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ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE
CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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2010 TOOLBOX

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THE CANADIAN MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Brief background

Founded in Toronto in 1919, the Canadian Mental Health Association is one of the oldest community-based organizations in Canada. It includes 12 provincial associations (divisions) and more than 135 subsidiaries spread out across the entire country.

The Quebec CMHA network: *The energy of an association! The strength of a network!*

The CMHA – *Division du Québec* came to be in 1955. It works collaboratively with ten independent subsidiaries, each having their own corporate body. This affiliation between the subsidiaries and the *Division du Québec* creates the strength of the network.

Visit the subsidiaries' websites in order to discover their activities, diversities and the assistance that is available in your region! (see the contact information on page 26)

- CMHA–Bas-du-Fleuve ■ CMHA–Côte-Nord ■ CMHA–Lac-Saint-Jean ■ CMHA–Québec
- CMHA–Montréal ■ CMHA–Saguenay ■ CMHA–Chaudière-Appalaches ■ CMHA–Haut-Richelieu
- CMHA–Rive-Sud de Montréal ■ CMHA–Sorel/Saint-Joseph/Tracy



Mission

The *Division du Québec* is a community-based organization that is dedicated to the promotion of mental health, the prevention of mental disorders and the development of activities that are intended for the population.

The services provided by the Quebec CMHA network

The Quebec CMHA network plays an important role with respect to information, awareness and referral, particularly in the areas of prevention and promotion of mental health.

The Quebec CMHA network offers the population numerous programs and activities in order to address the needs at the grassroots level. These programs and activities aim to improve the well-being of individuals and to prevent the appearance of mental health disorders. The strength of the network is mainly due to the partnership that each of the subsidiaries and the Division develop assiduously with the organizations in the various settings that are impacted by the issue.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

A person who is mentally healthy is able to adapt, in the short, medium and long term to the various life situations that are made up of joys and frustrations, happy and difficult times and problems that need to be resolved. He/she experiences a sense of well-being with him/herself and pleasure in his/her relationships with others. An environment that fosters fulfillment contributes to a good mental health.

Mental health is not something that is unchanging. It is:

- Being capable of loving life;
- Succeeding in putting one's abilities to good use and to reach objectives;
- Establishing and maintaining relationships with others;
- Being able to experience pleasure in relationships with others;
- Feeling sufficiently confident to be able to adapt to a situation that cannot be changed or to work towards changing the situation if possible;
- Developing strategies in order to deal with stress, particularly in the workplace;
- Being able to ask for support from friends and relatives or for help from organizations or specialists when going through difficult times;
- Discovering pastimes that are enjoyable and finding time to practice them;
- Managing to strike a dynamic balance between all aspects of life: physical, psychological, economic, spiritual and social.

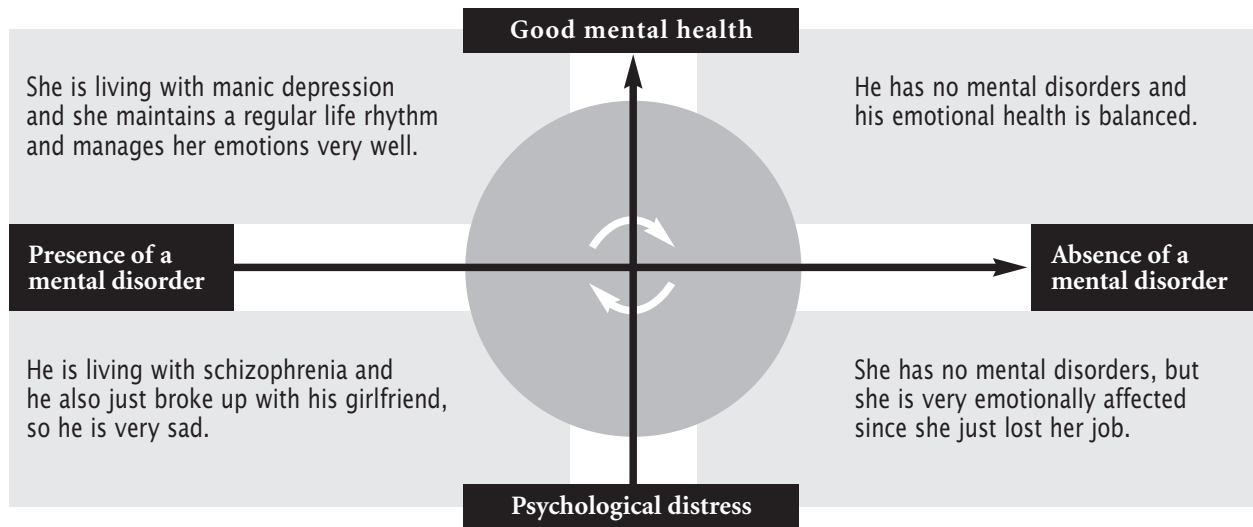
It is important to specify that mental health is not defined by the absence of disorders. With that in mind, a person can, for example, live with a mental disorder and experience mental well-being that is reflected in satisfying relationships or fulfilling employment. Conversely, sometimes people are unable to maintain a mental balance without actually suffering from a mental disorder.

The diagram¹ on the following page demonstrates that mental health is a path through which various crossroads can be encountered.

¹ Inspired by Blanchet, Luc et autres (1993). *La prévention et la promotion en santé mentale. Préparer l'avenir*, Boucherville, Gaëtan Morin éditeur.



THE CROSSROADS



Additionally, keep in mind that mental health is related to the collective values as well as the personal values of each individual. It is influenced by economic, social, cultural, environmental and political conditions. In this respect, mental health is considered to be a collective resource that receives contributions from the social institutions and the entire community as well as individuals².

NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

The National Mental Health Week marks the start of an annual campaign that aims to raise awareness among the populations regarding the importance of taking care of one's mental health.

The Week therefore promotes elements that allow for the maintenance of a good mental health. It is essential to learn, from a very early age, that maintaining one's mental health through daily actions – such as recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses, creating and maintaining relationships with others, or having access to spaces for creation – is just as important as eating healthy or physical exercise. These behaviours will help individuals to make it through life's difficulties more serenely and to avoid various problems and certain disorders.

The campaign called «*Être bien dans sa tête, ça regarde tout le monde*» » (free translation: being well in one's head is everyone's business)

This campaign started last year and will continue until 2016. Its title translates to "being well in one's head is everyone's business" because it is together, individually and collectively, that we can act in order to set up the conditions required for good mental health. Over the course of the next seven years, we will continue to support the development of skills, competencies and strategies that allow for dealing with and adapting more effectively to life's difficult events. This is what the experts call the "mental health protective factors".

2010 Edition: *Are you well surrounded? A network can be built*

In 2009, we promoted the sense of identity, meaning the importance of knowing one's strengths, capacities and difficulties as well as being recognized by one's entourage.

In 2010, we are putting the emphasis on the importance of the **sense of belonging and solidarity**. Feeling that we are not alone and that others are there for us and that we are there for others is the cure for the sense of social solitude that individuals are increasingly forced to deal with. The slogan accompanying this theme translates to "Are you well surrounded? A network can be built." Why this slogan? Because it feels good to have people around you; because together we can accomplish more; because being surrounded is reassuring. But being well surrounded is not always easy, since it's a dance that involves two or more people: the effort must be made to reach out to others, and others must open the door to welcome us. Who are the people that make up my entourage? How can I develop this entourage? Do I pay attention to my friends, relatives, neighbours and colleagues? Does my surrounding society help me to establish my place and feel supported? All networks can contribute to the development of the sense of belonging.

² Evans, Robert G., Morris L. Barer et Theodore R. Marmor (1996). *Être ou ne pas être en bonne santé. Biologie et déterminants sociaux de la maladie*, Boucherville, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal.



ARE YOU WELL SURROUNDED?

By Anne Échasseriau, Communications Officer at the Canadian Mental Health Association – Division du Québec and awareness facilitator at the Maison Jean Lapointe

Christophe André, psychiatrist and author, explains that “happiness is found in our interpersonal relationships”. Conversely, Sartre states that “hell is others”; and it is true that living in society demands compromises and conflict resolution skills. As for the psychologist Maslow, he places in his famous pyramid of human needs the sense of belonging at the third rank, after physiological needs (eating, drinking, etc.) and security. Relationships, despite the inherent difficult times, remain a vital need.

