

One step, one action, one movement...

Working together to
promote mental health!

MOUVEMENT
SANTÉ MENTALE
QUÉBEC



Promouvoir, Soutenir, Outiller.

Reenergize

Explore

Make
choices

Foster
relationships

A Case for Hope

FROM POWERLESSNESS
TO INSPIRATION

etrebiendanssatete.ca

We'd like to deeply thank
everyone who shared their
knowledge and experiences
with us. To all who read, re-read
and re-re-read this document
with love, care and a critical eye.



Inclusive Writing Techniques

Because each person's mental health is important to us, Mouvement Santé mentale Québec has opted to use inclusive writing techniques for all of its tools, in French and English. Given the gendered nature of French grammar, this can be a complicated endeavour that comes with its share of questions. Language is in perpetual evolution. It changes throughout history with time, events and movements.

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Learn more about each of the
7 ways to recharge your batteries
here: [mouvementsmq.ca/
campagnes/7-astuces/](https://mouvementsmq.ca/campagnes/7-astuces/).

With this booklet, we hope to remind one another that even the smallest action can help bring us closer to the future we seek. It is intended for anyone who has questions, dreams, frustrations or doubts. Wherever our strengths and abilities may lie, whatever our limitations may be, we can help create meaning and hope. Please feel free to read this in one sitting or in little bites here and there, on break at work, under the covers, with your coffee or cocktail... in the bath, on the bus, on your exercise bike... by yourself, as a group—or however you'd like!

About Us

Mouvement Santé mentale Québec (SMQ) is a group of community organizations working in mental health promotion and prevention all over Quebec.

SMQ — Bas-Saint-Laurent |
SMQ — Chaudière-Appalaches |
SMQ — Côte-Nord | SMQ — Haut
Richelieu | SMQ — Lac-Saint-Jean |
SMQ — Pierre-De-Saurel | SMQ —
Rive-Sud | CMHA — Québec City
branch | CMHA — Saguenay branch |
CAP Santé Outaouais | Centre
Accalmie | Comité Prévention Suicide
Lebel-sur-Quévillon | Le Traversier |
Nouveau Regard Gaspésie |
Community Perspective in
Mental Health | RAIDDAT

Our vision: That all people and all communities can access the skills and resources they need to maintain and foster their mental health.

To that end, Mouvement SMQ creates awareness-building tools as part of its mental health promotion campaigns. Please feel free to spread the word about these resources, share them or put them out here and there for people to read!

Mouvement SMQ sees mental health as a **dynamic balance between the different elements that make up human life:** the social, physical, spiritual, economic, emotional and psychological spheres. Good mental health helps us **take action, live up to our potential, cope with challenging moments** in our daily lives and **contribute** to our community. It is influenced by our living conditions, and both societal and individual values. It's a form of individual and collective wealth. It is entirely possible to have good mental health even if you have a mental health disorder. Conversely, the lack of a mental health disorder does not guarantee good mental health.

Moving towards hope—one step, one action, one movement at a time

The document you are reading makes a case for hope. Hope: such a small word that contains so much. Hope: a driver for change. It is both our trust in the notion that a better

future awaits us and the belief that we can help make it a reality.

What does the future we dream of look like? Does it include community, mutual aid, connections, collaboration?

What do we aspire to as a group? What changes do we hope for in our society? For future generations?

According to a survey of young Canadians at Lakehead University in northwestern Ontario, "73% of respondents find the future frightening and almost half believe that humanity is doomed."¹ We have a collective duty to respond to this loss of hope among our youth. We must take action, without naiveté and without underestimating the challenges ahead. To paraphrase Harmonium, if you bring someone into the world, you might want to listen to them.²

We are facing a polycrisis³: uncertainties around politics, the economy, society and health that affect us both on an individual and collective level, that can lead to a loss of meaning and hope in people's lives and have harmful impacts on our mental health. And yet, to continue, we must draw on past successes, the lessons we've learned in our lives and promising initiatives.

QUESTION

How can we nourish our own mental health and the mental health of those around us as this storm rages on?

There is a way to bring magic back into your world. We can: recognize the small wins we have in the day; remind ourselves that we are not alone when we feel powerless, weighed down by the world or like we can't find meaning; share initiatives that inspire meaning; and allow ourselves to get riled up and resist with love and respect.

We can also help develop solid and accessible foundations for us all, regardless of our skin colour, gender identity, income, health conditions or support networks. We can support new or existing programs that foster mental health.

With consideration for our resources and our boundaries, let's work together! Our actions can only grow stronger when we do.

What do we mean when we say 'hope' or 'meaning'?

What do we mean when we say 'hope' or 'meaning'?

These are nuanced concepts that are not easy to address or define. Doing just a little research has netted us a multitude of definitions. Maybe you already have one in mind.

For example, in some Indigenous cultures, **hope and meaning are central pillars that support balance and foster mental well-being.**

Meaning refers to understanding one's role in life and our collective story. It is supported by our connections with family, community and culture—it guides our existence. It is closely linked to other aspects of our well-being, like purpose, hope and belonging. Together, these aspects reinforce one another and create **a balance between our mental, physical, spiritual, emotional and affective selves**, allowing us to reach an optimal state of well-being.⁴⁻⁵

Meaning

This word may evoke a feeling of belonging to something larger than oneself: a collective movement, the grandeur of nature or spirituality.

