

Family Connections

Supporting families as they care for a loved one living with a mental health challenge



Storytelling: finding your voice >>>

BY DANA BENSON

Every one has a story to tell. Some people tell their stories with ease, while others struggle to find the right words to express what they *really* think and feel.

When it comes to supporting someone who lives with a mental health or addiction challenge, finding the power and the courage to tell our stories can be a **truly transformative experience**, both for ourselves, and for those who may read and be encouraged by our story.

Most people I talk to look a little apprehensive when I ask them to think about telling their story. Or they immediately decline, feeling uncomfortable about what they would say and how they might say it.

Figuring out what your story is, identifying all the pieces of it and what those pieces mean can provide much needed understanding. Discovering how your experiences have changed you and/or your family and then sharing what you have learned and how you have grown can offer much needed encouragement and hope for others who are having a similar experience.

Through our own compassionate story-telling, we communicate empathy for other's experiences and offer support in helping others know that they aren't alone on their journey - and that's what family support is all about!

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Telling Your Story cont'd...

Take some time to reflect

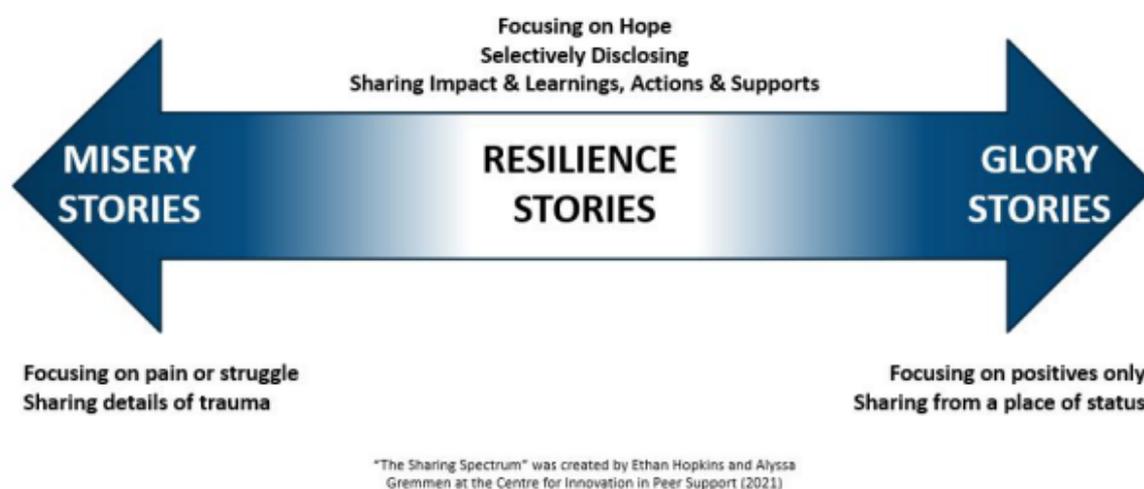
Take some time to think through what it has been like to support someone you love who lives with a mental illness and/or addiction. What are all the complicated thoughts and feelings you might have about it?

How have you changed and grown over the years? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about your loved one? What have you struggled with the most? Who has helped you along the way?

Consider the 'Sharing Spectrum'

The Sharing Spectrum has been adapted from: Support House: Centre for Innovation in Peer Support. (2021). Developing Your Resilience Stories Toolkit.

The Sharing Spectrum



Glory Stories: Only focus on positives. Sharing glory stories can create shame and comparisons, and they can be dismissive and prescriptive (eg. "Do what I did to get better")

Misery Stories: Focus only on pain or struggle. Sharing misery stories mean we stay in sorrow and hardship and we may overshare details of harm which can cause re-traumatization for ourselves and others.

Telling only glory stories or misery stories can cause harm - to ourselves and to others.

Resilience Stories: Inspire hope through selectively and thoughtfully sharing the parts of our journey that focus on the impact of our experiences, the learnings we have had, the actions we took and supports we found helpful.



TELL US YOUR STORY

Here are some more tips to get you started writing and sharing YOUR story!

Keep it Simple: your story doesn't need to be complicated or 'profound'.

Tell YOUR story: tell only **your** story from **your** perspective. Respect the privacy of other 'characters' in your story and honour their autonomy in determining how their story is shared.

You don't need to tell your whole story: you can choose to share a particular experience or some general reflections you have about a specific part of your journey. Think about what has had the most impact on you, and what might be the most encouraging and supportive for others.

