

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

SUPPORTING FAMILIES AS THEY CARE FOR A LOVED ONE LIVING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE



ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT

BY DANA BENSON

Way back when, I came across a poem (I think the poet was Milton Acorn) about what it means to be a Canadian. The imagery in my mind is now fragmentary and vague, but it had something to do with rowing



a rowboat: persistently trying to move forward while always facing backward. Over the years, this idea has occasionally resurfaced in my mind, and it surprisingly popped into my brain as I was thinking about content for this newsletter. The idea that it's hard to move forward if we are stuck in the past isn't new, but maybe the rowboat adds a new layer to the metaphor.



I wonder how many of us feel we live rowboat lives. The power of the forward motion comes from behind, but we can't really see where we are going. If we want to see where we are going, we can stop rowing for a bit and twist around to see what's up ahead. Then we turn backward again and try to finesse just the right amount of pull on the oars to steer us in the general direction of where we think we want to go. Throw in other boats out on the water, some current, waves, and wind and, well...

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Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Those of us who are supporting a loved one who lives with a mental health or addiction challenge often struggle with moving forward, especially when all our attention is constantly pulled backward – to the past, to the needs or wants of others, to expectations, and to lost hopes and dreams. Perhaps we catch a glimpse of where we really want to be, but that glimpse quickly fades as we turn our attention back to all of those other things that demand it. Eventually, we may find ourselves rowing aimlessly, with a kinked neck and fatigue settling into our bones, wondering what happened to the shore.

Looking backward can be helpful for learning and growth, but if all we can see is where we have been, we miss out on so much beauty in the landscape ahead of us. And we miss opportunities to navigate the rocks and current well and thoughtfully and instead we bump along, enduring the dents and scratches, and hope we don't spring a leak.

Maybe it's time to challenge that old rowboat metaphor.

Most of us have been told from childhood that we ought never to stand up in the boat. I have been paddling for decades, in every type of water, and I don't buy it. Maybe it's time to stop craning our necks around and stand up and turn around: place our feet, be mindful of our centre of balance, and up we go to see what we can see. If we are facing forward, we are in a much better position to face what comes our way AND to chart our own course.

Better yet, get out of the rowboat all together and get in a canoe. Canoes much more conducive to looking forward! Not that I'm partial to canoes or anything... 😊

Or hop on a bike, or go for a walk, or stand strong. Whatever metaphor you use, make sure it is one that helps you move forward, that doesn't twist up your neck and exhaust your arms and smother your hope.

I hope there are some ideas in this newsletter that give your legs strength and encourage your balance!



Taking Care of Others by Taking Care of Yourself

Submitted by Katelyn Avey (CMHAGB Addictions Counsellor)

Addiction is about many things but, often is a sign or symptom of distress. Your loved one does not engage in their addiction out of a desire to betray or hurt you but, to escape their own pain (Mate, 2008). One's vulnerability to addiction varies from individual to individual (Overdose Lifeline, 2020). Several biological and environmental factors contribute to the development of addictions (Overdose Lifeline, 2020).

Regardless of what your loved one (or anyone else) may have told you, someone else's addiction cannot be your fault (Meyers & Wolfe, 2004). Yes, your behaviours can have an influence on your loved one, but you did not cause them to cope by drinking or using (Meyers & Wolfe, 2004).

"Sometimes the most powerful way to help someone you love is by stepping back and taking care of yourself"
Meyers & Wolfe, 2004, pg. 83.

Repeat after me, I did not cause it, I cannot control it and I cannot cure my loved one's addiction. What I CAN do is take care of myself.

Believe it or not, you can help your loved one by improving the quality of your own life.

As your stress level decreases, you will be able to deal with your loved one in a calmer, less reactive manner, and your relationship will improve.
Meyers & Wolfe, 2004, pg. 3

Take time for you and time away from your loved one's problem. "Suffocating from worry, fear, anger, resentment, or stress will not help you help someone" (Garbett J. et al., (n.d.), pg. 42). "Spend time each week doing something that makes you feel good, relaxed, content, and soothed – something you want to do as opposed to something you think you should do" (Garbett J. et al., (n.d.), pg. 42).

