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Health/Education

## **Mental help**

Book, website aims for high school students

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The Newfoundland and Labrador division of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) doesn't have firm statistics on how many local youth are affected by mental illness, but executive director Geoff Chaulk says judging from the requests for information and support the local resource centre handles, it's certainly an issue.

Nationally, it's estimated that between 10 and 20 per cent of youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder - the single most disabling group of disorders worldwide.

And the CMHA says a staggering 3.2 million 12-to-19-year-olds in Canada are at risk of developing depression.

To help raise awareness and educate students, parents and high school staff about dealing with mental-health problems, the CMHA has released Mental Health and High School - a new publication and website that provides tips on recognizing signs and symptoms, and information on learning how to cope and knowing when and where to get help.

Chaulk said surveys indicate people in the 15-24 age group tend to identify the biggest stress in their lives over the past five years. It's also known, said Chaulk, that stress that's not dealt with can lead to further emotional problems.

"There's a lot on the plates of teenagers these years, you know - it's a very demanding world, and a lot of pressure and stress that they're required to try and deal with," said Chaulk.

Bonnie Pape, the CMHA's national director of programs and research, says it's critical that high school students, as well as parents and teachers, understand mental-health issues

and how to address them.

"High school can be a difficult time for anyone, and dealing with a mental illness or other mental-health problems makes it that much more challenging," said Pape. "But getting the right kind of help at the right time can make all the difference."

Pape said the CMHA material will help ensure that students experiencing mental-health problems recognize the signs, get help at an early stage, and go on to have a successful high school experience.

Mental Health and High School is also aimed at helping students living with mental illness or other mental-health problems with the transition to post-secondary education.

Chaulk said the resource will be promoted to youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"There's certainly been a lot of interest as an organization in terms of youth, and one of the other areas that we've partnered with nationally here in the province is early psychosis intervention," Chaulk said.

"We're just in the process now of developing e-mail discussion, a listserv-type site for people who've participated in the education sessions across the province on early psychosis. So, for our division, one of our strategic directions is a focus on youth."

Dr. Stan Kutcher, professor of psychiatry and associate dean of international medicine at Dalhousie University, estimates that mental illness affects 10 to 12 per cent of Canadian youth.

"We've known for some time that mental disorders have a serious impact on our young people, with the onset of many of these illnesses occurring in the teenage years," he said.

"We are hopeful this important resource will contribute to earlier detection and intervention and, ultimately, ease the burden of these illnesses on our youth."

Phil Hedges, executive director of the Ontario School Counsellors Association, who was involved in the development of the CMHA resource, said the project makes sense given the tremendous increase in mental-health issues among youth.

The project was funded by Human Resources Development Canada.

The handbook will be distributed to all secondary schools in Canada and is also available free of charge by contacting the CMHA at 416-484-7750 or by visiting [www.cmha.ca/highschool](http://www.cmha.ca/highschool).

The Newfoundland and Labrador division of the CMHA can be reached by calling toll-free 866-509-3937 or, in St. John's, 753-8550.

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