



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

**HEADSTRONG**



# Training your Speakers

**TOOLKIT FOR TRAINING SPEAKERS**



**BE BRAVE  
REACH OUT  
SPEAK UP**

## **ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT**

Well trained speakers are central to all successful headstrong events. Opening Minds research supports that HEADSTRONG-trained speaker stories generate improvements in a student's attitudes and behaviour towards those living with a mental illness. With this toolkit, you will have information and a process whereby you can train and support courageous people to tell their stories of hope and recovery. You may also be training family members or caregivers to tell their stories, both of whom can play a valuable role in a youth anti-stigma program. All stories will empower youth to take action in their schools in order to further build communities of health, wellness, acceptance and inclusion.

This toolkit should be used in conjunction with:  
[SHARING YOUR PERSONAL STORY | SPEAKER TOOLKIT](#)

## **ABOUT OPENING MINDS**

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) was established by Health Canada in 2007 with a 10-year mandate to act as a catalyst for improving mental health systems and reducing the stigma associated with mental illness. The MHCC launched Opening Minds in 2009 to tackle the stigma problem head-on.

Seven million Canadians will experience a mental health problem or a mental illness this year. This means that most of us will know someone who has experienced a mental health problem, yet there still exists the troubling and frustrating stigma related to mental illness. Many describe stigma as more life-limiting and disabling than the illness itself, and stigma is also a major barrier to people seeking help.

In 2001, the World Health Organization declared stigma as the "single most important barrier to overcome." Over the last five years, Opening Minds has become the largest systematic effort in Canadian history focused on reducing stigma related to mental health problems or mental illnesses, and the only anti-stigma initiative in the world with such a broad base of academic support. Following five years of extensive research, Canada is now considered a world leader in stigma research. The launch of the Youth Anti-Stigma Initiative signals a shift from the research phase to the roll out of evidence-based, anti-stigma programs to schools and communities across the country.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit is based on the work of many, including: Dr. Heather Stuart, Queen's University, who served as the Principal Investigator for Opening Minds research into youth anti-stigma projects in Canada, and the Durham Talking About Mental Illness Coalition (TAMI) that created a summit program upon which HEADSTRONG is modeled. We are grateful that the Durham TAMI Coalition as well as their school board partners have allowed us to share their work with the rest of Canada. Opening Minds and HEADSTRONG are also grateful to people with lived experience of mental health problems and mental illnesses who willingly share their stories of hope and recovery.

They also acknowledge the work of the following communities and their local organizations and partners who have helped deliver HEADSTRONG SUMMITS:

St. John's NL	Cornwall ON	Calgary AB
Halifax NS	Toronto ON	Edmonton AB
Pictou County NS	Peel Region ON	Stony Plain AB
Cape Breton NS	Hamilton ON	Lethbridge AB
Antigonish NS	Sudbury ON	Taber AB
Montreal QC	York Region ON	Vancouver BC
Quebec City QC	Winnipeg MB	Victoria BC
Dolbeau-Mistassini QC	Thompson MB	Yellowknife NWT
Ottawa ON	Brandon MB	

We look forward to adding new community names all across Canada to this list.