Story-Telling Prompts

*adapted from: Support House: Centre for Innovation in Peer Support. (2021).
Developing Your Resilience Stories Toolkit.*

- What was your life like before your struggles? How is it different now?
- What was is/was it like living with _____
- What factors do you think have contributed to your experiences
- What means the most to you in this journey?
- How have your family and friends been helpful/unhelpful? What does this mean for you moving forward?
- What have you learned?
- What would you do differently if you could do it over again?
- What has been the most difficult part of this journey for you? What did that difficulty teach you?
- What has been the most powerful/transformational part of this journey for you? What has that transformation looked like?



And remember - just because you 'write' your story, doesn't mean to have to share it with others. Quite often, the simple act of writing your story is transformational enough!

Fall Wellness Tips



Some of us welcome the arrival of Fall with a peaceful smile, a deep breath, and an eagerness to get outside and enjoy the changing colours, or curl up with a good book and a cup of tea in front of the fire. ☕ For others, Fall is the poorly disguised harbinger of wet grey days and cold, dark winter. ☁



Whether you love it or hate it, there is no escaping it! So why not make the best of it? Here are some tips to help you focus on your own wellness in order to get the most out of the season - or at the very least, make it through the season!

Don't let the cooler weather keep you inside. Throw on your coat and hat and get outside to smell the cool air, marvel at the amazing variety of leaf colours, explore a new trail, or just bundle up and sit on your porch and allow the fresh air to restore you.

Enjoy the harvest: Apples, squash, root veggies - experiment with a new recipe, savour the tartness of a freshly picked apple, stock up on all those vitamins and minerals that contribute to a healthy body and healthy mind.

Establish and maintain a good sleep routine: We all know that good sleep hygiene is essential for our brains and bodies to function well. Don't neglect this essential aspect of wellness.

Colour Something

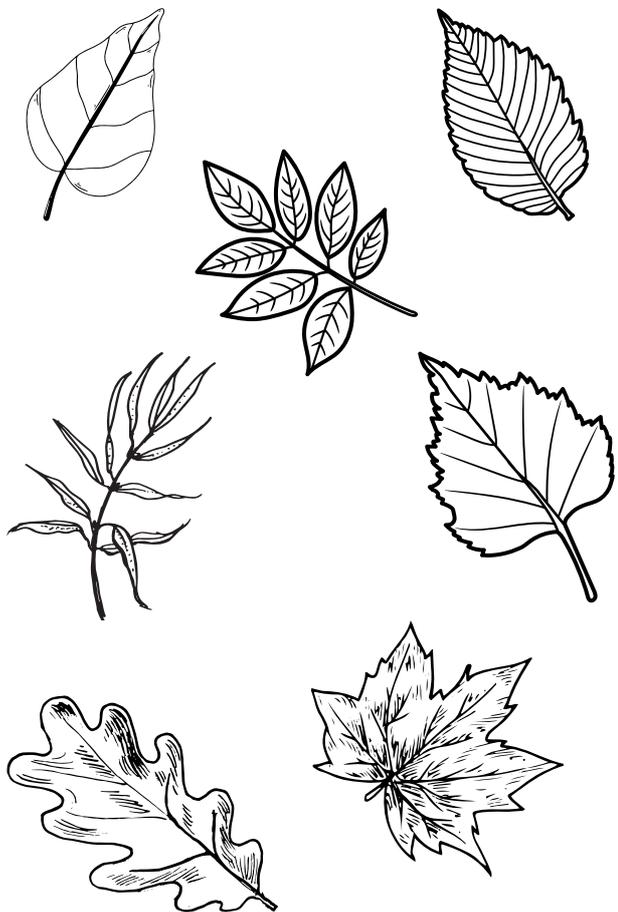
Don't knock colouring - it's calming and can be highly therapeutic!



Read a book: Join a book club or pick up a book you have never read before (or re-read something you love). Park yourself in a comfy spot and allow yourself to get lost in whatever you are reading.

Consider establishing a mindfulness practice. A simple Google search will yield countless mindfulness tools you can use every day to help yourself handle stress, external and internal pressures, racing thoughts, etc... Remember, learning mindfulness takes time and patience - but it's worth it!