The family constitutes the first place in which we develop the social connections that are indispensable to our survival. The sense of belonging begins at home before spreading throughout the neighbourhood, workplace and community. It grows through the connections that we develop with our friends at school, our neighbours and colleagues, the waitress at the restaurant, the convenience store owner, our sports teams, our community groups; it also increases with the support of our CSSS and in other places as well.

Feeling that we are part of a group is one of the elements that allow us to protect our mental health. Laughing with friends and relatives is as beneficial as knowing that support is available in the workplace or in social commitments. Society is composed of numerous and diverse communities that form around age, gender, faith, language, culture, status, work, etc. We develop connections of belonging with the people that we share affinities with such as social struggles, hunting, knitting or a sport. It is important to remember that we all belong to many communities at the same time¹.

The sense of belonging develops on two levels: the individual level and the collective level. This is where the slogan which translates to “being well in one’s head is everyone’s business” comes from. We have a responsibility that we must undertake in our community, whether it is issue of a municipality that creates public spaces, businesses that promote discussions with their employees, social groups that encourage new members, schools that integrate youth in activities, family or others. Conversely, stereotypes and stigmatization are barriers to inclusion. Individually, each of us plays a role in the establishment of the sense of belonging since being welcomed into a group involves an opening from both sides. The individual must be ready to travel the distance between his/her private space and the group; and the group must provide the individual with adequate support for his/her integration. There are both large and small networks that are composed of the people we trust or acquaintances that we see at the grocery store, our family members or the employees at the CLSC, some of which we see every day, while others we see once annually. Regardless of the form that a network takes, it feels good to have a one.

In terms of the media, the notion of solidarity is almost always presented when large-scale catastrophes, such as earthquakes or genocide, tear apart our cities and our countries. When faced with adversity, complete strangers choose to help one another by establishing linkages of solidarity in order to provide aid to survivors, the destitute or victims. However, gestures of mutual aid take place every day in our family, our town, our village and our living environments. It can be difficult to create or recreate connections after changing cities, a painful physical disease, and a depression or even after mourning, but help resources and activities organized by our communities are there to fill the temporary and unwanted void. It is normal to require assistance at certain times, and it is good for each of us to know that we can go and get that help. Once again, as individuals and as a community, we have the responsibility to allow for access to the existing support services and to raise awareness of these types of services to an increasing number of people. In each region of Quebec, there many community-based public organizations or movements that provide these types of services.

This toolkit will provide you with possibilities and solutions in order to maintain and develop your sense of belonging and help you to develop connections and organize activities with groups. As you read, you will discover that it is possible to break the isolation barrier.

¹ Fay, Michaël. “Count me in!”, Ontario Health Promotion E-Bulletin, no. 358.1, April 2004.





FOSTERING THE SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG THE YOUTH

By Germain Duclos, psychoeducator and resource teacher

Every human-being is first and foremost a social being. Everyone needs a partner in addition to friends. Being able to talk, laugh, sing, philosophize and move with others provides the feeling of being complete and makes us happy. Friends are unconditionally “on our side” in unfortunate situations and serve as a shield against our fears and solitude. Being loved, appreciated and considered helps us to deal with a wide range of situations. What others say about us, the way in which they look at us and listen to us; in short, what they think about us, helps to define us and gives us the desire to improve some of our attitudes.

The family

It is within the family - in the relationships with the parents, siblings and the people that he/she lives with, that the child experiences the sense of belonging for the first time. This need to not be alone will help the child to create other connections and thus develop his/her social self-esteem.

Siblings represent a group of belonging in which the child has the opportunity to learn about the social rules. Sibling relationships provide these partners of different ages that know each other well the opportunity to learn and discover the opinions of others and the challenges in terms of relationships that are sometimes marked with rivalry and power struggles. Moreover, research indicates that the children of a same family that often have fun together through role-playing demonstrate an improved understanding of the emotions of others and enhanced skills for conflict resolution and adaptation.

From the age of two years, the child already loves being in the presence of other children, even if the child is unable to genuinely play with them. The child loves just being in their presence. Later on, at the age of four years, he/she will cry out for friends. Even the most patient, available and playful parent will never be as great a friend as another child is. Pulling each other's hair, taking toys away from each other and learning how to negotiate and share is essential to the little one's inner well-being.

The school

The child who starts going to school must comply with certain standards and rules that are imposed by the adults and schoolmates. The child is submitted to the new requirements and judgments made upon his/her person. He/she therefore experiences significant pressure that has a direct impact on his/her self-esteem.

If the interventions on behalf of the adults that are important to the child are positive and encouraging, the child will experience his/her social and educational environment in a harmonious fashion and the self-esteem that the child has on the physical, intellectual and social levels will increase. The child then experiences a very strong desire to belong to a group of friends that will become his/her

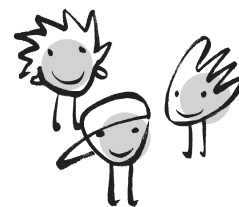
social niche. The child's emotional dependence towards adults then diminishes in favour of social dependence towards his/her friends. Through the child's relationships with them, the child comes to understand that he/she has value in the eyes of others. He/she finds out that life in a group is demanding, but the returns are great. In fact, the group's approval has a positive impact on the child's self-esteem. When the child feels accepted and respected by his/her peers, his/her identity is reinforced and the trust that the child has in others increases. The child seeks out opportunities or situations to be in a group, because the child feels confident and knows that he/she will be recognized. The adult's role is very important in terms of fostering this sense of belonging. By encouraging the children to affirm their identity and ensuring that they will be respected, the adult thereby allows for the child's integration. The adults must therefore favour cooperation activities and get the child to understand the value of life in a group while underlining its demands and the responsibilities that it entails.

Belonging to a group allows the child to confirm his/her identity. By observing others, the child comes to see differences and similarities in terms of abilities, tastes and appearances. The child becomes aware of his/her values. Through his/her contacts with others, the child develops autonomy, which allows the child to distance him/herself from the parents. The group is an educational environment not only for the practice of social skills, but also in the exercising of reasoning. The others serve as both mirrors and models.

Adolescence

During adolescence, the youth experience an imperative need to belong to a group. This allows them to distance themselves from their parents while helping them to forge their own identities. Adolescents that experience social difficulties and do not know how to make and maintain friendships develop a negative social self-image and become really disparaged. Studies have shown that youth who experience difficulties in terms of making friends and are isolated and labelled as “rejects” by other youth are at risk of experiencing significant social problems in their adulthood.





Adults who have their own issues in terms of trusting others, having fun in a group or keeping friends will experience problems in helping their child with his/her social life. The child learns through imitation and by identifying with the people that are important to him/her. This is another opportunity for self-improvement! (See the tool entitled “The sense of belonging isn’t taught, it’s cultivated”, on page 9).

The human being, and particularly the adolescent, is constantly faced with a dilemma between two legitimate desires: uniqueness and conformity. In order to live well with others, the adolescent must conform to certain rules that are imposed by adults and his/her friends. The adolescent faces a paradox in terms of his/her relationships with others: the need for confirmation in terms of his/her identity and uniqueness, while feeling the need to conform to the expectations of friends so as to be appreciated and accepted. Generally-speaking, the adolescent deeply fears being different from others and wishes to avoid being isolated or rejected, but, at the same time, he/she feels the need to have his/her own identity.

The attitude of the parents and teachers has a direct impact on the youth socialization process. Openness to others, accepting differences, tolerance, trust as well as most of the group conflicts that the adolescents are able to resolve on their own, provide the youth with the desire to reach out to others and assert themselves in a positive fashion. Violence and isolation are inadequate methods that some adolescents rely on to adapt to the group. Adults can provide suggestions in terms of attitudes in accordance with the values of democracy, negotiation and sharing.

Having a sense of belonging allows the adolescent to take his/her place in a group. He/she learns to resolve interpersonal conflicts, consider the requirements of the group and adapt to the rules that are being imposed. The adolescent also learns how to win and how to lose, to assert him/herself, speak in a group, cooperate with others and take on the responsibilities that are confided in him/her by the group. He/she feels important in the eyes of others and they are also important in his/her eyes. The learning of social skills that the youth integrates through the sense of belonging constitutes the foundations of his/her social competence for the years to come.

Foreseeing school drop-out

The sense of belonging with respect to the school increases his/her motivation related to learning and prevents school drop-out. It is characterized by the sense of well-being that he/she experiences when in the presence of the other youth and adults.

