

Lesson 3: Anxiety and Depression

Introduction

This lesson focuses on two of the more common mental health issues, anxiety and depression, and how an active healthy lifestyle can be a positive influence on them. Although a number of healthy lifestyle practices are discussed in this lesson, the primary emphasis is on the benefits derived from physical activity.

Anxiety and depression affect all people in one way or another. They are considered disorders only when these feelings are almost always there and when they significantly interfere with daily life. In *A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada*, Health Canada reports the following:

- “Anxiety disorders affect 12% of the population, causing mild to severe impairment.
- For a variety of reasons, many individuals may not seek treatment for their anxiety; they may consider the symptoms mild or normal, or the symptoms themselves may interfere with help-seeking” (Chapter 4, Highlights).

It is important to remove the stigma of weakness associated with seeking help if one is feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed. People who are experiencing anxious behaviour or any other mental health problem that is significantly interfering with daily living should feel that is not only OK, but also wise to seek medical advice, just as they would for physical injuries.

REFERENCES



For additional information, refer to the following resources:

Anxiety Disorder Association of British Columbia (AnxietyBC). <www.anxietybc.com/> .

Health Canada. “Chapter 4: Anxiety Disorders.” *A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Health Canada, 2002. Available on the Public Health Agency of Canada website at <www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/miic-mmac/index.html> .

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/> .



Specific Learning Outcomes

- 11.MH.1** Identify and apply positive health strategies to deal with issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.
- 11.MH.4** Examine the signs and symptoms of mental-emotional health issues related to stress, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders.
- 11.MH.5** Identify community service agencies that support individuals concerned about mental-emotional health issues.
- 11.MH.6** Apply problem-solving and decision-making strategies in case scenarios related to selected mental-emotional health issues.
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Key Understandings

- Anxiety may make people feel anxious most of the time without an obvious reason.
 - Anxiety has a wide range of signs and symptoms.
 - Major depression is a medical condition characterized by long-lasting feelings of intense sadness and hopelessness, with a biological and chemical basis.
 - Active healthy lifestyle practices are helpful in dealing with anxiety and depression and support positive mental-emotional health.
 - Community service agencies are available to support individuals concerned about mental-emotional health issues.
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Essential Questions

1. What are important signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression?
 2. How does an active healthy lifestyle support positive mental-emotional health?
 3. What health agencies support issues of mental-emotional health in your community?
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Background Information

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety, or feeling anxious, describes a mood familiar to most of us, one that we may experience every day. Anxiety comes from a concern over lack of control over circumstances. In some cases being anxious and worrying over a problem may generate a solution. Normally, however, it will just result in negative thinking. When anxiety seems to come out of nowhere, is excessive, persists for many weeks without relief, or interferes with everyday life, it may not be an ordinary mood anymore. It may be an illness.

Signs and Symptoms

People with an anxiety disorder may have a number of common physical symptoms, including the following (Canadian Psychiatric Association; Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba; AnxietyBC):

- shortness of breath
- shakiness
- muscle aches and tension
- tight chest
- racing heart
- choking sensations
- numbness or tingling
- feelings of unreality
- irritability
- insomnia
- restlessness
- sweating and nausea
- abdominal distress

Emotionally, people with an anxiety disorder may feel short-tempered and apprehensive, fearing that bad things are about to happen.

According to the Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba (ADAM), anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health problems. They can cause “significant personal and societal costs in terms of lost wages, decreased productivity, reduced quality of life and frequent use of health care services” (ADAM, *Major Anxiety Disorders*).

The different types of anxiety disorders include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, specific phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which medical professionals would diagnose before providing treatment.

Causes

As stated by ADAM, “research indicates that there is no single explanation for the cause of anxiety disorders but that several . . . factors may contribute to their origins” (*Major Anxiety Disorders*). The causes of anxiety may include the following (Manitoba Healthy Schools, “Anxiety”):

- inherited tendency
- shy temperament
- unpredictable lifestyle
- stressful experiences
- anxious parents

REFERENCES



For information on anxiety disorders, refer to the following websites:

Anxiety Disorder Association of British Columbia (AnxietyBC). “Overview of Anxiety Disorders.” <www.anxietybc.com/resources/introduction.php>.

Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba (ADAM). *Major Anxiety Disorders*. <www.adam.mb.ca/about.asp>.

Canadian Psychiatric Association. “Anxiety, Depression and Manic Depression.” *Public Education Materials*. <<http://publications.cpa-apc.org/browse/documents/17>>.