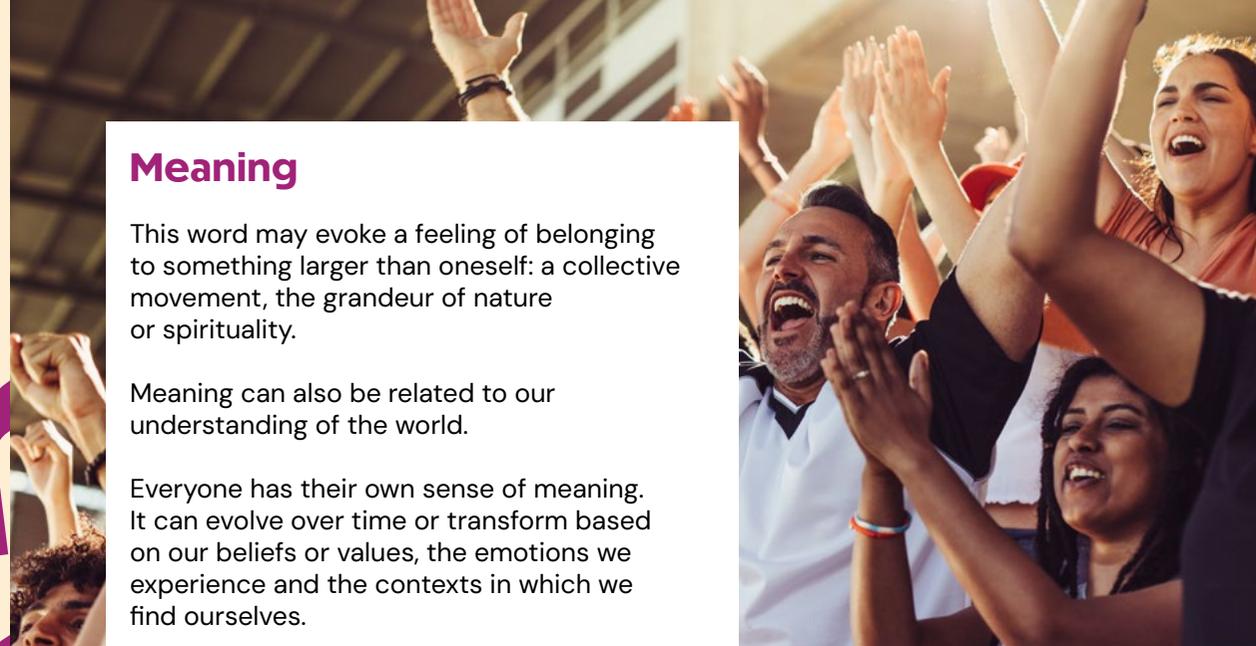
Meaning can also be related to our understanding of the world.

Everyone has their own sense of meaning. It can evolve over time or transform based on our beliefs or values, the emotions we experience and the contexts in which we find ourselves.

For Marine El Hajj a professor at Université Laval's school of theology and religious sciences, **meaning comes from spirituality. Spirituality is not necessarily associated with religion. It can be incarnated through values, practices or commitments.**⁶

For Michael F. Steger, a psychology professor at the University of Colorado, **meaning is influenced by how we interpret the events that unfold in our lives. It can also be defined as a purpose or a direction that we give ourselves to reach our dream—a well aligned objective.**⁷

As for a collective sense of meaning, several studies show that in times of crisis, developing actions that seek to support a population's sense of cohesion can make a real difference in individual and community well-being. This sense of cohesion can help people find meaning in events, access clear and organized information and feel that they have the resources they need to confront the situation. The policies and programs that are put in place can help us rise above the crises to nourish our sense of well-being, all while respecting each area's culture.⁸ We have a right to expect that decisions made by the government will align with the fundamental social principles that we defend, such as equity and dignity.





Hope

As for hope... while it is defined in numerous ways around the world, by different authors and in different times, we will focus here on the elements that connect it to meaning.

For some, hope helps to create or shore up a sense of confidence towards the future.

Marc Pistorio, a clinical psychologist, wrote that hope is “born from the belief that life has value, even in moments of desperation. A reason to live makes it possible to get through hard times [...] and is a major contributor to improving mental health.”⁹

From this perspective, any action or gesture, big or small, can be seen as meaningful or even *grand*, if it is part of supporting our collective well-being. As such, even a simple act like offering to help someone carry their groceries can gain a symbolic and transformative value.

For Michael F. Steger, the sense of meaning is having a goal, and hope is the conviction that this goal is attainable.

For Christine Michaud, a conference speaker and positive psychology educator, hope is, above all, the feeling that we can help to create a better future.¹⁰

QUESTION

Isn't being present and available a step towards the kind of world we want to live in?

The Butterfly Effect

While we might not always feel like having the power to act or influence the direction society takes, it is the cumulative effect of our actions, small and large, that will help us escape a sense of powerlessness, inspire hope and move forward together. In 1972, researcher Edward Lorenz gave a presentation entitled, “Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?”. Under the analogy he developed, even if we measure a long list of parameters, there is no way to know the final outcome of an action.

We rarely know the scope of our impacts. Even the smallest action could lead to a radical transformation of the outcome.¹¹

This idea dovetails with a commonly held worldview among Indigenous communities, which see human beings, animals, plants, past and future generations, and the earth as interconnected. In these cultures, every action, no matter how small, can tip the balance of the world. Human beings, as an integral part of this interconnected whole, are responsible for maintaining harmony.¹²

The beating of our wings can lead to positive changes for future generations.