The school interveners must promote the sense of belonging among the students in the schools while practicing democratic leadership and providing a warm welcome. They must advocate respect for differences, particularly in terms of differences related to ethnicity or sexual orientation between the youth. Furthermore, it is impossible to generate a sense of belonging without carrying out collective projects. Finally, the school must provide diversity in terms of extracurricular activities and leisure activities that all adolescents can partake in. By proceeding in this manner, the school will not be perceived as only a place of education, but also and especially as a living environment and an extension of the family.

Sense of belonging and prevention

A few recommendations in order to help the adolescent to develop a good sense of belonging:

- Welcome the adolescent with his/her dignity and inherent values;
- Acknowledge the right of the adolescent to be him/herself;
- Encourage the adolescent to assert his/her values;
- Suggest activities and projects to the adolescent that foster a sense of belonging to a group;
- Help the adolescent to become aware that he/she has value in the eyes of his/her friends as well as those of the adults that are important to him/her.

In conclusion, a good way to help the adolescent to integrate into society and develop a good self-image consists of teaching him/her generosity. Selfless gestures, mutual aid and compassion help them to feel good inside. Getting an adolescent accustomed to helping out freely from time to time helps increase his/her awareness with respect to human relationships while teaching about the joy of giving.

Sources

Bourcier, S. and G. Duclos. *Une place parmi les enfants*, Magazine Enfants Québec, April 2007.

Duclos, Germain (2004). *L'estime de soi, un passeport pour la vie*, Montréal, Éditions de l'Hôpital Sainte-Justine.





Exercise from 6 to 11 years old

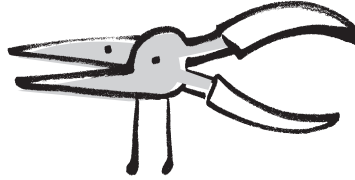
WHEN NETWORKS BECOME A KEY FOR HAPPINESS...!

Here is a list of different tools to help you to build up and maintain bonds around you.

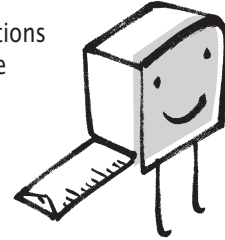
Which ones already belong to your toolbox? Connect them to the toolbox with an arrow link.

Do not forget: we can equip ourselves with new tools. Highlight the ones you would like to develop.

■ I care about others and others' feelings (sadness, anger, happiness, etc.).



■ I try to find solutions to problems I see around me.



■ I share with others.



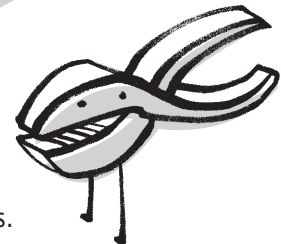
■ I help others.



■ I share with my family about my friends, my teachers, my school, what I like and what I dislike...



■ I communicate with others.



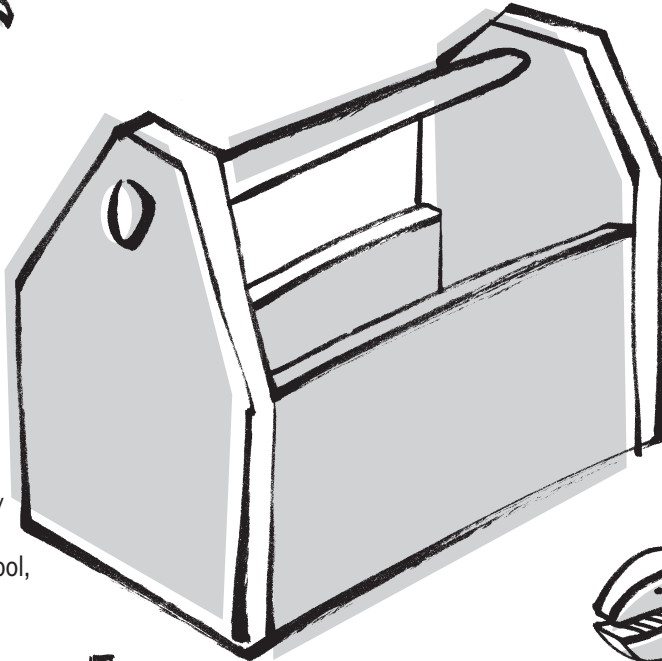
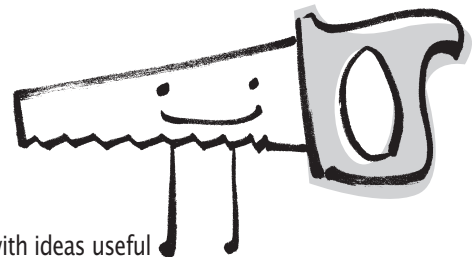
■ I like being surrounded by others (peers, parents, other family's members).



■ I do others a favour.

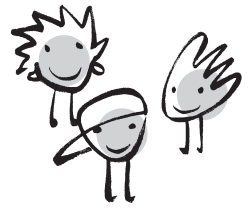


■ I come up with ideas useful for my group (ideas of games, ideas to improve something or to help someone).



1 Exercise inspired by Duclos, Germain (2004). « Le sentiment d'appartenance », L'estime de soi, un passeport pour la vie, 2^e édition, coll. Parents, Montréal, Éditions de l'Hôpital Sainte-Justine, p. 153.





THE SENSE OF BELONGING ISN'T TAUGHT, IT'S CULTIVATED¹

The role of all of the adults surrounding the child is important to the development of his/her sense of belonging (parents, foster family, sports facilitator, teachers, educators, etc.). Germain Duclos, psychologist, explains that “the feeling of belonging to one’s school increases the motivation for learning and prevents dropping out of school. It is characterized by a state of well-being when the child is in the presence of other youth and adults.”

Which seeds have you already planted around you in order to cultivate the sense of belonging? Among the following proposals, check the ones that have already been planted.

Don't forget: there is always room enough in the garden to keep planting!!!²

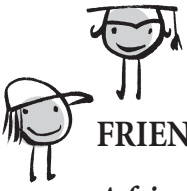
- I am sensitive to others.
- I share.
- I promote justice and fairness.
- I plan group activities.
- I cultivate pride in belonging to a group, family, school or another setting.
- I entrust the children with small tasks and I value their contributions.
- I establish a climate of respect between the people around me.
- I encourage the children to be sensitive to the things that surround us socially.
- I suggest ways to resolve problems.
- I encourage the youth to develop their social skills.
- I volunteer for social or community-based activities.



¹ Fay, Michaël, “Count me in!”, Ontario Health Promotion E-Bulletin, no. 358.1, April 2004.

² Exercice inspired by Duclos, Germain (2004). « *Le sentiment d'appartenance* », *L'estime de soi, un passeport pour la vie*, 2^e édition, coll. Parents, Montréal, Éditions de l'Hôpital Sainte-Justine, p. 154.





FRIENDSHIP, IT'S GOOD!¹

A friendship provides support and a positive influence on mental health and personal well-being.

Some are satisfied with having one or two friends; others need lots of friends. Regardless of the case, friendship allows for:

- openness;
- intimacy;
- sensitivity towards others;
- exchanges, a relationship based on equality;
- relaxation;
- spontaneity;
- the sharing of similar values.

If in a relationship you feel the presence of domination, exploitation, violence or fear – it is the proper time to make choices.

Take the time to weigh the pros and cons of this relationship. If the disadvantages outweigh the advantages, what other ways could be used to address your needs?

Who are the friends and adults around you that you can talk to and help you to get out of this relationship?

You can share your concerns by calling:

- **Tel-jeunes:** 1-800-263-2266. Website: www.teljeunes.com
- **Kids Help:** 1-800-668-6868. Website: www.kidshelpphone.ca

FRIENDS, YOU'D LIKE TO HAVE SOME?²

Everyone has their own way of striking up relationships with others and developing their network of friends. For some, it's easy to do. For others, it's a challenge.

The following are tips that can help you meet interesting people and make friends.

Learn about yourself. Think about what you like to do and what makes you happy. If you participate in activities that match your interests, you increase your chances of meeting youth that you have things in common with. What do you say?

Dare to take the first steps. When you meet someone that you would like to be friends with, you can say "hello" and share a few words with him/her.

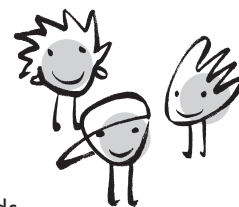
Be interested in others. When you meet new people, show your interest in them by listening to them and asking them questions to learn more about them. If a person also seems to be interested in you in return, you can propose a group activity (for example, doing homework together, practicing a sport, and inviting him /her over to watch a movie).

