

# MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION GUIDELINES

## For Frontline Workers at Agencies Serving Immigrants and Refugees in Ontario

*The following is adapted from CAMH's Best practice guidelines for mental health promotion programs: refugees, with input from Toronto Public Health and OCASI*

### FRONT LINE WORKERS SHOULD

- Be empathetic
- Maintain client confidentiality and ensure informed consent
- Create a safe space for clients to speak about their experiences
- Reassure the client
- Listen non-judgementally
- Respect client choices and preferences
- Recognize the limitations of their roles
- Respect and build on the values, preferences, beliefs, cultures and identities of the client
- Ask one question or make one request at a time. Keep the conversation simple
- Use open-ended questions where possible, e.g. "how are you feeling today?"
- Be sensitive to the possibility that a client has experienced a traumatic event
- Be aware of possible triggers and the potential for re-traumatization

### FRONT LINE WORKERS SHOULD NOT

- Encourage trauma disclosure unless they have the professional training and resources to address it
- Force the client to disclose information the client does not wish to discuss
- Make assumptions or generalizations about the client's beliefs, behaviour, or circumstances
- Bring up potentially triggering or graphic situations or material with a client
- Provide clients with a diagnosis or label clients. Only a health professional can make a diagnosis



# MENTAL HEALTH TIP SHEET

## FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

1

### **Assess Client's Current Situation:**

- Together with the client, identify and prioritize their needs (consider physical, social, mental health needs)
- Determine the existing supports in the client's life (e.g. family, friends, community etc.)

2

### **Enhance Protective Factors:**

- Explore with the client ideas, people, coping strategies, supports they may find helpful
- In collaboration with the client co-develop a plan to enhance the protective factors and supports in their life. This could include addressing social determinants of health (e.g. referrals to housing, employment, income, health, and social supports)

3

### **Reduce Risk Factors:**

- Explore with the client major challenges and concerns that are having a negative impact
- In collaboration with the client co-develop a plan to reduce the impacts of risk factors (e.g. address access barriers, reduce social isolation, advocate on behalf of the client.)

4

### **Assess Mental Health Support Needs:**

- Front line workers can ask the following questions when clients identify that they are experiencing mental health challenges:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| - How are you doing right now?                                | - Would you like me to connect you to additional or more                 |
| - What are the things that you think would be helpful to you? | specialized supports (e.g. family doctor, community support worker, etc) |
| - Have you felt like this before?                             | - Who would you like us to call if you experience mental distress?       |
| - What has helped you when you felt like this in the past?    | - What supports do you currently have to help you with this situation?   |

5

### **Conduct A Risk Assessment:**

These are some questions front-line workers can ask to determine if clients are experiencing mental distress or if they are at risk of harming themselves or others:

- Are you able to complete daily tasks that you are accustomed to completing?
- Are you planning on using physical violence against yourself or others?
- Have you had thoughts of killing yourself?
- Do you have a suicide plan?
- Do you have access to the means to carry out your suicide plan?
- What can we do to ensure your safety? Let's develop a safety plan that you can follow.

6

### **Intervene in a Mental Health Crisis Situation:**

- Keep the client safe
- Refer to internal Crisis Intervention Support Worker, if you have one onsite
- Call a mental health distress line (can offer to call with client)
- Contact the client's family/friends or other supports (if possible)
- Refer to a medical doctor (note: a medical doctor can also refer to psychiatrist)