We encourage you to think and act collectively to find meaning and cultivate hope, supported by the protective factors for mental health promoted by Mouvement SMQ—our 7 ways: FEEL THE MOMENT, MAKE CHOICES, EXPLORE, TAKE ACTION, ACCEPT YOURSELF, FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS, REENERGIZE. One way at a time, one step, one action, one movement. At our own pace.

7 Ways to Cultivate Meaning and Hope

Feeling the moment, means listening to our own emotions and those of the people around us. It means observing, welcoming and identifying emotions and trying to understand the needs that they are expressing for us and for others.

Feel the moment

Embrace your vulnerability to pave the way

There are no good or bad emotions—they are all valid. Emotions always have a purpose: they send us a message about a need that we can address. They can fill us with creative energy that drives action. Emotions have a language that we can learn. The more that we learn to accept, recognize, understand and name our own emotions, the more we are able to welcome and listen to those of others. Emotions go to the very essence of human communication. They are expressed differently from one person to another and from one culture to another. And the same situations don't necessarily result in the same emotions.

In the current social climate, feelings of vulnerability are valid and may take some space. From a social transformation perspective, this emotion allows us to let down our defenses a little bit and opens us up to what we feel, as well as to what other people are going through. In that sense, allowing ourselves a little

vulnerability means accepting that we will be affected by suffering, both our own and that of others, that we will be able to really listen and seek out ways to take action that are humane, fair and sensitive. We can think of vulnerability as a way to show courage in our relationships: getting in touch with our emotions, whether they are beautiful or challenging, and letting go of indifference.

QUESTION

In a society that puts so much value on strength and courage, what space can we make for vulnerability?

As psychologist Marc-André Dufour puts it, "[...] this crack that lets in the pain and the discomfort is the same that lets the light in [...] that lets us reconnect with pleasant emotions." He goes on to say that this step towards reconnecting can help reduce feelings of powerlessness and revive a sense of hope.¹³



Empathy and Care

Empathy allows us to understand other peoples' emotions and perspectives, which encourages better interpersonal relationships, more effective communication and improved teamwork.

Listening with empathy is a way to say, "You exist and I want to hear you." You can invite more empathy into how you communicate¹⁴ by clarifying the context or subject, identifying your respective emotions and the needs that they are expressing, listening, reformulating what the other person said to ensure you understood them well, and working with the other person to find a common goal or a way you can help one another.

As a way to avoid being overwhelmed by the intensity of another person's emotions, there is a point at which it is important to shift from empathy to care. We can use the following question to guide us: "What can I do to be supportive?" This recommendation came from an interview with psychologist Dr. Rachel Thibeault, who is also an occupational therapist and specialist in psychological resilience, community-based rehabilitation and peer support.

We may occasionally feel the need to lower our empathy level and take a step back temporarily to create more space for gentler emotions.

For Serge Lecours, psychology professor at Université de Montréal's faculty of arts and sciences, it is both possible and important to make space for luminous, feel-good emotions like joy, love, recognition, enthusiasm, enchantment, pride, peace, fun, friendship, solidarity and more. Allowing them this space doesn't mean ignoring the emotions that cause us pain; it simply means that it's time to allow ourselves a break. Such moments become all

the more precious when we learn that these pleasant emotions support our immune system, stimulate our creativity and encourage greater openness to information. In this way, they can actually help us respond to the underlying needs expressed by our painful emotions.¹⁵

In a study entitled, "Strengthening the adaptive capacities of individuals and communities in times of pandemic: the key role of the sense of coherence," published in 2020, we learn that collective spaces where people can listen and feel heard are extremely valuable. Listening, showing consideration towards others and mutual sharing are key to eliciting shared understanding of our world and the meaning we give to an event or situation. Sharing our emotions and understanding our needs can help us identify the collective actions we need to take.¹⁶

QUESTION

Are our ears big enough to hear our needs?

EXAMPLE

Eco-anxiety, which stems from emotions about the environment, or eco-emotions¹⁷, can be an adaptive response to a very real threat. Welcoming the emotion and listening to what it has to say, feeling heard and understood can help us feel less alone in the face of this situation. Support can transform emotions into drivers for action, and could lead to getting involved or organizing within the movement against climate change.¹⁸ In turn, these actions can inspire us to be more determined or to aim higher.



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

The Talking Stick. This tool originated within Indigenous communities, where it has been traditionally used in ceremonies and council gatherings to facilitate communication. It is a symbol of respect and equality. Try making a talking stick to use during meetings, or gatherings with family members, romantic partners or friends—its effects may surprise you! It can be a tool to support respectful and caring listening. We can catch up after!

Emotions that help you recharge. Seek out moments with others to collectively hit pause and share emotions that feel good.

What do you see yourself doing?

Making choices, is all about feeling free to make decisions, standing behind them and reconsidering them. It means making choices that align with your values, needs and show flexibility in situations where options are limited. It means developing and supporting your sense of autonomy, competence and belonging.

Make choices

Informed choices that revive your sense of meaning

Self-determination is a concept that is linked to our baseline needs: feelings of autonomy, competence and belonging. Think of it as a vitamin for your brain. It's available in many community organizations, from teachers and support workers, parents, senior residences and more. Contributing to environments that support autonomy means helping to create a sense of meaning on a broad scale.

Choices come in all shapes and sizes

Supporting autonomy includes presenting possible options. Even if conditions are ideal when it's time to make your choice, fear—of choosing wrong, of losing something, of upsetting someone—can put the brakes on

things. In a society that values certainty, performance and the ability to anticipate, doubt can be seen as a shortcoming. However, to paraphrase psychologists Amélie Seidah and Isabelle Geninet, the perfect choice does not exist. We would benefit from asking ourselves, "What is the best option for me, right now, in this context?" Answering that question, anchored in our values, will guide us better than any other compass.¹⁹



What values do you identify with? Take a look at our list for inspiration, at: mouvementsmq.ca/value_list_english

QUESTION

Can we draw on our values to take action together?

When it's time to collaborate and some of our values clash, can we put in the effort to find shared values that we are able to draw on?

It's important to recognize that in some situations, despite our well rooted values, our choices are limited and we have to compromise. For that reason, it is crucial that we understand the reasoning that guides our decisions and what gives them meaning as we're making them. Context has a direct influence on our freedom to act. The more restricted the context, the more limited our agency is. Even in these conditions, our environments can play a key role in supporting our self-determination.

In a context where our sources of information are constantly multiplying and shifting, there are other important issues that come into play when we make choices, like being able to tell truth from fiction (see page 41). We are constantly flooded with information, which pushes our brains into crisis mode and profoundly affects our ability to take in information and think critically. Worse yet, widely shared fake news harms our ability to participate in a nuanced dialogue which also contributes to the growing polarization of our society.

There is a key ingredient that gives us the space we need to make decisions: trustworthy information and verifying our sources. Other approaches can also be helpful, like recognizing and understanding the potential consequences of our choices as well as our inaction, for example. Other examples could be bringing nuance to a situation : being open to complexity and letting go of dichotomies, black-and-white thinking, extreme positions and closed-off mindsets.

QUESTION

Let's ask ourselves: Do we offer the people around us—coworkers, friends, parents, kids, seniors or anyone else—some flexibility to make their own choices? Do we support their autonomy?

EXAMPLE

The administration at a school refuses to provide breakfast for students despite repeated requests from teachers, many of whom pay out of their own pockets to make sure some of their students can have this meal. For these teachers, it is unthinkable that they would stop providing this first and essential meal of the day and give up the fight for the school to assume this service. By opening an empathetic dialogue with the administration, both parties realized that their values aligned, but that their realities, contexts and limitations were different. The teachers asked themselves, "How can we act as a force multiplier for the administration?" The team then opened itself up to new solutions and found external allies that shared its values, making it possible to continue serving breakfast to students.



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

Sharing what you've learned.

At times, within a relationship, at the workplace or after having implemented a policy, we may realize that our choices have unwanted consequences. We suggest working with the people involved to identify what should be considered when making future decisions.

What do you see yourself doing?

Exploring is all about helping you deal with change by drawing on your strengths, cultivating your curiosity and looking at the world from a new perspective.

Explore

Give yourself permission to dream

Allowing yourself to dream of a better future, even for a moment, is an act of hope. Even during hard times, our imaginations are a powerful tool that can carry us out of our daily lives and orient us towards the future. When we take the time to stop and break out of our patterns or routines, a new space opens up for us. Suddenly, we're peeking through the doorway to new possibilities. What if we let ourselves press pause on the here and now for a moment, so we can imagine what else might be possible?

QUESTION

If the world changes in a way that fosters the common good, what will it look like in 10 years?

And if part of that dream were possible, where would we need to start to make it a reality?

Multiple or constant changes that we have no control over are very demanding of our energy and capacity to adapt. **Curiosity** is an under-utilized tool that can be very helpful here. It encourages us to discover, open doors and open ourselves up to the world. It supports us in understanding how the world works, making connections, unpacking our biases and encouraging communication and understanding. Curiosity can transform the uncertainty caused by changes into energy to make it through them. It is an invitation to explore new ideas, test them out and adjust them—in short, to dare. Roxane de la Sablonnière, an expert in social psychology and full professor in Université de Montréal's psychology department, works to shed new light on our understanding of social changes. As such, she dreams of a new direction in which we unite our visions so that we can predict the effects of the most devastating social changes and help populations adapt.²⁰ Once the door has been opened, curiosity makes it possible for us to start moving. And suddenly, we become catalysts for change.



By sharing and combining diverse perspectives, we broaden our horizons and exercise our sensitivity towards other peoples' experiences. Each person, with their own baggage, life experience, skills and sensitivities, will have their own vision of the challenges before us. In situations where one single approach is likely to leave us stuck in a singular vision, combining ideas from multiple perspectives provides a richness of experiences.

There are many strategies beyond curiosity that can help us confront change, like giving ourselves time to adjust to a new situation, recognizing our emotions, taking a step back, or tolerating a situation or discomfort. We often forget to include **resistance** in this list. Resisting, refusing to give in to a situation that makes no sense can also be a way of adapting. In “Hopepunk: pour une bienveillance radicale,” sociologist and researcher Guillaume Ouellet²¹ wrote that indignation should always take precedence over resignation. While we’re a bit allergic to absolutist language at Mouvement SMQ, we believe that this sentence provides a glimmer of hope.

