Related terms include adolescents, teens, or young adults.

The toolkit includes:

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What Type of Support Am I Looking For?

First, write down your current challenges, questions or worries when it comes to your mental health and substance use (e.g. medication questions, getting a therapist):

A large rectangular area with a light blue border and horizontal dotted lines, intended for writing down challenges, questions, or worries.

Now that you've thought a bit about some of your current challenges or the questions you have about your mental health and/or substance use, you might be wondering where or who to turn to for support.

There are many ways to categorize the types of support that exist for mental health and substance use issues; throughout PARTicipating in My Mental Health Care, we use three categories that are each represented by a colour: **urgent support**, **coping support**, and **informational support**. Learn more about these categories below, so that you can get a better idea of the type of support you might be looking for:

Urgent Support:

You may notice big and sudden changes in your mood or behaviour, which may include being in a state of crisis. You may also have urges and/or plans to hurt yourself or someone else. You may see or hear things that others do not. You may have had either an accidental or deliberate overdose with substances. You may feel like your current way of managing stress and challenges is no longer working.

In this case, you may consider getting help from a healthcare provider or service that specializes in mental health or addictions and who can see you now or very soon, someone to guide you through the first steps needed for your health and safety and plan for what to do next.



Coping Support:


You may notice that parts of your daily life, including relationships, are strongly affected by your thoughts, feelings and mood. You may be going through, or have gone through, a major life change or event or feel smaller stresses piling up. You may feel like it is getting harder to manage challenges.

In this case, you may consider getting help from a professional, someone who may or may not specialize in mental health or addictions, for ongoing support that isn't needed urgently. You could also look to people and places in your community for support, including clinics, groups, or people who have gone through something similar. Coping support could involve talking about your feelings and experiences to better understand them and learn strategies to help.

Informational Support:

You may consider your overall well-being to be good but you could use some tips for managing stress, would like to build healthier relationships, or have questions about mental health or substance use.

In this case, you may consider talking to someone you are comfortable with who will listen and not judge you based on what you say. A person you trust might also be able to provide ideas or suggestions of where you can go for coping support, if you decide you would like to seek that out next. You could also find information about available resources, such as services or professionals in your community or online, learn more about a particular issue that you're struggling with, or tips for taking care of your well-being.



*Conversations
about our feelings
and mental health
can be difficult, but they
are important.
You are important.*

The diagram features a central white circle with a blue border containing the text 'Creating My Support Network'. This central circle is surrounded by a complex network of light blue lines connecting numerous small blue dots. Each dot is connected to one or more rectangular boxes, each containing a text label. The labels represent various support resources and professionals. The overall layout is circular and radial, with the central circle being the largest and most prominent element.

Creating My Support Network

Spiritual Communities

Counsellor

Websites

Support Group

Canada-wide Helplines

Family Doctor

Service Information

Hospital Outpatient

Courses

Trusted Adults

Psychiatrist

Friends & Family

Crisis Services

Community Organizations

Walk-in Clinics

Emergency Services

Addiction Rehab

Therapist

Resources

Social Media

Nurse Practitioner

Hospital Inpatient

Apps

Religious Communities

Ontario-wide Helplines

Psychologist

Social Worker

Creating My Support Network

We all need help at some point, whether it's needed urgently, for coping, or for information. Some of your supports might specialize in mental health or addictions, and others might be alternative or non-professional. Having variety in your support network can help you meet your different needs. It can also be helpful to talk with the people you see as part of this network to learn what ways they feel able to support you.

Here are some options of services or supports you might like to include in your support network, depending on the type of support you are looking for. Many services are not accessible 24/7, and some may not be available where you live, or require a referral, usually from a family doctor, before they can be accessed. Some options may be helpful for specific concerns (e.g. anxiety, alcohol use), and groups or communities (e.g. 2SLGBTQI+, People of Color, Newcomers), so explore what's available or ask if a service can meet your preferences or needs.

There may be other options for your support network that are not listed here. To learn more about your options, try asking an adult in your life who is informed on local health and social services or try a resource like [211](#), or [ConnexOntario](#)^o that can give you this information.

Struggling with mental health or substance use can be lonely, especially when it feels like you do not have many people, services, or tools to turn to. You do not have to go through this alone!


