Mental Health and Human Rights

Understanding how well-being and equity are connected

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is a state of well-being in which you recognize your own potential, cope with life's stresses, work productively, and contribute to your community.

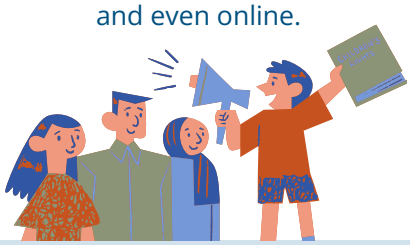
Various social factors, such as socioeconomic status, race, and education, play a big role in shaping mental health and access to mental health support. **Systemic barriers**, including racism, colonialism, poverty, and ableism, can limit access to mental health care. These factors are known as **social determinants of health** and often result in unequal treatment and access for different individuals.

Maintaining good mental health helps us manage life's challenges and reduces the risk of developing mental health issues. It is not just the absence of mental disorders but it is a positive state of mental and emotional well-being.



What are Human Rights?

Human rights are the basic freedoms and protections that everyone has just because they are human. They help ensure that people are treated with dignity, fairness, and respect in all parts of life: at school, at home, in healthcare, in the community, and even online.



How is Mental Health Tied to Human Rights?

Everyone has the right to mental well-being, dignity, and care. A person's mental well-being impacts their ability to exercise other rights, such as the right to education and the right to work. When mental health is protected, people are better equipped to engage meaningfully in society. You have rights no matter what your status is.



The Rights of Young people are protected under:

1. **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 3, 12, 24, 31 and 39:** Children have the right to the best possible health, including mental health care, non-discriminatory support, decisions made in their best interests and recovery from harm.
2. **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:** provides equality rights and protection from discrimination, including discrimination based on mental health.
3. **Provincial and territorial Mental Health Acts,** which establish care standards and safeguard access to treatment, the right to consent, protection against discrimination, and privacy.



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As a young person, you have:



The right to health: Free, youth-friendly, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate mental health care.



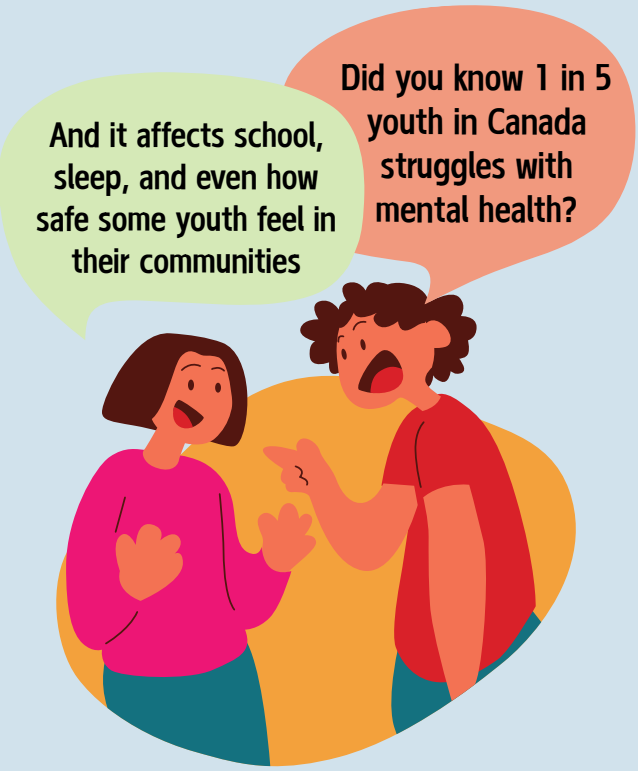
The right to relax, play, and be creative. Taking breaks and doing things you enjoy supports your mental health too!



The right to express your thoughts and feelings in all matters that affect you, including your mental well-being.



The right to get help to heal and recover if you've experienced harm, violence, neglect or trauma. This includes emotional and mental health support.





What can you do?

For yourself:

- ☐ Recognize that mental health is important for your overall well-being
- ☐ Know your rights to mental health care
- ☐ Practice self care and prioritize activities that help you relax and recharge such as listening to music, spending time outside or hobbies
- ☐ Develop healthy ways to express your feelings, such as journaling or talking to a trusted ally
- ☐ Speak up about your needs and seek professional help when needed

For Others:

- ☐ Avoid using hurtful language or jokes about mental illness or emotional struggles as it may be triggering to those around you
- ☐ Respect everyone's privacy: what someone shares with you stays with you unless it will put someone's safety at risk
- ☐ Include others: no one should feel left out or feel alone
- ☐ Share helpful resources or refer people to an adult ally
- ☐ Start or join student mental health club or committees in your school or community



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My Rights, My Mental Health

Below is a list of rights from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child that help protect and support your mental health. For each one, think of an example from your life, school, or community that shows why that right matters to you or others.



The Right That Protects Me (Article #)	My Real-life Example
EXAMPLE: Article 12 – You have the right to be heard	EXAMPLE: I told the youth worker that I felt lonely, so he connected me with a buddy group where I can meet new friends
Article 12 – You have the right to be heard	
Article 24 – You have the right to the best possible health	
Article 31 – You have the right to rest, play, and leisure	
Article 39 – You have the right to get help to recover if you've been hurt or harmed	

What does exercising and enjoying your rights look like?

(Use any form of expression- such as drawing, poetry, graffiti, etc. - to show what good mental health means to you)



Resources Used to delveop this content:

1. https://cmha.ca/brochure/brief-mental-health-as-a-human-right-cmhas-vision/
2. https://www.ohchr.org/en/health/mental-health-and-human-rights
3. https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/drupal/2016-07/Youth_Strategy_Eng_2016.pdf
4. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/brochure_-_youth_under_16.pdf
5. https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/rights-children.html
6. https://rightsofchildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Mental-Health-and-Childrens-Rights-Working-Paper.pdf

About Equitas

Equitas is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing equality, social justice, and respect for human dignity through transformative human rights education programs. We empower people to challenge inequality and discrimination and take action to make their communities safer and stronger.





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