The article goes on to paraphrase *The Rebel*, in which Albert Camus writes that indignation is the first step towards action—a refusal of the absurd that creates the conditions under which change is possible. Acting on indignation does not necessarily mean taking destructive action. It could mean simply stating one’s disapproval or anger. For Ouellet, indignation is more than feeling uncomfortable as we witness our social and institutional conditions crumble, it is refusing that this become the norm. It means rejecting the notion that this erosion of the social safety net is inevitable and refusing to get locked into cynicism, at an impasse that brings paralysis rather than transformation.²²

QUESTION

Is there a change that you feel compelled to resist?

EXAMPLE

One day, Dutch journalist Martine Postma asked herself, “Why do we throw out so many objects that could be repaired?” Guided by her curiosity, she met with local artisans and repair experts. And thus the Repair Café²³ was born. With locations in Quebec and around the world, it’s a place where people can gather to repair items for free rather than throwing them away. The Repair Café movement is an inspiring example of how a simple question can transform a harmful habit into positive change and serve to build solidarity around a collective sense of meaning.



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

Working together for the common good. Organizing with others to push back against a world that does not benefit us. Daring to express ourselves with creativity, care, poetry and determination. For example, you might get involved in a community organization that puts your shared values into action, choose to wear colourful socks at work to lighten the atmosphere or work together with your neighbours to create a green alleyway.

What do you see yourself doing?

Taking action, is all about giving meaning to our experiences, recognizing the good things and understanding that we are never too small to make a difference.

Take action

Recognize what is going well and break out of powerlessness

Positive psychology research emphasizes that people who find meaning in their lives are more resilient in the face of challenges.²⁴ Our values and life experiences influence the meaning that we attribute to our lives.

QUESTION

What gives meaning to your day? Do you have any daily rituals, relationships that make it possible for you to take action, or houseplants that bring you joy?

Are we using the strategies we need to support a sense of meaning in our communities?

When we face a life transition or crisis, the meaning that we attribute to these events can have non-negligible effects

on our mental health. These effects have been documented. For example, a loss of motivation. A loss of motivation can happen in the workplace or at school, and can be experienced by people of any age. It can lead to burnout, disengagement, a drop in performance, dropping out, decreased motivation and self-esteem, and an increased risk of depression or social isolation.

Did you know that taking the time to pause and observe the beauty, goodness and sweetness around us, both in our lives and in our environments, even for a few seconds, has a positive impact on our health? Putting on your “gratitude glasses” can reduce stress, support the immune system, and improve sleep, mood and social relationships.²⁵ However, it is just as important to put on your “lucidity lenses” to stay informed about current events and find innovative solutions that use the skills and strengths that you have available to you at that moment.

Unfortunately, these days, not a lot of news space is allocated to stories about beauty and hope. Studies show that regular exposure to negative information can aggravate symptoms of anxiety and depression, especially among people who are already vulnerable. Moreover, the cumulative effect of alarming news stories, without any accompanying solutions or notions of how things could improve, can lead to feelings of powerlessness and despair.²⁶



If the media could increase the extent to which they serve as messengers of hope and meaning, if we shared more content that made us excited on social media, if we followed media or news outlets that shared positive and inspiring stories, it could help us break away from feelings of powerlessness and give us a sense of the actions we can take (see page 41).

QUESTION

How can we make more space for information that brings us a sense of meaning and hope without filtering out the information we need to hear about the things that aren't going well?

For writer Jonathan Kozol, revolutions start by picking “battles big enough to matter, but small enough to win.”

The system of our society may seem vast, abstract and inaccessible. But every small action counts—and could have far-reaching impacts! As Guillaume Ouellet justly reminds us, the “system” is made up of all of us.²⁷ It is the sum of human beings who each have the power to act.

Within this system, there are people who continue to prioritize good, powerful and humane actions. They choose to support others based on their values of care and respect; they choose to keep trying, to keep hoping. This is the very essence of hope, according to University of New Mexico professor of psychology and psychiatry William R. Miller. It is the “refusal, regardless of current reality, to give up and succumb to hopelessness, cynicism or despair.”²⁸

A consultation led by the Réseau des carrefours jeunesse emploi du Québec showed that 66% of young people believe they have very little influence over society, despite the fact that their generation will be the future.²⁹ This only highlights the importance of regularly and loudly reminding youth that every small step counts, as well as providing them with spaces where their voices are heard and their choices are taken into account.

Every type of person can take action in a way that reflects their personality. You might be... an attentive listener, a non-conformist, a leader, a rebel, or a revolutionary. You might be caring, modest, sensitive, involved, curious, organized, sweet, loving, intuitive, funny, optimistic, determined, creative... The complementarity of our strengths is how we make progress as a collective movement.

EXAMPLE

Thoughtful and kind gestures have a positive effect both on the person who performs them and the person receiving them, and even on bystanders.³⁰ On this basis, Floris van Vugt and Roxane de la Sablonnière created *Projet Bienveillance*³¹ (Project Care), which creates and shares short videos telling the stories of kind gestures and their beneficial impacts. Testimonials from people who were on the receiving end of these gestures reveal some of those impacts, including emotional contagion (the idea that positive emotions associated with caring gestures are infectious.)³²⁻³³.



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

Let's propagate care! Let's share inspiring, powerful and humane actions and propagate care by circuit-breaking hateful comments with thoughtful or positive remarks.

What do you see yourself doing?

Accepting yourself, is all about recognizing your own worth, having a realistic vision of your strengths, skills and limitations, as well as those of the people around you. It means taking a caring position towards yourself and others.