Note: The options below are listed alphabetically. Links to options available only in Ontario have a superscript "o". Links to options available across Canada do not have a superscript.

Urgent Supports:

- Emergency services (e.g. 911, emergency department, [Ontario Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team](#)^o)
- Helplines and crisis support across Canada (e.g. [Black Youth Helpline](#), [Hope for Wellness](#), [Kids Help Phone](#), [Naseeha](#), [Talk Suicide Canada](#), [Trans Lifeline](#))
- Helplines and crisis support across Ontario (e.g. [Crisis Line](#)^o, [Good2Talk](#)^o, [LGBT Youthline](#)^o, [Ontario Distress and Crisis Services](#)^o)
- Family doctor ([find a doctor in Canada, in Ontario](#)^o)
- Inpatient hospital programs

Coping Supports:

- Addiction rehabilitation services
- Community organizations (e.g. [Canadian Mental Health Association \(CMHA\)](#), [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#)^o, [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario \(YWHO\)](#)^o)
- Counsellor
- Family, friends, or loved ones

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- Helplines and crisis support across Canada (e.g. [Black Youth Helpline](#), [Hope for Wellness](#), [Kids Help Phone](#), [Naseeha](#), [Talk Suicide Canada](#), [Trans Lifeline](#))
 - Helplines and crisis support across Ontario (e.g. [Crisis Line](#)^o, [Good2Talk](#)^o, [LGBT Youthline](#)^o, [Ontario Distress and Crisis Services](#)^o)
 - Mental health centres (e.g. [Canadian Mental Health Association \(CMHA\)](#), [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#)^o, [Children's Mental Health Ontario \(CMHO\)](#)^o)
 - Mobile apps (e.g. [Be Safe by mindyourmind](#), MindShift CBT, PocketWell)
 - Nurse practitioner
 - Outpatient hospital programs
 - Peer support and community groups (e.g. [One Stop Talk](#)^o, [Peer-to-Peer Community by Kids Help Phone](#), [Togetherall](#))
 - Psychiatrist
 - Psychologist (e.g. [find a psychologist in Canada, in Ontario](#)^o)
 - Religious and spiritual communities
 - School (e.g. club, guidance counsellor, teacher)
 - Social worker
 - Therapist (e.g. [find a therapist in Canada, in Ontario](#)^o)
 - Trusted adults or community members (e.g. coaches, elders, mentors)
 - Walk-in clinics (e.g. Integrated Youth Services, [One Stop Talk](#)^o, [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario \(YWHO\)](#)^o)

Informational Supports:

- Mental health websites and resources (e.g. [mindyourmind.ca](#), [YouthSpeak](#), [Youth Mental Health Canada](#))
- Miscellaneous resources (e.g. books, magazines, podcasts)
- Service information websites (e.g. [eMentalHealth.ca](#), [Mental health support-Canada](#), [Settlement Service Providers across Canada](#))
- Service information and navigation supports (e.g. [1Call1Click.ca](#)^o, [211](#), [ConnexOntario](#)^o)
- Social media accounts (e.g. [Kids Help Phone](#), [mindyourmind](#), [Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario \(YWHO\)](#)^o)
- Webinars or skill-building courses (e.g. [BounceBack](#), [Kids Help Phone](#))

Whatever your experience is, it's important to reach out for help.

Is This _____ Good for Me?

Service or Support

It can be hard to know where to start when evaluating whether a service or support is a good match for your needs. When asked what details were helpful for them to know, the youth involved in this study shared the points listed throughout this section. We hope it can help you gather important information to figure out if a service or support is good for you.

Everyone is different, so there may be points on the checklist that don't apply to you or some you think are missing. You also might not be able to get answers to everything listed or have control of the services available to you, this tool can be a way to take a more active role in your care. You deserve to have your preferences and needs heard, so we hope this tool can help empower you to speak up about them (and you never know when it could inspire change)!

Details

Do I know their basic service information?

- Contact information
- Location
- Hours of operation
- Wait times
- Costs (including if they do a free consultations)
- Privacy and confidentiality policies
- Eligibility criteria (i.e. requirements for using the service)

Is this service a realistic option for me? Do I have the information I need to access this service?