How many leaves can you identify



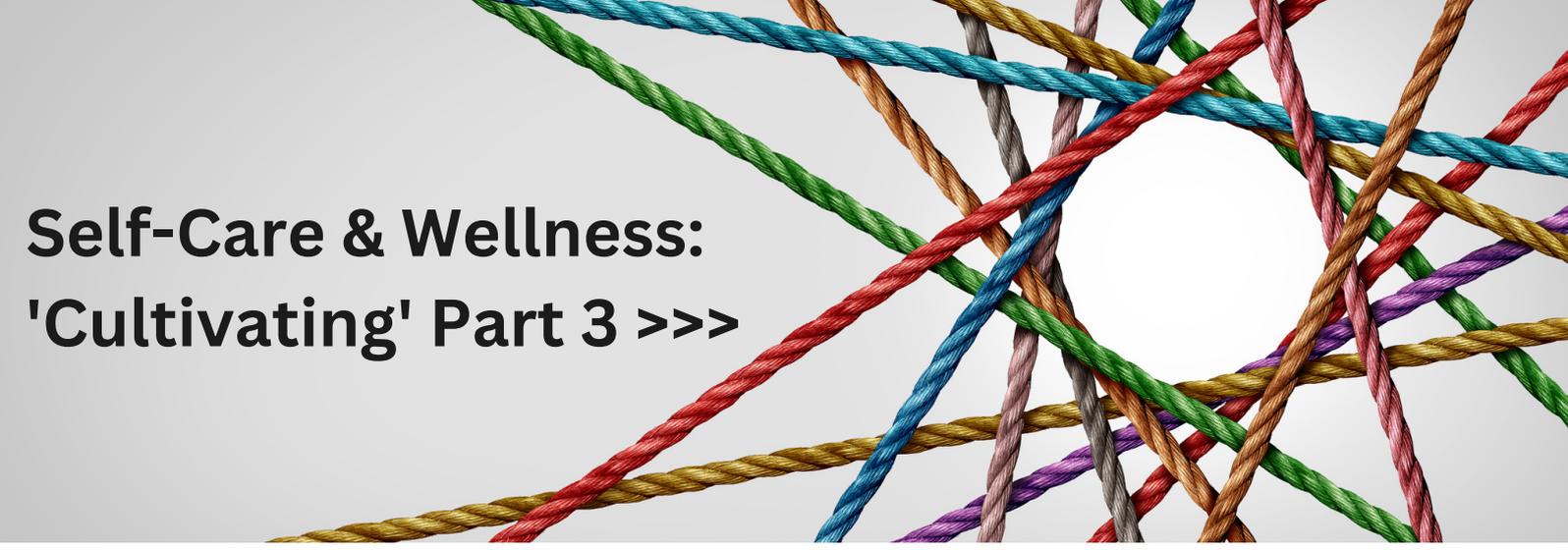
Boundaries: Set and maintain healthy boundaries for yourself around how much and what kind of support you can reasonably offer to others, holiday activities, what kind of thoughts and emotions you allow for yourself, screen time, and whatever else you need to do in order to be well. **You don't need to apologize for taking control of your own wellness!**

Honour Time for Yourself: Remember - there is always time! Taking a few moments out of your day for yourself isn't going to cause a global disaster. Whatever you 'need' to do will still be there after you have looked after your own wellness. When you look after yourself, you will be in a much better place to look after all those other things that want your attention.

Autumn Word Scramble

Unscramble these Autumn-themed words and write your answers on the lines below.

ALLF	_____
UMTUAN	_____
AELF	_____
EKAR	_____
EHARTVS	_____
AHTNGVSNIKGI	_____
NMKPIPU	_____
SCEWACROR	_____
UKRTEY	_____
PLAPE EDICR	_____



Self-Care & Wellness: 'Cultivating' Part 3 >>>

Cultivating Meaningful Connection

Sometimes when we are facing significant challenges, reaching out to others for meaningful connection is a hard task. We may feel embarrassed with our situation, we might want to protect the privacy of our loved ones (always a good thing to do), or we might not have the emotional energy to engage in relationships with other people.

Coping with the ongoing challenges of supporting a loved one who lives with mental health and/or addiction challenges is isolating enough on its own. Asking people to cultivate meaningful connection in the midst of that isolation might seem unreasonable.

But again and again, the research shows that people who are well connected within their community - to resources, to support systems, and in meaningful relationships - are more resilient than those who are not. And they are able to cope with their challenges much more effectively than those who remain isolated.

One of the benefits of cultivating connection is that it can protect us against the dangers of thought spinning or engaging in a negatively reinforcing narrative. When we are engaged in the world outside of ourselves and our circumstances, our perspective opens up a little bit and we are able to see our situation with fresh eyes and a new outlook.