Accept yourself

Self-compassion and character strengths as drivers for action

Without validation for our skills and strengths from our loved ones, supervisors or peers, we can have a hard time believing in them. When we receive recognition, we feel a sense of security and validation. Developing self-esteem is key for individual well-being and, by extension, for that of society as a whole. We can draw on our self-esteem when stating our opinions or developing healthy relationships. Positive self-esteem fosters civic engagement and commitment, resilience and risk-taking, and reduces social problems. Recognizing our own strengths, skills and struggles, as well as those of others, helps create strong foundations on which we can build.

QUESTION

Have you thought about all the strengths and skills that you and your circle use on a daily basis to

give meaning to your lives or work towards the world you want to live in?

Studies show that it is more beneficial to focus on employees' **strengths** in the workplace than their struggles. This helps cultivate a sense of pride while also using energy more efficiently.³⁴ In light of this research, we'd invite you to test it out in a variety of contexts and celebrate your strengths loudly. That doesn't mean that you start ignoring or stop working on gradually improving on your faults or difficulties.

Another important ingredient to keep on hand is **self-compassion**. This helps us accept our limits with kindness. For example, if our energy feels lower than others, we should treat ourselves with the same humanity and understanding that we would show a friend.³⁵ A study on well-being and self-compassion during the pandemic showed that self-compassion impacts our perception of control over a situation and of satisfaction with our life.³⁶ Practicing self-compassion can also help us accept others' choices and paces.

QUESTION

Do our approaches, interventions, policies or love facilitate the development of self-esteem and compassion among the people around us?

EXAMPLE

In a women's centre where participants feel accepted and validated, one participant said, "Being here has been the first time that I've felt listened to, like I have rights, like I can speak up." These spaces help women develop their self-esteem by fighting against biases, cultivating a sense of solidarity, breaking down the barriers to recognition, supporting their autonomy and helping them exercise their rights through participation in a social movement.

The more we trust in our own actions, the more we respect ourselves, the more we accept our mistakes as well as our victories, the more the people around us are likely to follow in our footsteps and... the more we are contributing to the common good. We become catalysts for change, even at a small scale. We can even become mentors and help others develop their skills.



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

A wave of postcards. Be part of a wave of sending postcards or virtual messages. Send one to a friend, a coworker, an elected official, a journalist, a manager, a writer, an artist, a company or anyone else with a few words recognizing one of their strengths or successes.

What do you see yourself doing?

Fostering relationships, is all about opening ourselves up to others and building positive and enriching relationships across various spheres of our lives. These connections will protect us during hard times and enrich how we see the world.

Foster relationships

Coming together to inspire hope

Several recent studies have shown that human relationships have changed. There are multiple factors that have contributed to this: the increasing role of technology in our lives, the pandemic, demographic isolation and changes in social codes.³⁷ These elements have an impact on our growing feelings of loneliness. This loneliness can then be exacerbated by a crisis, such as a serious health³⁸ or financial event. Social relationships are an important protective factor for maintaining and nourishing our mental health.

QUESTION

What can we do to strengthen connections in our community?

Networks are built over time through connections and conversations. The connections between the people who compose it may be intimate, close or distant. Most attentive and caring relationships have positive effects.

Some people will share and be vulnerable only with very close confidants, while others will do so on a park bench with a stranger. Some people will only feel safe at home, while others feel that way outside.

Having tangible connections to fall back on can be extremely beneficial and protective. "With all the upsetting stuff in the news and people's poor behaviour behind the wheel or at work, getting an unexpected call or message from a friend [...] restores my hope in humanity sometimes."³⁹

We may even have experienced these luminous and often spontaneous moments with strangers: laughing or crying at the movies, celebrating a sports win, an experience of awe in the park during an eclipse, sharing a few words while buying an ice cream during a heat wave... All these moments bring us together and help us see the beauty in the world around us. We often forget that the majority of our interactions are positive.

Relationships of care, whether they're created within the home or as far as the other side of the world, help weave a safety net around us. They have the power to inspire us, add meaning to our lives and fill us with hope. It's often our least close social relationships that help us see things differently and break out of our biases. We need one another.

Collective change is not a solo endeavor. Many social movements started from small gatherings around a kitchen table, meet-ups in the neighbourhood, social media shares or solidarity among coworkers. Major social movements come from

the desire to do things differently. "History teaches us that change does not come from the top down, but from individuals' ability to collectively reimagine our shared space and take action."⁴⁰ It's likely that our vision of the world that we want to live in resembles that of dozens of people around us.

QUESTION

What if we dared to talk about our vision of a better world with our friends and coworkers?

We might be surprised by the number of connections between them. There are hundreds of different paths we can take to reach the same place. And it is the cumulative effect of these paths and their complementarities that makes us stronger together.