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*Remember
to
breathe.*



Do I know what the service involves?

- What happens during the first appointment
- Type of therapy (e.g. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Exposure Therapy)
- Duration of service (e.g. single visit, short term, or long term)
- Format of service (e.g. individual, group or family therapy)
- Possible expectations of me (e.g. weekly diary card, occasional worksheets, no substance use)
- Communication outside of appointments
- Who can be present for my services (e.g. just me, a guardian, a support person)
- Possible risks and benefits

Am I clear on what I can expect from this service and what might be expected from me? Is there someone who I would like to encourage or support me with this service, or can I access it independently?

Options

What type of service(s) are offered?

- Information or resources
- Screening, assessment, or diagnosis
- Crisis support
- Counselling or therapy
- Indigenous forms of healing or medicine
- Alternative therapies (e.g. herbal remedies, acupuncture, light therapy)
- Referrals to other services or providers
- Medication prescriptions
- Other

Do I need another type of support while I wait to get help from this service (e.g. help safety planning, digital resources, someone else to talk with)? How might each service play a unique role in my care?



What ways are services offered?

- In person
- Online
- Phone
- App
- Other (e.g. text, email)

Is this form of communication doable for me? What do I need in order to feel more comfortable with this type of communication?

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Needs and Preferences

Does the service or provider have qualities that are important to me?

- Area(s) of focus or expertise (e.g. 2SLGBTQI+, trauma, autism)
- Qualifications or training (e.g. degree, member of a professional college, certifications)
- Background, personal characteristics or lived experience they identify with (e.g. language, gender, race, cultural-sensitivity, 2SLGBTQI+ friendly)
- Online reviews of the provider or service to learn about others' experiences

If I've met the service provider, do I feel safe and accepted by them? If I haven't met them, do I feel comfortable based on qualities I've learned about them?

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Is this service accessible for me?

- Options for scheduling an appointment
- Referral is/not required; Possibility of getting a referral
- Options for transportation or parking
- Payment options (e.g. insurance coverage, credit card, e-transfer)
- Communication outside of appointments
- Physically accessible
- Safe and inclusive environment
- Language translation services available

Does this service fit with my needs or circumstances? How convenient is this service for me?

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*It's more than
okay to ask
for help.*

Pause, Reflect and Act

Thinking about our mental health or substance use and the help we might need can be difficult and overwhelming. Try to pause for a moment and show yourself some compassion.

The prompts in this section are meant to help you think about the supports and tools that you already have, and the steps you can take to add more. Sometimes it helps to write out the people, places and things that can support us because it can be hard to remember them in a crisis.

Look at the [Creating My Support Network](#) tool to help you think about which options you can currently reach out to and when (e.g. when you need validation or help to calm yourself).

I can reach out to	for support when
I can reach out to	for support when
I can reach out to	for support when

My current supports provide me with		
What I still need help with is		
I can ask	or go to	for more information or support.

Similar to people or services, some coping strategies are best for helping with a particular emotion. Think about what you've found helpful when feeling some of the examples below and jot them down if you need some ideas the next time you're experiencing that emotion.

Coping strategies I can use when I'm:

Anxious (e.g. deep breathing)	Sad (e.g. create art)	Numb (e.g. hold an ice cube)	Angry (e.g. write it and rip it)

What I can do to help me stay safe: (e.g. call a friend)

The following is meant to help you to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the service(s) or support(s) that you're currently accessing or thinking about accessing after using the **Is This Good for Me?** tool.

Service or Support:	
Pros:	Cons:
<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Next steps (e.g. talk to a trusted peer or relatives about your concerns with this service or support):	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

Service or Support:	
Pros:	Cons:
<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Next steps	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

Service or Support:	
Pros:	Cons:
<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Next steps	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

After some important reflecting, let's put the next steps into action.

How ready am I to seek support or make a decision around my current support(s)?



What would help me feel more ready?

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What actions can I take in the short term (e.g. today, tomorrow or this week):

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What actions can I take in the long term (e.g. next week, this month or semester):

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Some self-care activities I like to do or want to try (e.g. watch something that makes me smile, dance, guided meditation, take a social media break, time in nature):

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One that I will do now:

