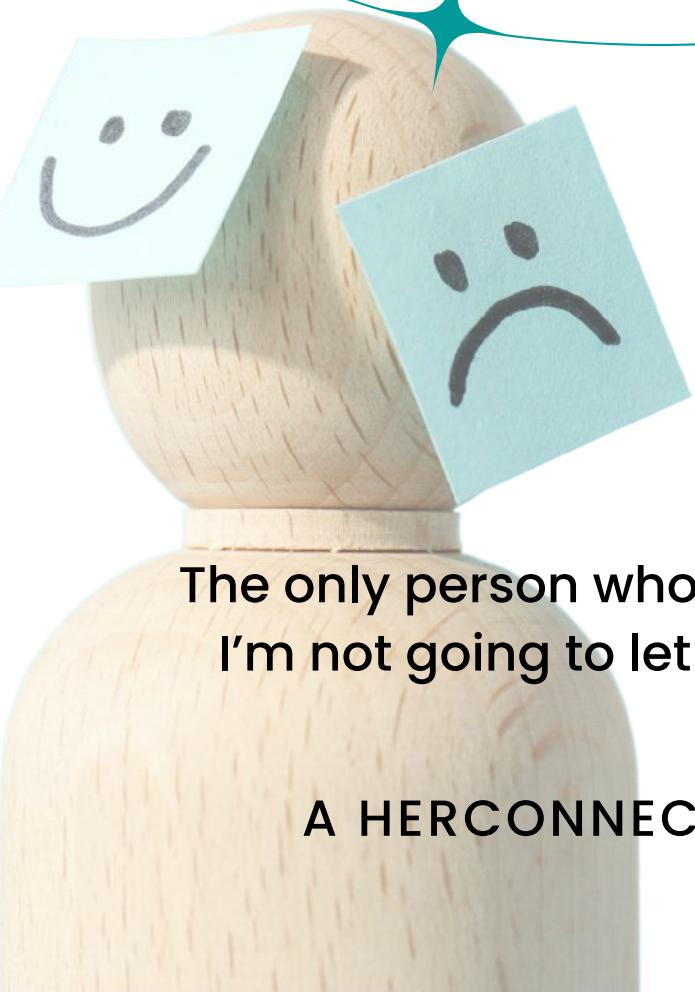




NAVIGATING NEW HORIZONS



A Mental Health Resource Guide for Black Newcomers and Immigrants to Calgary



The only person who can pull me down is myself, and I'm not going to let myself pull me down anymore.

A HERCONNECT INITIATIVE



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Introduction



HERConnect

HERConnect is a joint initiative dedicated to transforming mental health care for newcomer and immigrant Black women and girls who have recently made Calgary and Canada their home.

HERConnect is a promise to provide culturally sensitive, community-based social supports including mental health services, filling critical gaps and catering to the unique needs of these women and girls.

This visionary endeavor is brought to you by the Ladies in the Family Foundation (LIFF), in partnership with Health Research Partners (HRP) and Alberta Black Therapists Network (ABTN), with the generous funding and support of the City of Calgary's Community Safety Investment Framework (CSIF).

Join us in this exciting journey with HERConnect, where inclusivity meets innovation in mental health care.



Purpose of this guide

This workbook is uniquely designed to help you as a community member to:

- (i) understand mental health, recognize the signs and intervene when you see someone struggling with their mental health and, offer them information on how and where to get help immediately;
- (ii) Appreciate the importance of self-care, advocacy, and ongoing engagement in your own mental health journey.

We hope that with this information, we can eliminate the stigma associated with mental health, get people to talk more about it in a positive light and increase knowledge of the professional services and resources available in our communities.

- 1 in 3 Canadians experience mental health issues (MHCC)
- 65.87% of black Canadians suffer from depressive symptoms, 6 times higher than the general population (CMHA, 2023)
- 35.4% Black Canadians experienced psychological distress but 34.2% never sought mental health services (MHCC, 2021)
- 25% of black Canadians with poor or fair mental health are less likely to seek treatment (CMHA 2023)



Understanding mental health

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health is a state of overall well-being where you feel good about yourself, can manage your feelings and cope with everyday stresses.

It is about your psychological, emotional and social health.

This means having the ability to:

- create positive relationships with others
- Experience and manage your emotions
- Engage in and enjoy life
- Adapt to or bounce back after difficult situations
- Make positive decisions and choices



Having good mental health does not mean being happy all the time or never experiencing negative emotions like sadness or anger. It's normal to go through a wide range of emotions, and experiencing challenges is a part of life.

However, taking care of our mental health helps us navigate these experiences, recover from setbacks, and participate in society.

EVERY ONE HAS MENTAL HEALTH

Just like physical health, mental health needs attention and care. Mental health issues can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, background, or social status.

Seeking help and talking about mental health is a sign of strength, not weakness (American Psychiatric Association, 2020).