Another benefit of cultivating connection is to remind us that our lives are bigger than our current experiences. When we spend all of our time inside ourselves with our problems or talking about our problems with a very small circle of people, our world shrinks and soon it collapses in on itself. Our lives (and our relationships) become about just that one thing.

Not only does this make it impossible for us to gather fresh perspectives (and cultivate a growth mindset), but it also puts us in a very difficult position when that one thing changes, recovers, or goes away. If that one thing has always defined our identity and our lives, what do we do when it is gone? Who are we without that defining understanding?

Cultivating connection is about developing relationships and ways of being in the world that are not just about us and our challenges.

Our relationships shift from being all about us to being about us **and** the community, us **and** friends, us **and** work, etc. When we cultivate connection, we foster a sense of belonging for ourselves and others, and place ourselves in supportive, creative, and nourishing situations. And somehow we find that we are less anxious, our emotions are better regulated, we have higher self-esteem, and we are able to be more empathetic.

Cultivating More Meaningful Connections in Your Life

Actively Look for Opportunities to Connect with Others

Help Out

many hands....

Join a club or service group, volunteer, eat lunch in the park

Take Initiative

even when it's hard

Practice Gratitude

even when you don't feel like it

Be Friendly

Kindness costs nothing - except perhaps our own ego.

Communicate in Meaningful Ways

Instead of 'liking' a post on social media, send a DM or email to initiate a conversation. Pick up the phone, write a letter, have a conversation in person.

Avoid getting swept up by the anti-meaningful connection habits of mindlessly scrolling through social media.

Ask someone how they are doing and then be patient and express genuine interest in wanting to know the answer.

Make Time

If we are honest with ourselves, there really is no shortage of time - but there are conflicting priorities. If you value meaningful connection, you will make time for the effort it requires.

Smile

To yourself and for others. It might be the only smile someone else sees that day.

Follow-Up

Don't drop the ball on a connection just because another person might not take the initiative to follow up

Be Gracious and Generous

Brené Brown wisely said that generosity is the *ability to extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others*

Try Something New

with other people... Even if you don't like it, you can take pride in the fact that you had the courage to try!

Be Understanding and Empathetic Towards Others

Everyone is doing the best they can with the tools they have

Dig Deep for Courage

Pick up the phone and call someone you haven't talked to in a while - just to see how they are doing, not to unload your own stuff on them or co-opt them into your own struggles



Learn and grow

Listen Read Watch

Longing to dig into something that might make you think? Or are you looking for something to help you relax and breathe? There is no shortage of things to watch, read, and listen to that can help us be well, stay well, learn and grow. Whatever your preference (podcast, Youtube, or a book), here are some great options around mental health, providing support for loved ones, self-care, and finding meaning in the midst of change.



Wellcast - Youtube

In this twice-a-week quirky, animated show, we explore the physical, mental and emotional paths to wellness. With an emphasis on education, the show addresses both the latest trends and long-standing practices of wellness—everything from the efficacy of the gratitude experiment to the importance of sunshine and vitamin D. Follow along as your host, Caitlin, guides you through a bi-weekly journaling exercise that helps you apply what you've learned. The ultimate goal: one year, one show, one journal, one collective journey to wellness.



From the website: Dr. Robert Duff, a psychologist from Southern California, made this podcast after being frustrated with the complex nature of psychological issues. He wanted to put it all into simple language for everyone to understand. Every episode tackles mental health questions from listeners and interviews mental health experts.



Elyn Saks

Elyn Saks asks bold questions about how society treats people with...

ted.com **TED** Ideas worth spreading

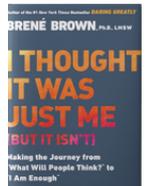
From the website: Elyn Saks has chronic schizophrenia, and she is a professor of law, psychology and psychiatry at USC. She might have spent her life in the back ward of a hospital, but that's not what happened.

Check out her TED talk where she shares some of her story.



I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't)

Making the Journey from "What Will People Think?" to "I Am Enough"



Adapted from Brenebrown.com: We spend so much precious time and energy managing perception and creating carefully edited versions of ourselves to show to the world. There is a constant barrage of social expectations that teach us that being imperfect is synonymous with being inadequate...