Be a loyal companion. The bonds of friendship are made from times of sharing, trust and intimate discussions. It is important to respect this intimacy; avoid spreading any secrets that you were entrusted with and do not spread rumours.

¹ Inspired by Cloutier, Richard (1994). *Mieux vivre avec nos adolescents*, Montréal, Éditions Le Jour.

² Tel-jeunes. "True friendship", [online]. [<http://en.teljeunes.com/get-informed/friends/true-friendship>] (site consulted on December 11, 2009)





TO HELP PARENTS: A SUPPORT NETWORK

Bonds are important for teenagers. As parents, we can sometimes be concerned that our child has no friends or that he/she is being closely involved with a gang described at risk.

It is important to:

- take time to think about your child's problem and the support that can be given to him/her
- keep a good child-parent relationship, be interested in his/her daily life
- achieve your parental duty of care

It is possible:

- To help him/her to organize activities

Doctor Gilles Julien wrote that: "very few parents would abdicate their responsibilities if the community was playing its full role". As parents, we sometimes feel we are losing control towards the situation. This is the proper time to have people around us, being able to share about our situation, seek help and prevent from being isolated. We can call those people for help:

- Family
- Friends
- Teachers, professors
- Neighbours
- Social workers
- Counsellors, etc.

Hotlines for parents:

- **Ligne parents:** 1 800 360-5085
- **Parents Anonymes:** 514 288-5555
- **Éducation-coup-de-fil:** 1 866 329-4223
Online: <http://www.education-coup-de-fil.com/english.php>
- **Choisis ton gang :** an informative and gang awareness website for the youth, parents and counsellors.
- **Many organisms** exist to help parents. You will find more information:
By calling 811
By staying in touch with your city council or your Local Services Networks and Health and Social Services Centres which offer many services.





An example of an action that fosters the sense of belonging

NEIGHBOURS DAY

A spark to bring people closer together

With the rapid growth that it is experiencing in both Quebec and Europe, Neighbours Day is definitely in line with the times. This annual provincial event, which takes place on the first Saturday in June, addresses the need to improve the social climate through the development of solidarity and mutual assistance in the living environments. It therefore conveys the values that are essential to the establishment of meaningful relationships with others.

A gathering of strength...

Neighbours Day was born in Paris in 1999 following the initiative of an elected municipal official, Mr. Atanase Périfan, following the death of an elderly woman whose body was only discovered after several days despite the presence of many neighbours. Since then, the goal of this event has remained the creation of solidarity bonds between neighbours in order to establish towns that are more humane, break the isolation barrier, make society more friendly, promote caring for others, foster mutual assistance – in short, the goal is to add meaning to life.

Since then, the idea has experienced a snowball effect. The celebration has been implemented in 29 European countries. Now, millions of citizens participate in this event. In 2006, propelled by the *Réseau québécois de Villes et Villages en santé*, it blossomed in Quebec, thus marking a first in North America. The Quebec 2009 edition united nearly 200 municipalities and organizations in the implementation of 2300 celebrations in which more than 120 000 people participated.

... organized by the citizens

It is in the spirit of a nice, warm neighbourhood in addition to friendliness and simplicity that this event is held. Original, since it is implemented by the citizens who organize it themselves, Neighbours Day unites the people who live in a same setting by giving them the opportunity to play an active role in the development of friendliness and solidarity. Thus this collective activity proposes to those who see each other every day the opportunity to break the ice, get to know their neighbours and increase their bonds as well as the spirit of mutual aid.

More than 30 neighbours participated. The children played and drew pictures on the street. Every one brought their dinner, wine, beverages and smile. It was simple and easy! What a wonderful day!

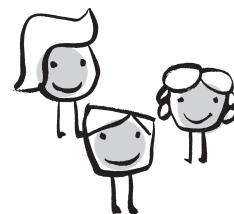
Christine Burnside, Gatineau

... to break the isolation barrier

As we are faced with individualism and the “every man for himself” frame of mind, it is necessary to develop solidarities close to home in order to complete the family-based, social and institutional solidarities. By reinforcing a social fabric that is often fragile, Neighbours Day can become a springboard for a new dynamic between neighbours in which friendliness, mutual aid and solidarity holds a greater place. Establishing these types of bonds between neighbours fosters the development of a sense of belonging to the community as well as a sense of security, which can lead to the engagement of the citizens in their living environment; the citizens can also be incited to call upon their community resources in order to obtain support.

According to Mr. Périfan, the drama behind solitude is that it is invisible. In our societies in which individualism reigns king, we see the isolation of many citizens – for example, senior citizens, people in cultural communities, people who are stuck in their homes because of a handicap and people who are isolated from friends and relatives because of distance or for some other reason. Isolation and particularly marginalization are responsible for many individual and social problems.





Our idea is that each person could allocate one hour per month in order to help someone in the place they live. Each will invent the gestures that they find appropriate. Institution-based assistance is not infinitely extendable. I really believe that neighbours can become a social parachute. We must relearn to avoid always delegating gestures that cost nothing and could in fact return much to the person who gives them.

Atanase Périfan

... to live better together

Neighbours Day aims to revive community living through the friendliness that enhances living together, acceptance of others and respect. A place of meeting, it can become the spark that unites people and creates human relationships that will make all the difference for the isolated or marginalized individual. The celebration can also provoke mutual assistance that reinforces the capacity for community living. To this effect, it can be a springboard that gives rise to a hidden potential: the capacity of each individual and each community to be concerned with the well-being of others.

A melting pot for social integration...

By giving the individual an opportunity to be recognized by the members of his/her community and to go out and meet people who are different than him/her socially, culturally, sexually, etc., this place of meeting contributes to making the communities into a melting pot for social integration.

This wonderful celebration called Neighbours Day allows for the creation of connections and even to resolve issues such as dogs that aren't on leashes in an effective manner, without the concerns of causing frictions with our neighbours. Really, since last year, I no longer see my neighbours in the same light.

Julie Chouinard, Val d'Or

In France, those who have committed to gestures of mutual aid after having participated in a Neighbours Day celebration have stated that they have gained in terms of feelings of social utility, recognition, pride and belonging. The heatwaves and riots that have struck Paris over the past few years also demonstrated that the communities that had developed neighbourly initiatives were quicker to undertake supportive measures for isolated individuals or people who were at-risk. They also experienced a lower level of vandalism and violence.

... to be put on the agenda

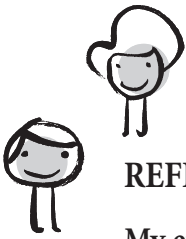
The ever-increasing number of celebrations and participants as well as the ever-increasing visibility in the media at the national, regional and local levels demonstrates the relevance of Neighbours Day in the social universe of the people of Quebec.

We can maintain, without worrying about being wrong, that in changing societies that are looking for new ways to build united communities that are based on diversity and respect, that Neighbours Day is seen as a promising and heartening venue to stimulate the participation of citizens. The celebration gives a sense of security, provides an opportunity to exist as an individual in one's immediate community, brings respect and interest and creates altruism¹.

Let us remember that Neighbours Day takes place each year on the first Saturday in June. The municipalities and local-level organizations are invited to join the event in order to contribute to mobilization. For more details on the event, please visit the website located at www.fetedesvoisins.qc.ca/home.html. For more information on the *Réseau québécois de Villes et Villages en santé*, visit the website at www.rqvvs.qc.ca (French only).

¹ Letarte, Georges. *Évaluation des effets de l'expérience québécoise de la Fête des voisins*, March 2009.