Manitoba Healthy Schools. “Anxiety.” *Mental Health*. <www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/issues/anxiety.html>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.

Depression

Depression is a mental disorder that affects a person’s thoughts, moods, feelings, behaviour, and physical health. People once thought that depression was “all in the head” and that if one really tried, one could “snap out of it” or just “get over it.” Some people still respond to depression in this way. Health professionals now know that depression is not a weakness, and it is not something people can treat on their own. Depression is a medical disorder with a biological and chemical basis, and it may affect people of all ages or nationalities. Some mental health problems, such as bipolar depression or major depression, tend to run in families due to genetics or family interaction styles.

Sometimes depression is triggered by a stressful life event. At other times depression seems to occur spontaneously with no specific identifiable cause. Depression is much more than grieving or experiencing a bout of sadness.

Depression may occur only once in a person’s life, or it could occur sporadically throughout life, with periods when the person would not feel depressed. It may also be a chronic condition, which may require ongoing treatment over a lifetime. With proper treatment, most people with serious depression improve within weeks, and can return to normal daily activities.

Signs and Symptoms

The two main symptoms associated with depression are lack of interest in normal daily living, even in the activities that are enjoyable, and feeling miserable or “down in the dumps.” A depressed person shows feelings of sadness and helplessness, or may cry often.

A health professional would also look for other signs and symptoms lasting at least two weeks, such as changes in sleep patterns, concentration, weight or eating patterns, demeanour (more irritable), self-esteem, and desire to live. Physical complaints, such as gastrointestinal problems (indigestion, constipation, or diarrhoea), headache, and backache may also be signs.

Different age groups may react differently to depression. Sometimes it is confusing to determine what the actual problem is because the behaviour is a cover-up for the real problem. For example, children may pretend to be sick, worry about being bullied, not do well in school, or act out to cover up their feelings of sadness. Older people may focus more on complaining about the physical symptoms of depression than on what situations or emotions are causing them to feel that way.

The primary types of depression include major depression, dysthymia, adjustment disorders, bipolar disorder, and seasonal affective disorder (Mayo Clinic). These types of depression have similarities and differences. It is important that people who suffer from depression obtain proper diagnosis from a medical professional rather than attempting self-diagnosis.

REFERENCES



For additional information on the signs and symptoms of depression and definitions of the primary types of depression, refer to the following websites:

Canadian Mental Health Association. *Mental Health and High School*.
<www.cmha.ca/highschool/>.

Finding Optimism: Health in Response to Mental Health. “Things to Say to Someone with Depression.” *Healthy Mind*. <www.findingoptimism.com/healthy-mind/ways-to-build-up-someone-with-depression/>.

Health Canada. “Chapter 2: Mood Disorders.” *A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Health Canada, 2002. Available on the Public Health Agency of Canada website at <www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/miic-mmhc/index.html>.

Mayo Clinic. *Depression*.
<www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/DS00175/DSECTION=2>.

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Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health Issues

Ask students to think about the signs and symptoms of selected disorders, using the information from this lesson. Have students record on a T-Chart what each disorder “looks like” and “feels like” as it relates to the signs and symptoms.

Disorder:	
Looks Like	Feels Like



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Self-Assessment of Mental Health

Check websites for sample mental health assessments. Examples of self-tests include the following:

- Anxiety Test
- Coping Skills Test
- Eating Disorders and Emotional Eating Test
- Optimism/Pessimism Test
- Resilience Test
- Self-Esteem Test
- Social Anxiety Test

Have students choose a self-test they would like to try. Provide students with an opportunity to discuss results, if desired.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Educators are advised to preview and evaluate websites and online resources before recommending them for student use. Ensure that the selected websites and tests are appropriate for student use.

REFERENCE



A variety of mental health assessment tests are available on the following website:

Discovery Health. “Mental Health Assessments.” *Mental Health*. 2007.
<<http://health.discovery.com/centers/mental/assessments.html>>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Signs and Symptoms of Mental Health Issues

This learning activity will enable students to become more acquainted with various mental health issues and some of their signs and symptoms. An assumption is that teachers have already addressed these topics in class and are using this learning activity primarily for review or for application of learning.



Refer to RM 6–MH: Mental Health Scenarios.

REFERENCES



The following annotated bibliography is intended to be used as a reference for selecting student and teacher learning resources. Decisions related to choice of learning resources are determined at the local school/division level.