This book shines a long-overdue light on an important truth: Our imperfections are what connect us to one another and to our humanity. Our vulnerabilities are not weaknesses; they are powerful reminders to keep our hearts and minds open to the reality that we're all in this together.

Mental illnesses affect everyone in some way. We all likely know someone who has experienced a mental illness at some point. Yet there are still many hurtful attitudes around mental illnesses that fuel stigma and discrimination and make it harder to reach out for help. It's time to look at the facts.

Myth: People don't recover from mental illnesses.

Fact: People can and do recover from mental illnesses. Today, there are many different kinds of treatments, services, and supports that can help. No one should expect to feel unwell forever. The fact is, people who experience mental illnesses can and do lead productive, engaged lives. They work, volunteer, or contribute their unique skills and abilities to their communities. Even when people experience mental illnesses that last for a long time, they can learn how to manage their symptoms so they can get back to their goals. If someone continues to experience many challenges, it may be a sign that different approaches or supports are needed.

Myth: Bad parenting causes mental illnesses.

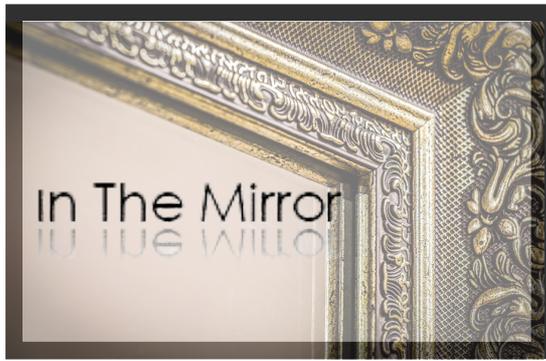
Fact: No one factor can cause mental illnesses. Mental illnesses are complicated conditions that arise from a combination of genetics, biology, environment, and life experiences. Family members and loved ones do have a big role in support and recovery.

Myth: People who experience mental illnesses can't work.

Fact: Whether you realize it or not, workplaces are filled with people who have experienced mental illnesses. Mental illnesses don't mean that someone is no longer capable of working. Some people benefit from changes at work to support their goals, but many people work with few supports from their employer. Most people who experience serious mental illnesses want to work but face systemic barriers to finding and keeping meaningful employment.

Myth: People with mental illnesses are violent and dangerous.

Fact: Some people try to predict violence so they know what to avoid. However, the causes of violence are complicated. Researchers agree that mental illnesses are not a good predictor of violence. In fact, if we look at mental illnesses on their own, people who experience a mental illness are no more violent than people without a mental illness. Excluding people from communities is linked to violence. And people with mental illnesses are often among those who are excluded. It's also important to note that people who experience mental illnesses are much more likely to be victims of violence than to be violent.



Tips, strategies, and brain nudgers to help us become more mindful of our thinking patterns and the way they shape our interpretation of events around us.

What is Distress Tolerance?

Many people "cope" with stress and crisis by choosing behaviours that provide relief, but at a great cost. Some of these ineffective behaviours might include alcohol and drug use, self-injury, gambling, spending money, and over-eating. As an alternative, we can learn and practice distress tolerance skills to manage stress and crisis in ways that better contribute to wellness.

Building Distress Tolerance

One of the things you can do to start building distress tolerance is to begin by making 2 lists. List one is your ineffective coping behaviours, and list two is your healthy coping behaviours (everyone has at least a few healthy coping behaviours). Your goal is to reduce the number of things on the first list while developing the behaviours on your second list.

Give it a try!

Adapted from 'The DBT Deck' by Lane Pederson

Community Highlight >>>

CMHA Grey Bruce Recovery College

Recovery College is a collection of educational courses that relate to mental health and addictions recovery for anyone wanting to learn. The courses are developed and facilitated by people who have lived experience with mental health and addiction. Recovery College is ideal for people who are looking to learn new skills, access recovery support and expand their "wellness toolbox."

Each semester, students can enroll in their choice of courses, and attend in person or virtually online. Students are not required to be clients of CMHAGB to participate. The Recovery College is based out of CMHA Grey Bruce's Owen Sound office; however, as interest grows, we hope to offer in person workshops throughout Grey and Bruce counties.

This Fall we are offering a variety of courses that include but aren't limited to: WRAP, boundaries and communication, overcoming stigma and barriers, mindfulness, goal setting, compassion fatigue, budgeting and conflict resolution. Anyone who is interested in taking a course can register any time throughout the semester.