Do not underestimate the impact self-care can have on improving relationships.

Start Taking Care of Yourself

List three things you want to do to feel good, relaxed, content, and soothed
When will you do this? How? Who or What Can Support You?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

References:

Garbett J., Lovett J., & Schultz D. (n.d.)
CRAFT Family Support Group Workbook.

Mate, G. (2008). In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction.
Vintage Canada

Meyers, R. J., & Wolfe B. L. (2004). Get Your Loved One Sober: Alternatives to Nagging, Pleading, and Threatening.
Hazelden Publishing.

Overdose Lifeline. (2020). The Brain and the Disease of Addiction Quick Reference Sheet.

WINTER Wellness

We all know that looking after ourselves during the winter months is tough. Shorter days, lack of sunlight, harsh weather, increased isolation, and post-holiday lack of motivation is par for the course. Add supporting a struggling family member and managing our own emotions and expectations on top of the average winter, and it can be extremely challenging to feel grounded, connected, and well-balanced. And even when we know that we need to look after ourselves, having yet another 'to do' list for our own wellness can seem like an insurmountable chore that we just don't have any more energy for. So, let's have some fun with it!



Beat the Winter Blues B I N G O

Grounding	Relaxation	Mindfulness	Moving	Connecting	Positivity
Find an example of each of your five senses	Practice deep breathing	Do a guided meditation from a link online	Walk – either inside (even in place) or outside	Each day call a different friend for a week	Engage in gratitude exercises that express what you're thankful for
Push your feet firmly into the ground	Count to 10	Practice naming skills and strengths in yourself	Practice yoga	Try a class or activity on Zoom	Each day say and/or write positive affirmations about yourself
Hold a cold ice cube for 10 seconds	Listen to music that makes you feel calm or happy	Write down three good things and three bad things in a situation	Tai Chi	Send a greeting card or letter to an old friend	Reframe your negative thoughts to positive thoughts
Pick a focal point and use descriptive words	Color or draw	Celebrate beauty in nature	Have a dance party with yourself or others	Make a list of people you appreciate from your past	Engage in acts of kindness
Touch something soft or warm to nurture your self	Puzzles/crosswords/word searches	Challenge yourself to name five details in an ordinary object	Participate in chair exercises	Drop off a small treat to the front porch of a loved one and include a handwritten note	Celebrate your Successes - big or small



Challenge

Complete a line in any direction, complete the whole card, work on a column - whatever works for you!

Don't like some of the suggestions - invent your own!

Your mental health will thank you!

**SELF CARE
IS A
PRIORITY
- AND
Necessity
NOT A
LUXURY**

Home Takeovers - Parents and Families

By Dana Benson



One of the many ways that families may be able to support a struggling loved one is to provide safe shelter while their loved one works toward wellness.



Inviting a family member to stay in one's home to 'help them get back on their feet', or to provide some financial or social support is often mutually beneficial. But sometimes the living arrangement can deteriorate into a home takeover situation and the consequences can be very serious. Some of these consequences may include loss of housing, criminal charges, financial cost, safety issues, loss of control of one's home, and various forms of abuse.

NOTE: Home takeovers can happen to anyone. For the purposes of this article, we will focus on the family context which may include parents, grandparents, other family members or close friends.

Helpful & Healthy Support or Home Takeover?

Parents, grandparents, and other family members understand that supporting a child who is struggling doesn't end when that child becomes an adult. Most family members are often willing to 'do whatever it takes' to help their loved one overcome their challenges and circumstances. In the family support context, parents and grandparents can sometimes offer their loved one support by providing a safe shelter and other daily necessities (food, laundry, transportation, etc.) so that their adult child can focus on accessing the other supports they need like seeing a doctor or counsellor, developing a wellness strategy to get back on their feet, finding employment, cultivating healthy social connections, and perhaps eventually independent housing.

Quite often, this situation, while challenging, proves to be beneficial for everyone, and a healthy pattern of support and wellness can develop.

Sometimes though, parents (and other family members) reach out to provide support for their adult children and the outcomes have tremendous negative impacts on their own well-being. The living situation can decline very quickly if there are patterns of elder-abuse (physical, emotional, financial), when people no longer feel safe in their own homes, when their adult child takes advantage of their generosity without taking responsibility or accountability for themselves, or when parents feel manipulated into doing what the child wants at the expense of their own wellness. And sometimes when the parent wants to regain a sense of wellness and safety in their own home, their child won't leave. In fact, the child often engages in all kinds of challenging behaviours in order to stay.

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Home Takeovers - Impact on Families

What makes this even more challenging for parents or other family members, is that alternative housing options for their loved ones are in very short supply and are extremely difficult to access, given the current housing crisis in Grey Bruce. And when the choices seem to be homelessness for their child or enduring abuse and overwhelming stress and anxiety for themselves, many parents quite understandably feel helplessly backed into a corner.

How does a home take over happen?

In a home takeover situation, the occupant of a home is coerced or threatened into allowing access to their home. This person then creates an untenable living situation for the original occupant and refuses to leave.

Perpetrators often target the most vulnerable in society which can include the elderly and/or older family members, someone who has a substance dependency, disability, mental health issues, women and single mothers.

"Targets may be exposed to threats, violence, coercion, abuse and exploitation, all of which are associated with serious mental and physical health impacts"

Home Takeover: A Response Framework for Organizations and Service Providers. Pilot Project, October 2022, Grey Bruce Public Health, pg. 8.

Older family members are particularly vulnerable because the perpetrator may use guilt and manipulation to leverage a family member's sense of duty to their family.



Home should be your safe place.

It's normal to invite friends, family or people you know into your home. A **home takeover** happens when you can't get them to leave and they start making you feel physically, financially or emotionally unsafe.

Protect Your Home

- Don't let too many people into your place at once.
- Don't let people break the law in your home.
- Stay connected with people you trust.
- Know the rules of your lease.

Take Action

Get help. Don't keep it a secret.

Talk to:

- Someone you trust
- Your support worker
- Your housing provider
- In an emergency, call 911



Not sure who to talk to? Call 211 or visit www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca

Home takeovers can leave family members feeling:

alone
isolated
angry
guilt
hopeless
abused
shame
powerless
frustrated
grief
victimized
threatened
disappointed
vulnerable
uncomfortable

Home Takeovers - What Can you Do?

Prevention

When inviting someone else to live in your home, even if it's a family member, these tips can help keep you safe and healthy:

- Establish & maintain your own wellness strategies (self-care, support systems, maintaining friendships and activities, etc.)
- Establish & communicate clear expectations for everyone living in the home (respectful communication, meals, laundry, transportation, financial support, overnight guests, privacy, mutual goals, etc.)
- Set boundaries about what attitudes and behaviours you are willing to live with and what you are not.
- Enact meaningful consequences when boundaries are violated.
- Avoid rescuing and/or enabling your loved one
- Encourage self-determination, choice, and responsibility.
- Take responsibility for what you can control. Remember that your loved one's choices are their responsibility, not yours.
- Know your rights and responsibilities

Think you might be in a home takeover situation? Now What???

If you are feeling unsafe, manipulated, pressured to lend money, or that you have lost control over your own home, you may be in a home takeover situation. You can reach out to the following supports for help:

- Call 911 anytime you are feeling unsafe
- Call 211 to find out what supports are available in your area
- Your landlord
- Grey Bruce Legal Clinic - 519-376-2200
- CMHA Grey Bruce - Housing Program, Family Support Program, Mental Health & Addiction Support - 519-371-3642

The risk of home takeover is real.
Home should be your *safe* place.
Learn more & get help with unsafe guests.

Safe Guests:

DO	DON'T
 Respect your house rules.	 Make you do things you don't want to do.
 Leave when you ask them to.	 Steal from you.
 Ask before using your stuff.	 Make you feel anxious or scared.
 Respect the rules of your lease.	 Threaten or hurt you.
 Obey the law while in your home.	 Make you feel like you have to let them stay.

Talk to someone you trust, your support worker, or your housing provider.
CALL 211, a free helpline 24/7 for information & support
Learn more: www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca

PUBLIC HEALTH GREY BRUCE

Self-Care & Wellness: Cultivating Optimism>>>



You're soaked with rain, loaded down with groceries and facing down a cold, muddy puddle, holey sneakers on your feet and your last pair of dry socks. I get it - jumping in is probably not the first thing on your mind. It's hard to get excited about a muddy puddle on a rainy day.

But to a child, that muddy puddle is a veritable playground of joy!

Sure, you say. But those puddle-jumping kids don't have bills to pay and others to support and stress and worry and a lifetime of challenge to weigh down their boots like I do. And you'd be right.

But cultivating optimism isn't about covering over the hardships of life, or under-estimating the weight of our challenges, or denying that sometimes life is really, really hard.

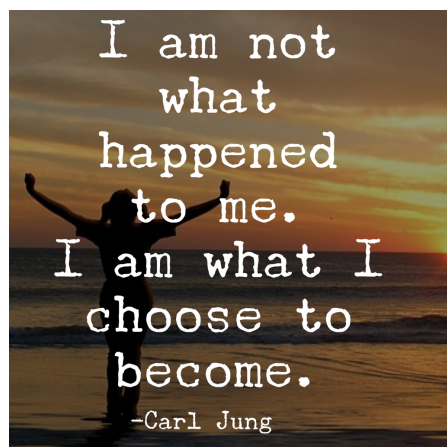
Cultivating optimism is about making a conscious choice to acknowledge whatever reality we are facing **and** choosing to highlight the good parts rather than emphasizing the unpleasant parts. It's about looking to the light rather than focusing on the darkness. It's about embracing the moment of unencumbered joy, however fleeting, rather than enumerating how many rocks are in your boots.

Countless studies have proven over and over that a joyful and hopeful attitude is one of the primary indicators of happiness and success. And optimistic people choose to find joyful and hopeful opportunities, even when faced with hardship and challenge.

optimism
noun [U]

/ˈɑːp.tə.mɪ.zəm/

the quality of being full of hope and emphasizing the good parts of a situation, or a belief that something good will happen:



So, what can you do to increase the optimism in your life?

- Practice Cognitive Restructuring - check out Cognitive Restructuring: Techniques and Examples ([healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com))
- Turn off the news
- Practice Gratitude - make it a daily habit
- Laugh more
- Take note of the company you keep
- Acknowledge what you can and cannot control

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, video, 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.



Mental Health and
Substance Use Support

Free resources for mental health and substance use support: education, connecting with others, access to counselling support, and wellness tools. [Click for more details.](#)



The Sashbear Foundation

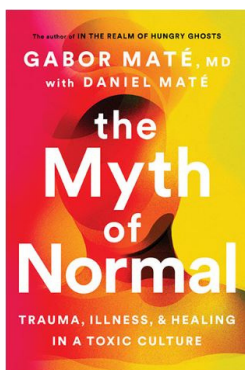
Making waves for mental health
and suicide prevention

From the website: The Sashbear Foundation is a charity recognized as a leading voice for Canadian families impacted by emotion dysregulation, suicidality, and related mental health challenges. Sashbear trains and empowers family members to share life-transforming skills, building community and hope through evidence-based family programs, advocacy, and education.

Sashbear is working towards a Canada where all families have:

- access to affordable and timely skills and support,
- opportunities to regain balance in their lives,
- strategies and skills to provide effective support to their struggling loved ones
- confidence to speak out about families' experiences and advocate for their needs.

[Click for more info.](#)



From the book jacket: From our most trusted and compassionate authority on stress, trauma, and mental well-being - a groundbreaking investigation into the cause of illness, a bracing critique of how our society breeds disease, and a pathway to health and healing.

... In the Myth of Normal, co-written with his son Daniel, Maté brings his perspective to the great untangling of common myths about what makes us sick, connects the dots between the maladies of individuals and the declining soundness of society, and offers a compassionate guide for health and healing.

Community Highlight >>>

Youth Awareness and Education @ CMHA Grey Bruce

Submitted by Liam Nicoll (Youth Awareness Coordinator)

My name is Liam and I am a Youth Awareness Coordinator with Youth Awareness and Education at CMHA Grey Bruce. Our team (Jackie, Jenna, Sarah, and myself) is small but mighty in what we do and accomplish. Our programs work with young children all the way up through high school, giving presentations on mental health literacy and wellness strategies.



Understanding feelings and how they go together with thoughts and behaviours are important concepts for children and youth as well as for adults. In our work with the Youth Awareness Program, we often hear adults say, “I wish this was around when I/my kids were in school”. This acknowledgment demonstrates how important it is to teach mental health literacy early so that awareness and skills can be developed all the way into adulthood.

If we are able to learn and develop healthy coping tools when we are young, we can take that solid grounding forward as we handle adversity in the future.

Mental Health skills are really about how we think and cope with the situations we find ourselves in.

We all have good days and bad days, and sometimes life just seems hard – for adults and for kids. Learning how to talk about our mental health, support one another, and develop healthy coping strategies can go a long way as we grow through life with purpose and resilience.

Our Programs



The Friends and Neighbours (FAN) Club (ages 4-11) uses hand puppets (based on the Japanese bunraku genre) to tackle topics such as self-esteem, bullying, anger, divorce, ADHD, peer pressure, and secrets.

The Let's Talk program works with kids in Grades 6-8, and covers issues such as mental health vs mental illness, coping and stress, lifestyle and overall health, relationships, goal setting, and media and internet safety. Instead of puppets, the program uses presentations along with discussions and activities.



Community Highlight >>>

Youth Awareness and Education @ CMHA Grey Bruce

The Talk Today program draws together mental health and sports. CMHA Grey Bruce, the Ontario Hockey League, and the Owen Sound Attack work together to offer school-wide presentations throughout Grey Bruce. Owen Sound Attack players talk about how they take care of their mental and physical health as well as how they support teammates who may be struggling. The presentation concludes with a ball hockey game between the Attack players and the students!!



In the 2021-2022 school year, Youth Awareness saw an average of approximately 2000 recurring students each month. In the summers you can see the puppets attending daycares, youth camps, libraries, and other community events. We also do community outreach at fairs and festivals. You can even find us promoting our programs and engaging with the community at the Keady Market.

Our amazing team is spearheaded by **THE** Jackie Ralph, who has been collaborating, advocating, and inspiring all thing related to youth and mental health in Grey Bruce for years! Her work, along with the generous support (all of our programs are funded through fundraising and donations) and partnerships from the community ensure that youth in Grey Bruce are encouraged as they navigate their own mental health and support their peers.

Interested in what we do? We would love to hear from you. We are always looking for helpers and feedback to make our programs the best they can be for the future generations of our community.

Please get in touch by emailing me (Liam: Inicoll@cmhagb.org) or calling us at 519-371-3642. You can also check out our social media pages on Facebook (@FanClubGB) and Instagram (fanclubgreybruce & letstalkgb)

Cheers!!!



LOOK WHERE WE'VE BEEN!

We are so delighted to connect with youth all from over Grey Bruce

Get Connected With Family Support >>>

CMHA Grey Bruce offers Family Support on an individual basis and in groups. 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.



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

CMHA Grey Bruce Family Support

Dana Benson
dbenson@cmhagb.org
519-371-3642 ext 1200

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)



Have an idea, poem, book report, resource 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!