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth. *Physical Education/Health Education Learning Resources: Kindergarten to Senior 2: Compilation of Annotated Bibliographies (2002-2004)*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2004. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/learnres/bibliographies.html>.



Additional information about anxiety and depression may be obtained from the following websites:

Canadian Mental Health Association. *Mental Health and High School*. <www.cmha.ca/highschool/>.

---. "Resources." *Work-Life Balance: It's a Matter of Time*. <www.manitoba.cmha.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=4-42&lang=1>.

Health Canada. "Mental Health." *Healthy Living*. <www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/mental/index_e.html>.

Manitoba Healthy Schools. *Mental Health*. <www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/issues/mental.html>.

Manitoba Health. *Mental Health and Addictions*. <www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/>.

Mental Health Canada. *Diseases and Disorders*. <www.mentalhealthcanada.com/ConditionsandDisorders.asp?lang=e>.

Mental Health Education Resource Centre (MHERC) Manitoba. *Mental Health Disorders and Issues*. <www.mherc.mb.ca/mentalIllness.html>.

Mental Health First Aid. <www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca/>.

National Institute of Mental Health. "The Numbers Count: Mental Disorders in America." *Health and Outreach*. <www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-numbers-count-mental-disorders-in-america.shtml>.

Safe Healthy Schools. "Mental Health and Schools." *Communities and Schools Promoting Health*. <www.safehealthyschools.org/mental_health/mental_health.htm>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Background Information

Prevention Strategies

Learning how to control our feelings through healthy lifestyle practices can help us reduce or prevent anxiety. Stress-management strategies may include deep breathing, relaxation, guided imagery or visualization, yoga, meditation, and calming self-talk.

Physical exercise can be a key element in reducing anxiety (Repich). Some research evidence suggests the following:

Exercise raises the levels of certain mood-enhancing neurotransmitters in the brain. Exercise may also boost feel-good endorphins, release muscle tension, help you sleep better, and reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol. It also increases body temperature, which may have calming effects. All of these changes in your mind and body can improve such symptoms as sadness, anxiety, irritability, stress, fatigue, anger, self-doubt and hopelessness. (Mayo Clinic)

Exercise isn't a cure for depression or anxiety, but its psychological and physical benefits can improve the symptoms.

REFERENCES



For additional information on the benefits of exercise for mental-emotional health, refer to the following websites:

Khan, Adam. "Exercise." *YouMe Works*. <www.youmeworks.com/exercise.html>.

Mayo Clinic. "Depression and Anxiety: Exercise Eases Symptoms." *Depression*. <www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression-and-exercise/MH00043>.

Repich, Deanne. "Exercise Your Anxiety Away!" *Health Articles*. 2007. <www.healthandfitnessadvices.com/articles/health/exercise-your-anxiety-away.html>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Exercise as the Best Preventive Medicine

Building on the information from Lesson 1 of Module C, have students research the benefits of exercise and physical activity for mental-emotional health and present their findings in different ways (e.g., a poster, a rap song, an advertisement, an acrostic). An example follows.

E X A M P L E

In the following example, an acrostic (BE ACTIVE) is used to promote the benefits of exercise and physical activity:

- B – Breath** Taking deep **breaths** is an effective relaxation technique and helps reduce stress-related symptoms.
- E – Exercise** **Exercise** increases levels of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, which are neurotransmitters that help elevate or improve mood.
- A – Attitude** Taking a positive **attitude** is a strategy for reducing stress and dealing with anxiety.
- C – Confidence** A person can develop **confidence** through exercise or training, because the body becomes stronger and the physical activity becomes easier.
- T – Time** Planning a **time** to be active every day is important to good mental and emotional health. Regular physical activity can help improve sleep, decrease anxiety, and enhance ability to cope with stress.
- I – Inactive** Being **inactive** puts a person at risk for developing various chronic diseases and mental health issues.
- V – Vigorous** **Vigorous** exercise contributes to developing cardiovascular/respiratory endurance. The health benefits associated with cardiovascular fitness include easier weight management, improved sleeping habits, decreased anxiety, reduced depression, improved ability to cope with stress, improved mood, and enhanced self-esteem.
- E – Endorphin** It is believed that, in response to exercise, the body releases different chemicals, such as **endorphins**, which affect the brain. Endorphins have a pain-relieving effect on the body and produce a feeling of euphoria.

R E F E R E N C E



The following is an example of a song that promotes active healthy living. The song lyrics, as well as an audio clip and video clip of the song, are available on the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth website.