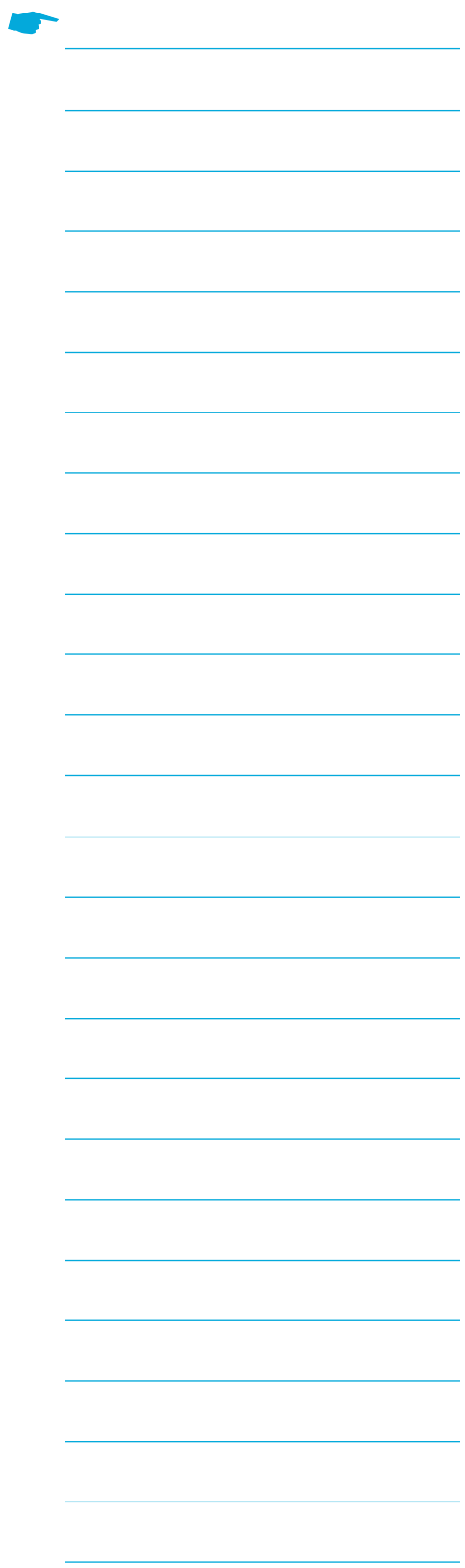


# Table of Contents

What is Stigma? .....	2
Why Anti-Stigma for Young People? .....	2
The Role of Speakers with Lived Experience .....	3
Your Role as a speaker trainer .....	4
Speaker Recruitment .....	5
The Training Process .....	6
Key Items to Include .....	8
Delivering Speaker Training in Groups .....	9
Giving Helpful Feedback .....	10
Appendices .....	11

# What is Stigma?

Stigma is the result of negative and prejudicial attitudes and behaviours that are expressed by people to those living with a mental health problem or a mental illness. Stigma is destructive. It leaves a mark of shame that makes people feel different and socially excluded. It is a major barrier to recovery. Among youth, the stigma often associated with mental health problems or mental illnesses can lead to teasing and bullying and, in extreme cases, catastrophic outcomes including suicide. Having a positive experience with people who have recovered, or who are in the process of recovery, from a mental health problem or mental illness can help change negative perceptions and stereotypes.



# Why Anti-Stigma

## FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

70% of adults living with a mental health problem or mental illness state that the first onset of their symptoms began when they were teenagers. If not identified and managed early, youth-onset mental health struggles can make it hard to succeed in school and have a significant impact on post-secondary dreams and aspirations.

- The fear of stigma often delays diagnosis and treatment, yet early intervention can make a dramatic difference in quality of life.
- Unfortunately, only one in four kids and teens in Canada who need mental health treatment can get it. (CMHA, 2017)
- 40% of parents say they would not admit to anyone, not even their doctor, that they had a child with a mental health problem or mental illness.

On the positive side, it is during this crucial developmental period that foundations can be laid for adult attitudes and beliefs which, if positive, could prevent stigmatizing behaviour in the future.

# The Role of Speakers

## WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

Successful anti-stigma programs centre on speakers with lived experience with mental illness who tell their personal stories of hope and recovery. Research shows that when young people hear positive personal stories of hope and recovery, it breaks down barriers about mental illness and can change attitudes and behaviours. This is known as contact-based education and research has shown it to be a very powerful model of learning. These speakers should have recovered from or are managing a mental health problem or mental illness.

Speakers play a 'speaker teaching' role. Through positive contact, students acquire accurate knowledge and reduce their anxiety about meeting and socializing with someone with a mental health problem or mental illness. The personal contact also increases students' empathy.

Research by Opening Minds found that contact-based education is one of the most promising approaches to reduce stigma associated with mental health problems and mental illnesses. The critical ingredients of change include:

- A speaker being able to connect with students.
- Sharing their positive story of recovery.
- Engaging students in an open dialogue after the formal presentation.

The critical aspect is students having a positive experience with people with lived experience of a mental health problem or a mental illness. A negative experience can reinforce negative stereotypes if a speaker highlights disorganized behaviours, symptoms, or poor social outcomes. This underlines the need to ensure speakers are well trained.



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# Your Role

## AS A SPEAKER TRAINER

### WHAT WE LEARN FROM TAMI

The Durham Talking About Mental Illness Coalition (TAMI) has held 15 high school summits, eight intermediate grade summits, and consulted on dozens in other areas of the country. TAMI has been using speakers with lived experience in both summits and classroom-based presentations since it was formed in 2002, and through their experiences we have learned the following:

- The key to success of a contact-based education program is the proper training, support, and ongoing recognition of the speaker group.
- Don't rush the process. Make sure that each person who came forward to share their stories followed the same processes for storytelling.
- Individuals reach milestones at different times and the training process is designed to complement their differences.
- The group being trained hears the consistent message that their contribution is the most important piece of the program.
- Speakers are teachers. The process they participate in to become a "speaker teacher" is respectful, caring, and flexible.
- The health of speakers is a priority and they will not be asked to speak in front of a group until they are comfortable and ready to take on this new challenge.
- Speakers know that the lines of communication are always open between themselves and the speaker trainer.
- The training process needs to create a sense of trust between you and the speakers in your youth anti-stigma program.
- TAMI speakers have openly stated that the training process and the welcome they receive from students and school staff has had a tremendous impact on their own recovery journey.
- It is important that someone from your organization who is familiar with this training model is present to support the speaker when he or she is making a presentation.



### CONTACT-BASED EDUCATION

When youth have the opportunity to interact with a speaker – a person with lived experience of a mental health problem or mental illness who has received support and training in order to share their recovery journey with youth – and to ask questions, they begin to see the person rather than simply their mental health problem or mental illness. It is an important and crucial step in successful, effective youth anti-stigma programs towards the reduction of stigmatizing attitudes and behaviours among young people.

# Speaker Recruitment

Contact-based education is at the core of mental health education and the battle to end stigma. Speakers who are properly trained, supported, and consistently recognized for the strength they demonstrate each time they speak to a group, they will want to continue to the best of their ability to remain a part of your team.