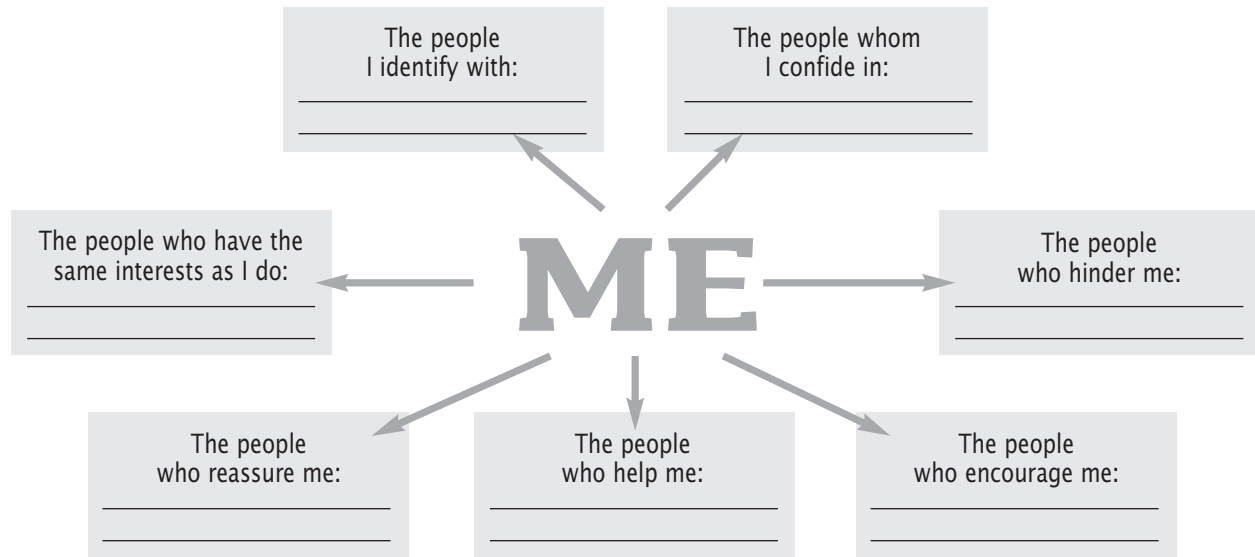




REFLECTION: ARE MY CONNECTIONS WITH MY ENTOURAGE SATISFYING?

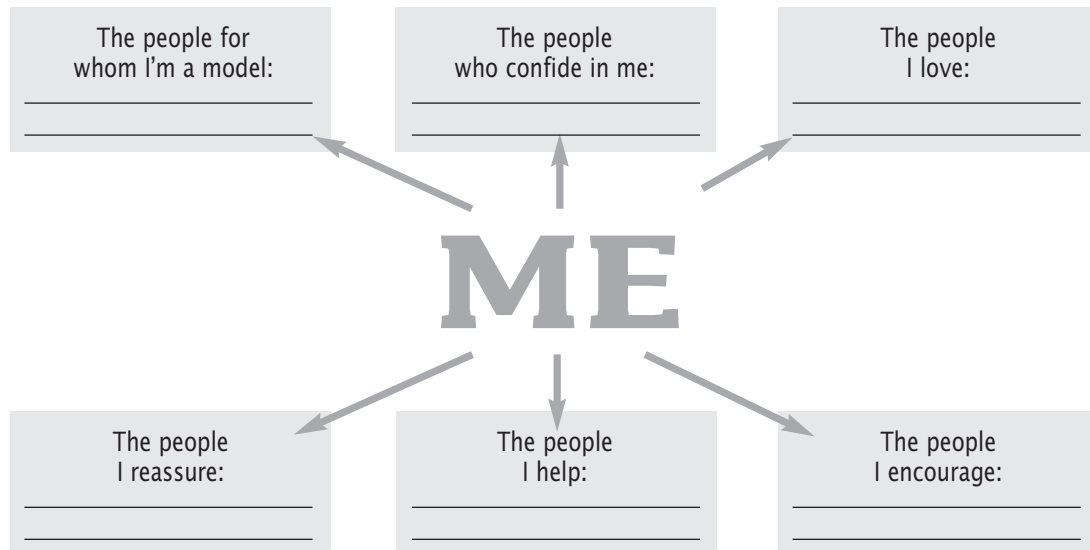
My entourage and me...¹

- 1 Name the people in your entourage. Which of your need(s) does each person correspond to?
- 2 In your opinion, are your needs fulfilled by the people you have named?
If you answered no, you can attempt to name other people, groups or resources that can contribute to satisfying your needs.
- 3 Do you believe that you should set limits on certain relationships?



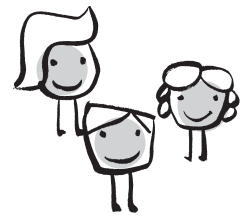
... And me and my entourage!

- 1 Name the people for whom you hold a certain importance.
- 2 Would you like to be present in the lives of other people? In what capacity?



¹ Adapted from the exercise « Comment êtes-vous entouré? », CAP Santé Outaouais, and reproduced with the organization's authorization, [online]. [http://www.capsante-outaouais.org] (consulted on November 20, 2009)



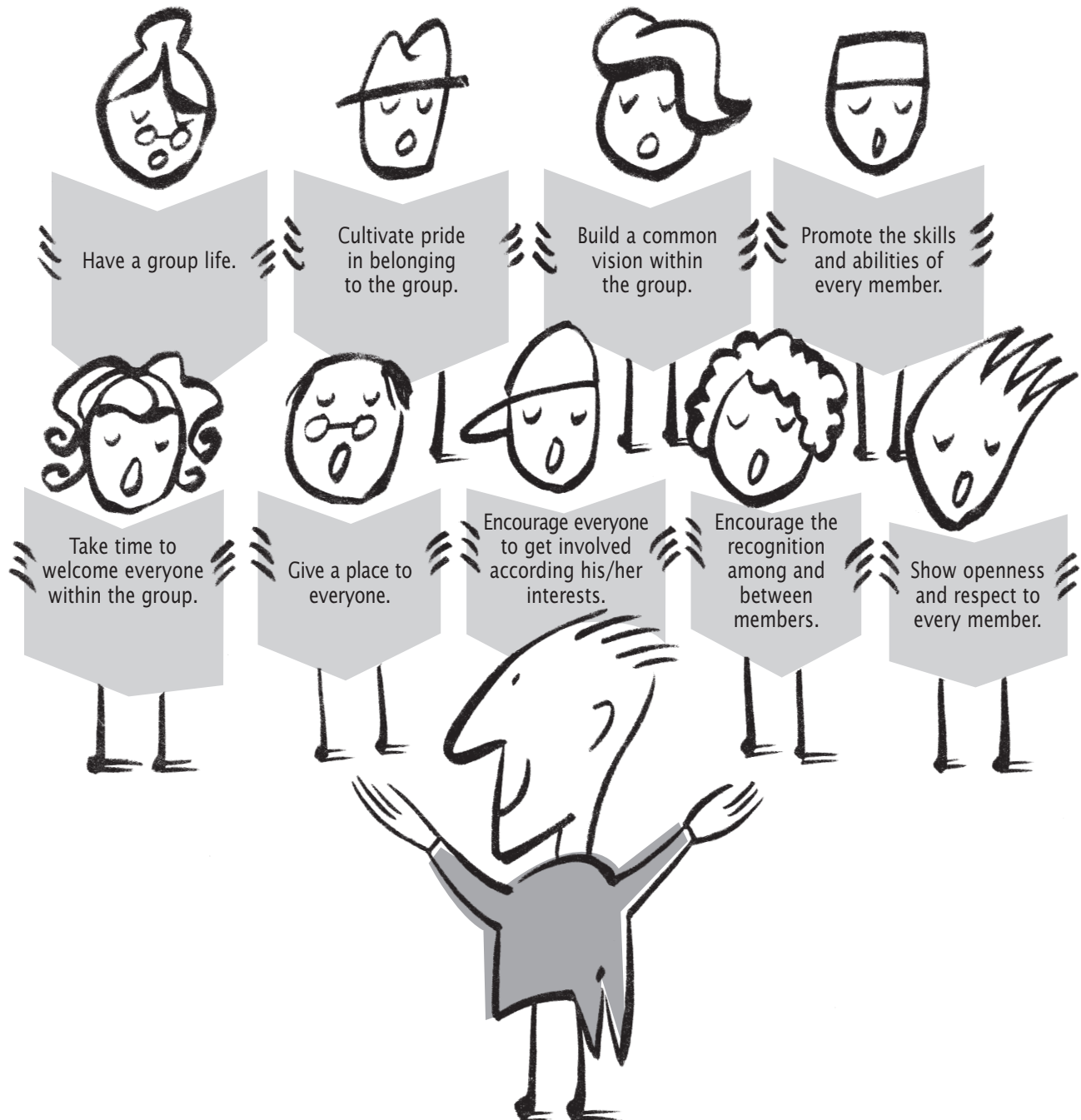


A symphony of tips to encourage integration within groups: SMALL MEANS TO GIVE TO EVERYONE A BIGGER PLACE!

Belonging to a family, a neighbourhood, a community or a society is one of the fundamental elements of life. As a group, we have to introduce some mechanisms to allow everyone to find his/her own place within it. Many behaviours and attitudes promote sharing, integration, goodwill and harmonious networks building.

Among the following orchestral scores, which ones your group is already using?