Burnett, Aaron. *Get off the Couch*. Audio and video clip. 2003.
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/curriculum.html>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at
<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Background Information

Seeking Professional Help

The diagnosis of depression should be left to a health professional. There are basic questions to ask that may help steer a person in the direction of seeking professional mental health care.

REFERENCE



For a list of questions, refer to the following website:

Aetna IntelliHealth. "Are You Depressed?" *Diseases and Conditions*.

<www.intelihealth.com/IH/ih/IH/WSIHW000/8596/35222/362836.html?d=dmContent>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at

<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Community Supports and Services

Have students use a variety of resources (e.g., Internet, directories, regional health authority, counsellors) to research supports and services for mental-emotional health issues available in the local community or in the province. Ask students to include the name of the agency or organization, identify contact information, and describe the supports and services provided.

Agency	Contact Information	Supports and Services Provided

REFERENCE



For ideas on supports and services available in Manitoba, refer to the following website:

Manitoba Healthy Schools. "Where Can I Go for Help?" *Mental Health*.

<www.gov.mb.ca/healthyschools/issues/mental.html>.

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at

<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/>.

RM 6–MH: Mental Health Scenarios*

This learning activity will enable students to become more acquainted with various mental health issues and some of their signs and symptoms. An assumption is that teachers have already addressed these topics in class and are using this learning activity primarily for review or application of learning.

Materials Needed

- slips of paper with a different mental health scenario on each (see the following page)
- notes taken in class
- a health book

Directions

Place the class into groups of three or four students. Have one person from each group pick a slip of paper that outlines a specific mental health scenario. Advise students that the groups will have approximately 10 minutes to figure out which mental health issue their selected scenario describes and to respond to three questions, providing explanations for their answers:

1. From what mental health issue do you think the person described in the scenario is suffering? Provide reasons for your decision (signs, symptoms, and possible causes of the mental health issue).
2. What advice and assistance would you offer the person in the scenario? Explain.
3. Which health care professionals would best be able to help the person? Give reasons.

When the 10 minutes are up, the groups take turns reading their scenarios to the class and presenting their response to the three problem-solving challenges. During the class discussion, the teacher can include any other important information that is appropriate.

Continued

* Source of adaptation: Ballard, Michelle. "Mental Health Scenarios." *PE Central: Health Lesson Ideas*. 2002. <www.pecentral.org/lessonideas/ViewLesson.asp?ID=3221>. Used by permission of PE Central (percentral.org), the premier website for physical education teachers.

RM 6–MH: Mental Health Scenarios (*Continued*)

Mental Health Scenarios

Below are a few scenarios that may indicate a mental health issue. Teachers are encouraged to make up more scenarios for any other mental health topics addressed in class.

1. Suzie’s mother died a year ago, but Suzie just can’t seem to move on. Suzie is still having a hard time sleeping at night and concentrating in school. Last week, I even caught Suzie crying in the school washroom. Some people have seen her take some pills.
2. Brandon has recently graduated from high school and will be attending a local university this year. Brandon was always exercising and working out in high school. He now spends a lot of time weight training at the gym. He’s been putting on a lot of muscle lately, and he is always talking about working out and getting bigger. Brandon takes supplements, drinks protein shakes, and has started using creatine (amino acid). When I’m talking to Brandon it almost sounds as if he wants to become the next “superman.” I’m really worried about Brandon because he gets agitated and angry very easily.
3. Jenny is my best friend. We both play volleyball. We’ve been playing volleyball together since Grade 7. I’ve noticed that every winter Jenny withdraws from her friends and always seems sad. Every winter, I think that it’s me . . . that I’ve done something to Jenny to upset her. Once spring hits, Jenny slowly returns to her “normal” self.
4. Chris is constantly worried about catching colds. In fact, Chris washes his hands just about 20 times a day. When asked, Chris says that he cannot afford to be sick, and then goes into a lecture about how many germs there are around. Sometimes Chris washes his hands so much that they bleed.
5. Hailey’s parents were divorced when she was six. Since then, she has been spending every second weekend with her father. She is now in high school and doesn’t want to go to her father’s house every second weekend anymore. She wants to work and spend more time with her school friends. Her father lives in another part of the city quite a distance away. When she’s at his house there isn’t much to do, and he’s a smoker, which bothers her, but she realizes that he is lonely and needs her help to do household chores.

ANSWER KEY

1. Health issue: **depression**
2. Health issue: **muscle dysmorphia**
3. Health issue: **seasonal affective disorder**
4. Health issue: **anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder**
5. Health issue: **stress**