Feeling like we are part of a group and a community strengthens our ability to weather crises. Providing mutual aid and support reduces feelings of isolation and encourages social support. Guillaume Ouellet refers to the work of bell hooks⁴¹, reminding us that one of the keys to returning to a sense of meaning and hope is resisting through love: love as a vector for political change, not as an abstract ideal, but as a seemingly simple concrete practice rooted in our daily experiences. It means meeting people where they're at, exploring what could be possible with them (here and now), while committing to a long-term practice that strives to support their connection to the world.⁴²

EXAMPLE

The Idle No More⁴³ movement, which emerged in 2012, marked a turning point in contemporary Indigenous rights movements. Initially a response to Bill C-45 under the Harper government, which reduced environmental protections and facilitated land development without adequate consultation protocols, the movement quickly spread across Canada. Using teach-ins, protests and, notably, round dances in public spaces, the movement's founders articulated a form of peaceful resistance centred around Indigenous sovereignty, environmental justice and recognition for the rights of Indigenous peoples. By reimagining dance, singing and ceremony in an activist context, the movement contributed to cultural revitalization and strengthening collective pride in Indigenous identity. The movement's impacts are still visible in 2025.⁴⁴



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

Sharing a smile. Have you noticed how rarely we see a sparkle in the eyes of the strangers around us in public spaces? Let's lead the challenge! Every day, get your eyes off your screen for a moment and share a smile with a person nearby. A simple smile can make all the difference. It's an act of openness to others, acknowledging that we're part of the same universe. A small sweetness we offer up. This might seem like a small detail, but that's how we change the world: one interaction at a time. Your smile might be infectious and encourage the other person to share their own moment with a stranger.⁴⁵

What do you see yourself doing?

Reenergizing is all about making space for and valuing the things that make us feel good, that recharge our battery. This could include determining your priorities, laughing, spending time in nature with your loved ones, or taking breaks. Reenergizing is valid and vital, and there are hundreds of ways to do it!

Reenergize

Get involved without burning out

In this document, we've explored ways to adapt, get involved and take action. Breaking out of powerlessness, organizing around an idea that gets us fired up, coming together to change the world, feeling like we are empowered to act—all of this can be exhilarating and revitalizing! We might even feel like it gives us wings! But sometimes, we need a moment to catch our breath.

It takes a lot of energy to adapt, make space for our emotions, listen, show care, change our habits, get involved socially, be present for those around us, take action, and so on. **It is valid to change our pace based on our needs and circumstances, to take time to ourselves and recharge.** For example, you might choose not to speak up about a topic that you normally champion, surround yourself with caring people, or go camping to clear your mind... As a society, **we should be celebrating when people dare to say**, "No, I need to prioritize something else" or, better yet,

"Today, I took some time to recharge my batteries."

We live in a world that tries to squeeze us dry, that's always pushing for more. The impacts of this are dire. To paraphrase Marc-André Dufour, the more tired, stressed, distracted, rushed and under pressure we are, the less empathy we have for those around us.⁴⁶ This also means we're less available to reflect on environmental and socio-political issues, to be creative, surprise ourselves and think outside of the box. If we want to break out of this vicious cycle, it's important that we recognize as a society that, as Catherine Ethier put it in an interview with the radio show *Point de repère*, "when we offer one another space for sweetness, there is no space left for indifference."⁴⁷ These spaces are how we return in force. We need to take the time to reenergize. By letting ourselves experience the present moment, we reject mindlessness. It affirms our freedom.

We only have one reservoir of energy that we draw from for our work, responsibilities, sports, activities, children, loved ones, commitments... To make sure we don't overdraw our

energy account, we have two options: stop withdrawing from our reservoir (meaning: rest, take breaks, set boundaries, determine your priorities); or refill it with things that make us feel good (meaning: do nothing, garden, take a forest bath, read, spend time with friends, run, cook).⁴⁸

QUESTION

How can we work together to redesign our relationship to time and create a society where everyone has the ability to thrive without sacrificing their health or the health of their environment?

EXAMPLE

Some organizations provide their workers with health leave as well as sick leave. "Health days" allow us to reenergize to keep us from overdrawing from our energy accounts. Small changes to our organizational culture can foster good mental health.



We invite you to take action: with a friend or two, or as a collective

Waive the white flag. What if we challenged ourselves to raise our hands when we feel like things are getting out of control, when it's going too fast, when it's too much, when the pace is no longer sustainable, so that we could work together to find solutions that support our well-being? What if we took the time to listen to those who wave their flag?

What do you see yourself doing?

In conclusion, our wish

As this document has made clear, we are living through a polycrisis that affects our hearts, bodies and minds. While Mouvement santé mentale Québec and its member organizations remain fully aware of the profound effects this reality has on the population's well-being, we still have the ability and the power to dream together.

If we take action, it will be for a world where we can hear and respect our differences, and come together to face these crises and get involved.

A world where it will be possible to resist with poetry, love and free will. Where we can take action in solidarity to transform the future by transmitting a sense of hope to people both young and old.

We believe that...

- the culmination of our steps, our actions and our movements can trigger the revolution we need;
- promoting mental health and practicing the 7 ways to recharge your batteries are two of many strategies to nourish the well-being of individuals, communities and our society;
- the population's well-being cannot rely solely on the health care sector; it requires joint actions from multiple actors;

- by investing in key social structures, we will empower individuals and communities to reclaim their lives and their health.

The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha, the great novel by Miguel de Cervantes, presents a case for dreaming of a world that is not pre-destined. As Guillaume Ouellet points out in his previously cited article "Hopepunk: pour une bienveillance radicale," Cervantes reminds us that the world is a building we are endlessly constructing. We are not doomed to live in a reality that is predetermined. We can reinvent it, bend it to another shape, see it from a new angle. Don Quixote sees cracks where others see insurmountable walls. He gives himself permission to believe in another version of the world—not because he rejects reality, but because he refuses to submit to it without a fight.