Can you recognize these signs and symptoms

Emotional

- Feelings of sadness
- Anxiety
- Irritability, or mood swings
- Disruption in regular functioning



Behavioral

- Withdrawal from social activities
- Decline in performance at work or school
- Substance abuse and addictions



Physical

- Unexplained aches and pains
- Loss of appetite or over eating
- Disturbed sleep patterns
- Poor hygiene



Cognitive Symptoms:

- Difficulty concentrating
- Constant worrying
- Negative thoughts

How to talk to someone struggling with their mental health



- Describe to them what you notice eg change in behaviour. For example, "I notice that you are (fill in the behaviour)"
- Let them know that you care about them. Use a calm tone.
- Listen actively to what they have to say and do not interrupt.
- Do not try to explain away their problem because you may not understand what they are going through.
- Validate their feelings or explanation and ask them how you can be of help.
- Ask them what has worked for them in the past when experiencing a similar situation.
- Find out if they have any family or community supports and encourage them to reach out to those supports.
- Ask them if they are open to talking to a therapist and if they are, call **HERconnect at 587.893.9355 to get** them connected to a therapist.
- Check in with yourself and practice self care. The conversation may have been triggering for you as well.
- Dont forget to follow up with the individual if you, yourself are fit to do so or refer them to appropriate support/resources available on our website



Finding the right mental health professional

SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF BEFORE CONNECTING TO A PROFESSIONAL

- Do you want a professional with the same gender, cultural or religious background as you?
- Do you want someone who speaks a specific language?
- Are you looking for support for yourself or for someone else? Do you have their consent?
- Do you want in-person or virtual / online sessions?
- What time can you be available for your sessions? Morning? Afternoon? Evening?
- What modalities or methods do you prefer?
- Do you have insurance to pay for your sessions?
- Are there free sessions that you could access? (HERconnect provides free virtual and in person sessions. Call 587 8939 355 to book a session.

Accessing mental health services

A photograph of a person from the side and slightly from behind, sitting outdoors. They are wearing a dark jacket and have their head in their hands, looking distressed. The background is a sunset with a clear blue sky and some clouds. The lighting is warm and golden.

Seek help when symptoms persist, worsen, or interfere with your daily life or routine

Preparing for your first appointment

1. Have a list of any signs and symptoms that are interfering with your daily life and routines.
2. Be open to shopping around to make sure you get a professional who is the right fit for you
3. Check with your insurance and find out if they can cover the costs
4. If it is a free session, confirm that as well.
5. Make sure you have the date and time confirmed so you are not late or miss your appointment. You may have to pay for a missed appointment!
6. Have a list of questions for the professional. Dont be afraid to ask to make sure they are right for you!
7. Ask the professional if there is anything you need to do or bring for your appointment.
8. If virtual, make sure you have steady internet and a private, quiet space
9. If in person, arrive early to avoid missing your appointment.
10. Relax. Breathe. Therapists are human just like you!



Staying engaged in treatment

- Recognize that taking care of your mental health is a journey
- Just like going to the gym, you may not experience results immediately but trust the process
- At times it may feel worse before it gets better
- Discuss any uncomfortable experiences with your therapist before termination
- The relationship you have with your therapist is key
- If and when it doesn't feel right-you explore page (#8) to find another provider



Mental well-being and self care strategies

Engaging in regular physical exercise can help manage stress levels. Walking, cycling, or community sports can be both physically beneficial and are opportunities for social interaction. Get access to a recreation facility.



Building a support system of family, friends, community groups, or professional networks.

Mindfulness, prayer and relaxation practices can help manage stress, anxiety, and depression.



Mental well-being and self care strategies



- Eat a balanced diet and healthy snacks.
- Get adequate sleep.
- Prioritize rest. Take breaks.
- Drink lots of water.

- Incorporate music and dance into your life
- Set healthy boundaries with yourself and others.



- Learn a new hobby or sport
- Join a club or choir
- Connect with a religious community



Mental well-being and self care strategies

Engage in community events or join groups with similar interests can help in forming new relationships.



Online forums and social media platforms specific to immigrant communities can also be a great way to connect with others



Ask questions and be aware of cultural nuances in communication. Language classes, conversation clubs, or language exchange programs can be beneficial.



Self care ideas for life balance

1. Take a random day off. Have a day off without any planning or purpose. Just to be off from work.
2. Plan for a weekend holiday. Go for a short trip with friends or family. Escape from the routine.
3. Be on time for work or appointments. Avoid being in a rush.
4. Leave work on time.
5. Eat lunch away from your office or work place. Take a little walk. Breathe some fresh air.
6. Talk to someone about something other than work.
7. Turn off work-related email notification when at home. Be present with your family or friends.
8. If you work from home, separate work from personal or family time. When off, be off as much as possible.
9. Dress up in clothes that make you happy. Boost your happiness by a neat and refreshing appearance.
10. Eat healthy food. Supply energy to your body.
11. Listen to soft music. Relieve your stress with a soft background music.
12. Try to go to bed at the same time and wake up same time every day. Try to get at least 8 hrs of sleep.
13. Share responsibilities at home so you are not all burnt out.
14. Practice mindfulness. Engage in exercises.
15. Set healthy boundaries. Its okay to say "No."



We hope this small but packed booklet provides you with simple tools to support you with supporting others who are struggling with their mental health, and acts as a resource to take care of your own mental health.



Remember we all have mental health!

We just need to take good care of it!

For mental health supports please call our emergency line at 587 893 9355 or visit our website www.herconnects.ca to connect to a mental health therapist.

If you or someone you know is at risk of hurting themselves or others, please call 911 or the mental health distress line 211 or suicide crisis help-line 988