Circle them and highlight the ones you would like to adopt.



SOME INFORMATION REGARDING WORK¹

According to several experts in the field of work-related health, work:

- provides individuals with a connection of belonging to society and the feeling of being able to give a useful contribution to society;
- is a way to create connections and to obtain positive reinforcement and respect;
- gives access to economic stability, consumption and autonomy;
- fosters access to the practice of citizenship;
- contributes to consolidating confidence and self-esteem;
- can contribute to sustaining our pleasure and maintaining our happiness.

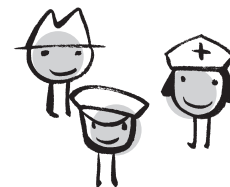
However, in the current social context, work:

- is often demanding, performance-driven, competitive, fragmented and dehumanized; it can inflict suffering, be an obstacle to networks that fuel our well-being, confidence and self-esteem and progressively push us towards distress;
- demands the impossible: government statistical data indicates that sick leave taken for mental health issues has tripled over the course of the past decade;
- requires more time: in 1991, one out of every 10 people worked at least 50 hours per week; ten years later in 2001, one out of every four people worked 50 hours or more per week.

This results in a loss in terms of a sense of belonging to one's business.



¹ Fondation Travail et Santé mentale [online]. [<http://www.fondation-travailsantementale.qc.ca/>] (website consulted on December 4, 2009)



COLLEAGUES IN THE WORKPLACE: A MENTAL HEALTH PROTECTIVE FACTOR

By Micheline St-Jean, associate professor, ergotherapy program,
École de réadaptation, Université de Montréal

The impacts of the changes that have taken place in the world of work are great. The economic and social context (the primacy of the economy, the globalization of the markets and the erosion of the social institutions are a few elements) has forced businesses to reorganize work. In Quebec, one has to admit that little or no organizations, large or small, private or public, have gone through over the course of the past year what has almost become an ideology: reorganization.

Is the relationship being recognized between the “well-being of the employees” and the “effectiveness of the organization”?

In the name of efficacy, performance and often in the name of the “noble objective” to “better fulfill our mission”, we have come to find it almost normal to see our work settings amalgamate, separate or restructure in accordance with services, objectives or levels. Yet, if in many cases profitability and effectiveness are attained, people also find themselves in situations where they, the workers, are stuck in a trap. Never before has the mental health of the workers been in such peril. Work-related mental health issues currently represent one of the most significant causes of work absence and this phenomenon has noticeably increased over the course of the past two decades. We can anticipate that, in the near future, the economic and social costs related to mental health problems will reach staggering levels. Therefore, anxiety, psychological distress, professional exhaustion, depression and stress are now an integral part of the workforce vocabulary. Yet, despite this collapse, many research projects recognize certain mental health protective factors in the workplace. Of these factors, we note, among others, the importance of work that holds meaning and social support.

Maria at the heart of our reflections

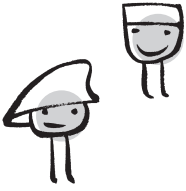
From this point on, let us focus our reflections on Maria in an attempt to understand, through her story, how work that loses all meaning can become destructive. Maria is a home care worker who is linked to a home maintenance program of a CLSC that is located in an underprivileged neighbourhood in an urban centre. Four years ago, a fusion with a long-term care hospital was accompanied by a new administration in addition to a restructuration of the work organization.

Maria believes that it is important to help people. In each home that she visits, she deals with destitution, social misery, the woes of sick bodies and troubled souls. Then, little by little, she starts experiencing her own misery – her work related misery. The amount of work is ever-increasing! Protocols

are being increasingly implemented such as the one that dictates the amount of time allocated for bathing a given beneficiary. And so she wonders, “What am I to do if the woman I must wash is in tears because her son has just been arrested for drug possession or if another beneficiary is howling in pain? I listen and I wash them really quickly, but I often have to take too much time. The more protocols are in place, the less I can work” she candidly adds. All of this additional work and all of the constraints related to productivity also come with consequences: less available time to meet with colleagues! Team meetings are reduced to a minimum and the workers are also submitted to performance evaluation. No down times are permitted in the work place! Maria feels as though she is alone with the miseries of her beneficiaries and her own difficulties in terms of fulfilling the requirements of her work. One day, she accepts to go to the drug store to pick up a prescription for a beneficiary. On her way, Maria falls down and suffers a back injury and is unable to work. After one month of absence, her employer asks for a medical assessment. Maria experiences this medical-administrative procedure as a significant moral injury. For her, it puts doubt on her integrity as a worker. At the same time, she learns that her administration has submitted a disciplinary complaint in her file because performing errands for the beneficiaries is prohibited. Maria takes the assessment request and the disciplinary action as a great source of humiliation and will therefore never discuss the matter with her colleagues. Her back pain turns into professional exhaustion; she will miss more than six months of work.

Maria’s story, with a few changes here and there, is very similar to the stories of many other workers who have been profoundly wounded by a profession that they claim to love.





Understanding in order to rethink work

How did Maria get to this point? Let's make a few reflections in order to understand. It is important to understand so that we can rethink work; understand so that similar situations can perhaps be avoided. A first observation that we can make is, as is the case in many work settings, the restructuration process took place accompanied by unprecedented expectations from the employers towards the employees. It has even come to be considered normal for a worker to seem overloaded, overwhelmed or rushed; if such isn't the case, there is a suspicion of slacking off! For Maria, the desired level of effectiveness has among other things lead to the implementation of work control measures that are far removed from the reality of the actual work. The implemented execution and control procedures are hard to apply in real life, the result of which is the impression that it necessary to work towards and against everything. There is a failure to recognize the real work that is being accomplished. Also, one cannot help but notice that Maria's work is not being recognized. When the work is attacked in its last bastion – either through blame handed down from a superior as in Maria's case or through the criticism received from a client – it is not rare to see the collapse of the worker who has reached the end of his/her rope.

We also see that in many situations, the management methods have shattered the work collectives. On the one hand, people are overloaded, overwhelmed and no longer have the time to consult with colleagues to share successes and failures; on the other hand, when the issues multiply, it is often an "every man for himself" situation. Some management practices have set the table not only for the mental health issues in the workplace, but also for relational conflicts and psychological harassment – two problems that have also seemingly grown over the past few years and are considered to be a pathology of solitude and "desolidarization".

The social networks: a safety net for psychological distress

Even if time goes by quickly, changes in the workplace can be carried out benevolently, by taking into consideration the experience of the workers and by discussing problems and solutions. Who knows her work better than Maria does? Who knows better than Maria that, without her medication, Mrs. X may fall into a diabetic coma or suffer a severe anxiety attack within the next hour? How can Maria be expected to find her work meaningful if she doesn't have any time available to simply be there for someone or to lend an ear when needed?

Looking beyond profitability, connections remain essential between employees, between managers, between employees and managers and between employees and service beneficiaries. We need to help and to be helped, to listen and be listened to and to recognize and be recognized. All of this requires time, downtime, time that cannot be managed.