What if we let ourselves press pause on the here and now for a moment, so we can imagine what else might be possible? What if we dared to talk about our vision of a better world with our friends or coworkers? Our vision may well resemble that of dozens of people around us.

How would you like to start moving on the path towards this dream? What will your first step, your first action, your first movement be?

Working together to promote mental health!

Afterword | From Chaos to Cosmos

The word "chaos" (*kaos*) refers to disorder or confusion, while "cosmos" (*kosmos*) refers to a well organized whole, a space where everything in the universe is in its place. We are in an era where the accumulated weight of crises is threatening our connections, undermining our sense of meaning and blurring our vision of the future. It is a moment in history where chaos is radically disrupting the cosmos.

As destabilizing as it is, this disorder (social, political, climatic) reveals two essential things: the sunny tomorrows that we were promised have not come to pass, and, tolerating the current state of affairs (the status quo) is not a viable option. Rather than allowing ourselves to be overcome with despair, let us remember that chaos is the fertile ground from which societies (re)invent the cosmos.

Both as individuals and as collectives, we are called to shape what philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis referred to as the "magma of meaning." The challenge may be great, but it is essential. Transforming chaos into cosmos requires traveling, step by step, down the paths blazed by humanists, without which we remain trapped in the impasse of disenchantment.

Without putting the burden of this task on those who are subjected to the brunt of the chaos, this manifesto calls us to take on the challenge of finding meaning and hope through concrete, daily, accessible actions. It traces pathways that are as simple as they are powerful: moving forward step-by-step, nurturing hope, building connections, express indignation with love, recharging without guilt. All practical means through which we can recreate a sense of meaning and transform powerlessness into inspiration.

Rediscovering the capacity to collectively create meaning that makes life possible—this is the task, at once vital, beautiful, and urgent, to which this "little manifesto scented with hope," invites us.

Guillaume Ouellet, Ph.D.

Researcher at CREMIS (Centre de recherche de Montréal sur les inégalités sociales, les discriminations et les pratiques alternatives de citoyenneté) and adjunct professor at Université du Québec à Montréal's school of social work.

Learn more

Some Sources of Hope

“Inventing hope means seeking out those who work each day to repair the ends of the world.” — Serge Marquis, *Espoirs*, translated from the original French

CHATTY BENCHES: A worldwide initiative with the goal of breaking isolation and encouraging conversation between strangers using specially marked benches in public spaces. Also called *bancs de jasette*, *bancs bavards*, and buddy benches.

THE CHAIR OF GENERATIONS:

A chair made by children, placed around tables where political decisions are made to symbolize the voice of young people and ensure that leaders don't forget that these children are the future! As of today, nearly 170 of these chairs have been adopted across Quebec. meresaufont.org/chaise-des-generations

COMMENT RENVERSER L'ÉCOANXIÉTÉ

[HOW TO REVERSE ECO-ANXIETY]: In this documentary, young people show how they've taken action to break free of their feelings of powerlessness due to eco-anxiety. <https://stationsme.ca/en/students/taking-care-of-yourself/tools-for-students/documentary-comment-renverser-lecoanxiete-french-only/>

INCUBATEUR CIVIQUE

[CIVIC INCUBATOR]: A project from the Maison de l'innovation sociale (MIS) with the goal of incubating social and environmental projects that focus on inclusion, ecology and holistic health. Make way for inspiration! mis.quebec/categorie/cohortes-incubateur-civique/

INTERCOM PROJECT: A clinical and social psychology community intervention program that seeks to support individuals in maintaining positive mental health through prevention work in times of crisis and recovery from social upheaval. projetintercom.ca/fr

REPAIR CAFÉ: A free collective space where people share knowledge with the goal of repairing objects rather than throwing them away. repaircafe.org/en/

WAPIKONI MOBILE: Through audiovisual creative works, Wapikoni supports the personal, creative and professional development of First Peoples and the affirmation of their communities. wapikoni.ca/

To stay informed about good news

UNPOINTCINQ: unpointcinq.ca (in French)

TikTok: [faitque](https://www.tiktok.com/@faitque) (in French)

BONNES NOUVELLES DE MAJ – News from Radio-Canada for young people: ici.radio-canada.ca/jeunesse/maj/fil-actualite/1012137/bonnes-nouvelles (in French)

TikTok: [majmonactu](https://www.tiktok.com/@majmonactu) – Instagram: [@majmonactu](https://www.instagram.com/majmonactu) (in French)

LE MEILLEUR DE NOUS – Newsletter with the most inspiring stories of the week published in the French-language newspaper *leSoleil*:

lesoleil.com/infolettres/inscriptions/

Tools to Help Protect Yourself from Disinformation

- Check news sites with sections that specifically unravel fake news.

“FAUSSES NOUVELLES,” A SECTION OF RADIO-CANADA INFO:

ici.radio-canada.ca/theme/281/fausses-nouvelles/1 (in French)

THE “DETECTEUR DE RUMEURS,” FROM SCIENCE PRESSE:

sciencepresse.qc.ca/detecteur-rumeurs (in French)

THE “VÉRIFICATIONS FAITES” SECTION OF THE NEWSPAPER LESOLEIL:

lesoleil.com/actualites/verification-faite/ (in French)

- If you get information from an AI chatbot, ask it to provide you with its source. It's as easy as asking it, “What is your source for this information?”. That way, you can judge how reliable the source is.
- Test your ability to detect if information is true or false: doubtit.ca/

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