

# Understanding Mental Health Literacy

This video series was produced from the Autism Mental Health Literacy Guide by the Autism Mental Health Literacy Project (AM-HeLP) Group.

This video is one of six in the series about different aspects of autism mental health literacy. For this video, we will talk about: “Understanding Mental Health Literacy”

Mental health literacy means finding and applying information about mental health in real-world situations.

Why is this important to you?

Understanding your own mental health can help you experience well-being, manage stresses, and find help when it is needed.

Let's explore what we mean when we say Mental Health Literacy

## Mental health knowledge

Understanding the different ways people can feel and interact with the world. When is someone feeling bad and why? When is someone feeling good and why? There are many things we can learn to understand positive and negative mental health states.

## Reducing stigma

Reducing stigma means not judging others or thinking less of them when they experience mental health difficulties.

They deserve respect, support, and acceptance just like everybody else.

## Improving attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs

Being open to talking about mental health with others.

Learning about different ways that we can support our own mental health and that of others.

## Seeking help in the right place and time

Knowing when to get help, for example, when you are in a crisis.

Knowing where and how to get help. Where can you find a peer, a counsellor, or a specialist to talk to?

Knowing what good care looks like. Are the people helping you doing a good job?

Now let's take a look at Mental Health Literacy with an Autistic lens. What is especially important to the Autistic community when it comes to Mental health Literacy?

## Here are five topics important to Autistic Mental Health:

### Being heard

Autistic people often report not being consulted or listened to when it comes to their own lived experiences. Mental health difficulties can arise if you feel like your voice is not being heard.

Making sure Autistic voices are heard leads to greater understanding and acceptance of Autism in society. It also helps improve Autistic mental health.

### Getting help from service providers

As an Autistic person looking for help, you may be trying to explain what you need, but feeling like your service provider is not getting it.

Healthcare providers often lack the training to understand the different ways in which Autistic people can communicate about their mental health needs and experiences.

Mental health literacy teaches healthcare providers to listen to you and help you get the supports you need.

### Getting access to resources

Everyone deserves support and it can be hard to access when you need it most. This is particularly true if there are few Autistic-friendly resources, or if you don't know where to go to access them.

Mental health literacy means learning about how to access the right kinds of support at the right time.

## Decreasing stigma, increasing acceptance

Society can have wrong ideas about Autistic people and what Autistic people are expected to do. This is called “stigma” and it can lead to exclusion and discrimination.

Autistic people can be stigmatized because they may behave, communicate, or understand the world differently from non-Autistic people.

Mental health literacy means being able to de-stigmatize these behaviours, increase understanding, and promote acceptance of differences.

## Understanding self-stigma and internalized ableism

Over time, Autistic people can develop negative feelings about being Autistic, and this can hurt their mental health.

This is sometimes called “internalized ableism” or “self-stigma.” An Autistic person can end up believing they are less than, or “inferior” to others just because they are Autistic.

Feeling inferior can make you feel unworthy, isolated, and alone.

**Testimonial** – “Autistic adults can often feel that we’re “bad people,” or failures, or that we are always wrong, and that those who are not Autistic are always right in what they do or say. This is because we have internalized that our behaviour is wrong or incorrect.”  
– Elsbeth Dodman, Adviser

Sharing your experiences and hearing about the experiences of others can help reduce the negative effects of “self-stigma.” Mental health literacy can help you find inclusive spaces, connect to a supportive Autistic community, and increase your sense of belonging.

Knowing more, helps more.

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More information can be found in **Section 1** of the Mental Health Literacy Guide for Autism.

To learn more about AM-HeLP and to read the Mental Health Literacy Guide for Autism visit: <https://www.yorku.ca/health/lab/ddmh/am-help/>

Watch the animated video: <https://youtu.be/t9nddiRAQEU>

## Credits

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