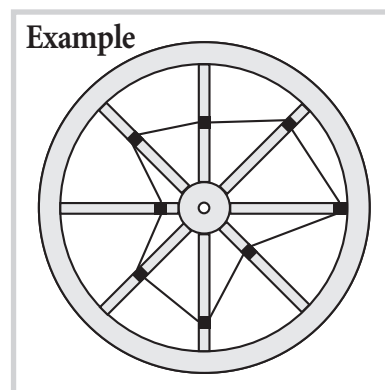
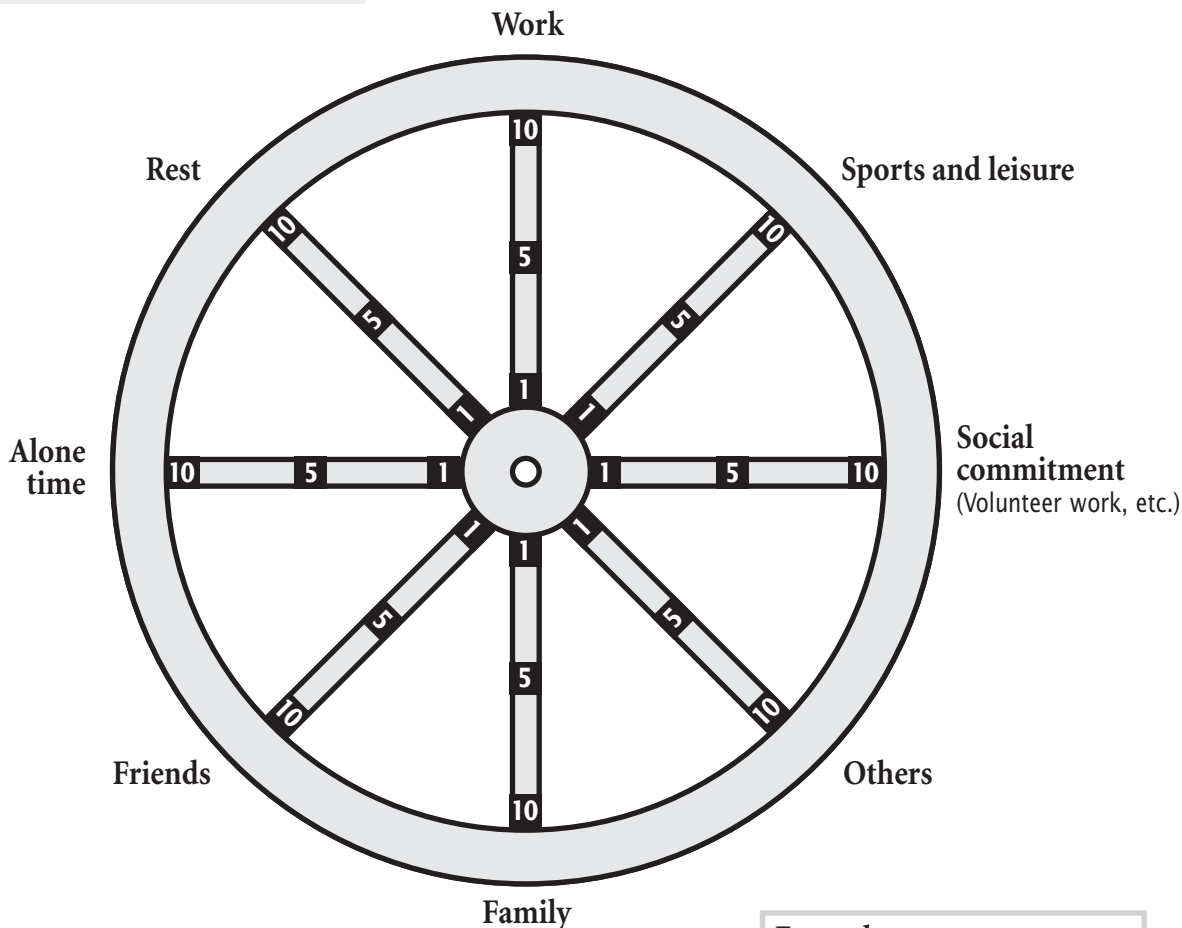


WHEN TIME PASSES SQUARELY BY...

“When professional self-esteem holds too much importance in the global self-esteem, to the point of representing the main source, we run the risk of being completely dependent on our profession, to live only through the prism of the office. This excessive professional commitment presents grave danger for the subject’s psychological balance¹.”

Are you satisfied with the importance given to work, family, friends, alone time and time for others in your life? On each section of the circle, indicate with a dot, on a scale of 1 to 10*, your level of satisfaction with respect to your personal investment in each of the spheres of your life. Then, draw your wheel by connecting the dots between them (like in the example).

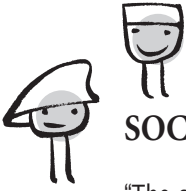
* 1: unsatisfactory; 10: very satisfactory



Is your wheel round or square? If it turns rather squarely and you are unsatisfied, what changes can you make in your life in order to balance its various spheres?

¹ André, Christophe and François Lelord (2008). *L'estime de soi. S'aimer pour mieux vivre avec les autres*, Paris, Odile Jacob, p. 135.





SOCIAL SUPPORT AT WORKPLACE: THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING IT A PLACE

“The social support is one of the three elements of protection in mental health”, said Jean-Pierre Brun, professor at the department of management at the University of Laval.

The social support allows someone to feel that he/she deserves affection and caring. This helps him/her to develop a feeling of belonging to his/her work. This assistance should be given to everyone at work. It reduces the negative effects of particular events or under certain work conditions. It improves the quality of life at work.

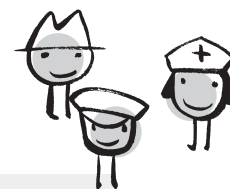
THE SUPPORT FROM DIRECTORS AND ADMINISTRATORS

If you are administrator, director or leader of a company, you also are the major stakeholder concerning mental health. One of your roles is to develop and support the feeling of belonging for both the group and the firm. Many ways exists to bring support to employees (awareness sessions, etc.).

Tick the means you have already set up within your company and underline the ones you could plan:

- Take into consideration the employees and their opinions within the company's decisions.
- Create an adequate context to develop social support at work
- Promote values of mutual aid, support and sharing
- When reorganizations are made, take employees' opinion into account
- Broadcast high quality information about orientations and activities of the organization.
- Communicate the goals and values of the enterprise.
- Ensure an efficient management.
- Have clear expectations and orientations to avoid confusion and misunderstandings
- Maintain strong bonds based on mutual trust
- Create opportunities to allow sharing and mutual support
- Attribute stimulating tasks to employees according their interests
- Compromise to keep good working atmosphere and relations
- Give time and tools to employees to achieve their work
- Acknowledge and give feedback on the accomplished work on a regular basis
- Communicate the resources available for employees during difficult times
- Prepare the team to welcome an employee coming back after a long absence or to integrate a new employee.





THE SUPPORT FROM COLLEAGUES

Feeling supported and helped is a definite asset against isolation. Sometimes, colleagues represent the primary resource for people with difficulties. There are many actions to support others:

- Take an interest in others and in their work.
- Develop openness, respectful and trustfulness relations.
- Build a support network to listen to others' problems.
- Provide support to colleagues in need along with dedicated resources.
- Give a hand to his/her colleagues to fulfil their tasks.
- Acknowledge good job of others.
- Offer time to others in need to talk.
- Meet a colleague instead of sending him an email, have informal conversations.
- Invite colleagues to participate to meetings and social activities, ensure that information is shared between everyone.



SOME INFORMATION REGARDING OLDER PEOPLE

According to the results of a survey on health led by the government of Canada, the elderly who declared having a deep feeling of belonging to their communities were in better health (62%) than those who declared being more detached (49%)¹.

The social support is a crucial element of mental health.

It improves:

- our self-efficiency (trusting our capacities)
- our self-confidence and our capacities of adaptation
- our whole quality of life

It helps to:

- lead and achieve our daily activities
- cope with life transitions (retirement, etc.) and losses²
- evolve more easily in our environment³

It drives us to:

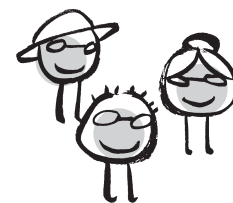
- adopt new behaviours
- lead an active life
- make the right choices to get a healthy life



¹ Shields and Martel (2006). Public Health Agency of Canada. "Social Connectedness and Healthy Aging", (date modified: 2009-10-01), [online]. [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/pro/healthy-sante/haging_newvision/vison-rpt/social-sociale-eng.php] (site consulted on December 2, 2009)

² Powell (2004). Public Health Agency of Canada, *Idem*.

³ Government of Canada (2005). « Enquête sur la santé dans les collectivités canadiennes ». Citée dans Agence de la santé publique du Canada, *idem*.



LOSING ONE'S POINTS OF REFERENCE WITHOUT LOSING ONE'S HEAD!

By Catherine Geoffroy, President of the Association québécoise de gérontologie
and chief editor of the *Vie et vieillissement* magazine

This article aims to be a tool to help people recognize the factors that can be destabilizing when moving into retirement. It provides suggestions that can help people prepare for this important step in their lives and maintain their balance as they search for new points of reference.

What will you do when you grow old?

As we do for all of the important periods in our life from early childhood to adulthood (first day of school, discovery of the feeling of love and sexuality, prenatal period, etc.), we should prepare for our life as a senior citizen and aging, take the time to centre ourselves, ask ourselves which of our personal aspects that we would like to develop, and what type of old age we want to have.

Certain retirement preparedness courses (that reach a percentage of preretirement individuals that is much too low) prove to be useful for the participants. The experts involved in these courses recommend reflection tools that allow preretirement individuals to make certain assessments in order to better plan their futures: assessment of their financial situation (for example, evaluation of assets and spending power in relation with the needs or desired projects), their legal situation (will and others elements) and psychosocial aspects (physical, psychological and social health) and their living environment (for example, consideration for the types of foreseeable homes, the offer and quality of the community network). Certain courses that are more in line with the latest tendencies devote a component to the reorientation of life and career.