Contact the Peer Support program at 519-361-1742 ext. 1229 to register for the Fall semester or get in touch for more information. And stay tuned to hear about our Winter semester course offerings!

Submitted by Michelle Parkes

Family Support Groups >>>

Family Support Groups are a great way to connect with a peer support worker and other families who know what it's like to support a loved one who lives with a mental illness.

Together we offer mutual encouragement, tips and strategies for coping with crises, and wellness tools so we can be healthy enough to provide the best support we can.



Women's Circle

Women supporting women in mental health and wellness

by Zoom Monday afternoons 2:00-3:30pm
email ehoughton@cmhagb.org to register



Riding the Wave

Family Peer support for parents supporting their adult children who are living with a mental health or addiction challenge.

by Zoom Friday mornings 10:00-11:30am
email dbenson@cmhagb.org to register



Turning the Page

An exciting new family support group - **Turning the Page!** Each month we will read a book and discuss weekly. Books may include topics like mental health memoirs, personal growth and wellness, understanding mental illness, relationships and communication, etc...
Start Date: November 2022.
First book: **I Thought it Was Just Me** by Brené Brown.
Contact Dana for more info or to register: dbenson@cmhagb.org

Autumn

WORD SEARCH

E	W	E	K	V	V	L	N	N	V	K	Y	G	N	H
L	S	O	L	C	H	E	S	T	N	U	T	R	A	R
D	L	D	R	D	I	F	B	B	J	V	O	R	S	V
N	Z	I	E	C	D	D	U	G	H	C	V	N	G	R
A	R	X	A	N	E	U	E	Z	A	E	B	C	T	A
C	G	C	T	E	T	R	P	R	S	C	A	R	F	K
R	E	T	A	E	W	S	A	T	N	Q	K	G	C	E
U	Z	C	B	W	Z	P	T	C	G	O	E	O	Q	L
H	B	O	Z	O	V	X	U	M	S	I	R	A	H	C
F	O	Z	K	L	H	M	A	M	P	N	V	K	D	I
N	N	S	G	L	D	C	N	E	P	S	F	J	G	C
S	F	K	V	A	K	X	L	Q	E	K	Q	N	B	E
C	I	F	D	H	P	P	E	F	N	M	I	N	H	G
U	R	E	W	E	P	D	B	S	N	X	V	N	K	T
P	E	W	J	A	W	I	M	D	S	T	Q	R	N	D

- ACORN
- BONFIRE
- CANDLE
- HALLOWEEN
- APPLE PIE
- CHESTNUT
- HARVEST
- SWEATER
- CORN
- RAKE
- SCARF
- PUMPKIN
- CIDER
- PUDDLE
- SCARECROW

Get Connected >>>

CMHA Grey Bruce Family Support
Dana Benson
dbenson@cmhagb.org
519-371-3642 ext 1200

Have an idea, poem, recipe to share? It is the vision of this newsletter to truly be about families supporting families. **My** voice isn't **your** voice!
Your voice matters!
If you have something you would like to contribute, PLEASE get in touch with Dana!

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Other Connections and Resources

CMHA Grey Bruce: Peer and Family Support, mental health counselling, addiction supports, housing and community outreach. 519-371-3642

<https://greybruce.cmha.ca/>

Recovery Colleges: Recovery Colleges offer a number of free courses, webinars, workshops, and events to help those living with mental illness and their supports gain new skills and connect with community. For a listing of recovery colleges and the programs they offer, check out: <https://cmha.ca/what-we-do/national-programs/recovery-colleges/>

Mental Health and the Law in Ontario: This is a helpful guide to how the Mental Health Act works in Ontario and what that means for you and your loved one. Click on the link, or Google Mental Health and the Law in Ontario.

[https://www.oha.com/Legislative%20and%20Legal%20Issues%20Documents1/OHA_Mental%20Health%20and%20the%20Law%20Toolkit%20-%20Revised%20\(2016\).pdf](https://www.oha.com/Legislative%20and%20Legal%20Issues%20Documents1/OHA_Mental%20Health%20and%20the%20Law%20Toolkit%20-%20Revised%20(2016).pdf)



Nodus Tollens

n. the realization that the plot of your life doesn't make sense to you anymore—that although you thought you were following the arc of the story, you keep finding yourself immersed in passages you don't understand, that don't even seem to belong in the same genre—which requires you to go back and reread the chapters you had originally skimmed to get to the good parts, only to learn that all along you were supposed to choose your own adventure.

From the *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*,
by John Koenig