Most adults who are nearing the age of retirement have given very little thought to retirement or done very little planning – let alone actually organizing the next 25, 30 or even 40 years. They do not measure everything that their workplace provided them with in terms of support or consider the lack of time that they have in order to prepare themselves to take the plunge into an entirely new life. Fortunately, the human being has an incredible capacity to adapt! It is also true that over the course of the years gone by or events, an adult has had to adapt on a regular basis to new situations: marriage, birth, disease, separation, migration, change in employment, the loss of loved ones and other things as well.

But the move towards retirement is an event that is different from others because it imposes a radical and fundamental life change: work will no longer be the structuring element in our lives, external constraints that have existed to this point will disappear and the opportunities to meet people of different ages, cultures or professionals will not be as common. By leaving the workplace, we leave an important setting in terms of belonging!

When we lose our points of reference, we lose our sense of belonging!

For many individuals, retirement represents a new level of freedom that they have been dreaming about for a long time: no longer are they obligated to follow a schedule and finally they can rest, be less fatigued and deal with less stress... Yet work also allows for the satisfaction of many fundamental needs, which is why it is important to get properly prepared to deal with certain difficulties and address certain losses in order to ensure a satisfying quality of life.

Work is often a source of positive reinforcement that allows us to define ourselves while providing us with motivation and the opportunity to belong to a setting. It allows us to express our talents, acquire knowledge and develop special skills. If we do not prepare ourselves to deal with the void created by retirement, we are at-risk of experiencing the loss of a sense of belonging to a certain know-how or profession!

For many of us, and perhaps even more so for the men who have left their spouses with the responsibility of organizing the social life of the family, work constitutes the main source of social relationships. It keeps us physically and intellectually alert and makes us feel socially useful.

The person who retires must first decondition him/herself from his/her work routine. What will that person do with the 2 500 annual hours that were, up to this point, all accounted for? The person experiences the loss of a sense of belonging to a pace of life, being in the loop and staying connected! In today's society that is focused on productivity, the loss of this sense of belonging can lead to a loss of a self-worth if we are ill-prepared! Leaving one's work is one thing, becoming invisible is quite another.

In today's society in which the youth culture is omnipresent, it is not easy for senior citizens to be the age that they are and to look their age. There is not much out there that prepares us for this reality. A few white hairs, some wrinkles along with the slightest health issue can make it difficult to fit into a world that is tailored to a hectic lifestyle. We must proclaim the right to be the age that we are.

Retirement from professional life forces us to give meaning to our existence, make new choices, surround ourselves with new people, move in new directions and occupy our time differently. All of this must be considered before entering retirement.





The basic rules in order to age well

The World Health Organization defines health as being “a balance between physical health, mental health and social health in a healthy environment”.

Keeping in shape

It is important to stay active, remain quick-minded and have good people around. There can no longer be any doubt regarding the beneficial effects of physical activity, practiced several times per week, for the maintenance and even improvement of health. Furthermore, practicing physical activity (walking, dancing, gardening, sports, bowling, lawn bowling, swimming, playing ball with grandchildren, etc.) plays an important role on mental health (by producing enhanced oxygenation of the brain and stress relief) and social life (by offering opportunities to combat isolation, have discussions and laugh with other participants).

Moreover, retirement preparedness courses insist on the importance of remaining active in retirement: it is important to avoid replacing metro-job-sleep with the terrible trio of tv/junk food/wc!

Keeping one's reason for living

What do these people who are about to enter retirement have in common? They have time to exercise a passion or have an interest in a given field, project or mission to accomplish. They want to continue learning and to feel useful. They are valued by their peers, family or friends for their actions. They have a reason to live, do not spend their time thinking about the various age-related illnesses (arthrosis, cardiac disease, respiratory problems, etc.). Their activities help them to stay active and keep finding life interesting while maintaining moral and a good mental health.

It is therefore necessary to find new activities that provide satisfaction and set short term objectives, but also plan projects that will only take shape in the longer term. Without these projects, the euphoria of the first few months could vanish and make way for boredom and idleness. It is important to take the opportunity to create a new social status for yourself by assuming your new role as a retired person and by fully participating in a new social life.

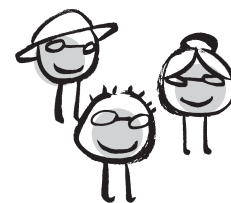
A forest to replenish

Retiring exposes you to isolation. Consequently, it is advisable not to underestimate the importance of the social network that work once provided or to overestimate your personal network. In this regard, performing an overview of the people who currently surround us is a very telling exercise.

As we get older, if we are fortunate enough to be healthy, this will not necessarily be the case for our contemporaries: little by little we experience the disappearance of our family members, acquaintances and friends that formed our social network, due to degenerative disease, moves to a CHSLD or death, thus clearing our forest of trees. The social network and the family network are therefore at risk of falling apart. Making new contacts as early as possible during preretirement is a good way to sow the seeds that will bear fruit when the time for retirement comes. By doing this, we are not dependent on others to organize our outings or activities; we take control over them ourselves!

By sowing the seeds to experience the budding of new friendships, we create new connections with people of all ages, different cultures, different opinions, but especially with those who share the same tastes, which can open the door to new networks. Since you have more time available, take the time to explore settings where you are likely to meet people who share the same interests as you do. Feeling that we belong to a group allows us to fight isolation and therefore sadness, depression or other mental health issues!





AN EXAMPLE OF MUTUAL AID AND SHARING: VOLUNTEER WORK

There are different ways to get involved in life. Volunteer work is one of these ways. For ages, volunteer work has been considered a productive and enriching activity that provides health benefits and constitutes a form of constructive social engagement. In 2000, the senior citizens in Canada performed 179 million hours of volunteer work. Globally, they surpassed the average of all the other age groups¹.

TIPS

Volunteer work can give meaning to life and thereby foster self-esteem². It allows to:

- share one's knowledge and skills;
- be appreciated, grow and be creative.
- improve the quality of life of the community while having fun;
- eliminate solitude;
- obtain recognition;
- obtain a sense of usefulness and achievement;
- have a sense of belonging.



GROWING OLD TOGETHER

Social connectedness has a positive effect on health. The people who preserve an active life as well as linkages with their entourage are generally happier, physically and mentally healthier and better able to deal with changes and transition¹. Friendships play an important role on our self-esteem: they both nourish and stabilize it.

We encourage you to check the activities that you perform in the spirit of “living together” and underline those that you could do:

- Writing to a friend or relative.
- Sharing memories with someone.
- Committing to a group (volunteer work, academic advising, etc.).
- Travelling with someone.
- Making contact with old friends.
- Inviting a friend or a family member over to the house.
- Visiting a friend or relative.
- Calling an acquaintance.
- Finding out how my neighbour is doing.
- Transmitting my skills or knowledge to a person or group (computers, history, fishing, etc.).
- Sharing a sport or a hobby (bingo, bowling, music, knitting, cinema, reading, walk in the forest, painting, skiing, gardening, etc.).
- Participating in municipal activities (festival, celebrations, exposition, etc.).
- Actively participating in the wellness of my municipality (meetings, defending the rights of senior citizens, etc.).
- Other things that I do or could do:

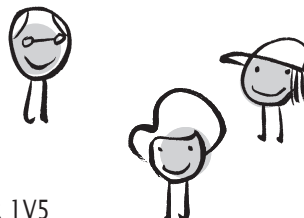
1 Public Health Agency of Canada. “Social Connectedness and Healthy Aging”, (date modified: 2009-10-01), [online]. [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/pro/healthy-sante/haging_newvision/vision-rpt/social-sociale-eng.php] (site consulted on December 2, 2009)

2 Gravel, Louise et Linda Mastrovito (2008). « Découvrir et apprécier sa valeur pour s'affirmer dans son bénévolat », [online]. [www.berthiaume-du-tremblay.com/pdf/RVA_9e_presentation.pdf] (site consulted on December 2, 2009)

1 Wilkins, K. (2006); World Health Organization (WHO) (2003). Social Connectedness and Health Aging, Health Aging in Canada: A new vision, a vital investment; from evidence to action – a background paper, Public Health Agency of Canada, [online]. [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/publications/pro/healthy-sante/haging_newvision/vision-rpt/social-sociale-eng.php] (Consulted on November 25, 2009)



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