If you have an existing speaker base, you may want to share the Speaker Toolkit with them to see if any of the information contained in it proves to help edit and/or shape their stories of hope and recovery.

If this is your first venture into the contact-based model of mental health education, there are a number of ways to attract the interest of potential speakers. In some communities, the participating organizations designed a speaker recruitment flyer (see **Appendix A**) that had information on the program, the speaker's role, and the contact information of the speaker trainer. Community Organizations may also have their own networks of individuals who are living with and managing their mental health problem or mental illness. Speakers also have their own network and in some cases, a trained speaker on your team will refer a colleague to also take the steps necessary to participate the project.

Regardless of how you attract the attention of potential speakers, each community will have a person (coordinator) who is the key point of contact.

In your role as speaker trainer, you will want to know some key findings and insights shared by other areas of the country. For example, **Appendix B** includes sample speaker application forms.

Your first contact with a potential speaker may be via email or phone. Either way, this connection is the beginning of a working relationship where honesty, support, and trust are key ingredients. From the beginning, your potential speaker needs to know that as speaker trainer, you will teach the speaker the skills needed to be a very well-received speaker; however, you are not that speaker's case manager or individual therapist. You will provide support as the speaker crafts his or her story, practice the story, and presents it to the program organizers. You will take in the recommendations of the organizers to assist your speaker with any edits to their draft. Each of your speakers need to know that, when they have completed the process, you will be the person who will schedule them and support them at speaking presentations.

## VOLUNTEER RETENTION

Once you have your group of speakers trained, it's important to plan retention strategies, including recognition. Providing an honorarium, covering travel costs, presenting awards, and bringing speakers together for social events shows your speakers that you appreciate them and their contributions to your program.



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# The Training Process




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If your program is at the stage where you have more than one speaker in the training process, it is an excellent opportunity to form a small training group. This can provide valuable peer support.

**1. Initial contact:**

You will receive a call and/or email from someone indicating that they want to become a speaker. This may be the beginning of a long-term relationship, or someone wanting information on the process. Take your time welcoming the potential speaker and sharing that in most circumstances, it may take two to three months or more before most speakers are ready to speak in front of an audience. Let the individual know that you see them as potential teachers, therefore, it is important not to rush through the process.

**2. Introductory Meeting:**

The first meeting will help the potential speaker better understand their role as a speaker and the training process. You can use the Speaker Application (**Appendix B**) as a guideline to start the conversation of having the potential speaker potentially join a very welcoming, supportive community group.

**3. Ask the potential speaker to complete a Speaker Application to complete and advise that when it is returned to you, it will then go forward to your program organizers will review it once it's submitted.**

**4. Once Approved:**

When the application has been reviewed and approved, contact your speaker and ask them to begin to write their story. It is at this point that you should give the speaker *Sharing Your Personal Story - A Speaker Toolkit*.

Walk them through the toolkit with a particular emphasis on the section *I want to share my story. What do I do next?* (page 5) and the section *Getting to Work on Story Creation* (page 6).

- a. Ask the speaker to connect with you when the first draft is ready.
- b. The speaker may send it to you electronically prior to your next in-person meeting for you to make edits/comments.
- c. Invite the speaker to a First Story meeting to discuss the draft story and offer any feedback.
- d. Remember that communication goes two ways. If you haven't heard from a speaker in training for a week or so, or if you have a gut feeling that a supportive call from you may be in order, get in touch.

**5. First Story Meeting:**

You and your speaker will discuss the first draft and make adjustments. There may be places that require editing and attention. Go over these parts and ask your speaker to complete a second draft, and schedule another meeting for the two of you.

**6. Second Story Meeting:**

Talk about any changes and invite the speaker to read the story aloud—hearing your own words in your own voice can take some getting used to. Talk about the presentation skills section in the Speaker Toolkit for helpful tips.

**7. Presentation to your program organizers:**

When you and your speaker feel that the speaker is ready to present to a small group, invite the speaker to share their story with the program organizers (this is a very helpful dry run!). Remind your speaker that after the story has been shared, the audience of program organizers will ask questions that are similar to those that students have asked speakers in the past. At the end of this presentation, the group will offer you and your speaker helpful feedback.

**8. Observation:**

If possible, invite your speaker to attend a scheduled HEADSTRONG summit to get a better feel for the process. This often helps with any anxiety a speaker may be experiencing.



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# Key Items to Include

## IN SPEAKER MEETINGS AND TRAINING SESSIONS

### REINFORCE THE SPEAKER'S ROLE IN THE PROGRAM:

- Speakers are 'teachers'—educating youth about mental health, mental health problems, and mental illnesses.
- The speakers attend training sessions/meetings to understand the program and acquire presentation skills.
- Each speaker is supported in the development of a 12-15 minute speech highlighting the speaker's own recovery journey.
- When ready, the speaker tells his or her story to groups of 20 or more youth.
- With support from the **Master of ceremonies** (MC), the speaker will answer – in a positive and genuine manner – the students' questions about their own experiences.
- All speakers must be punctual for all presentations – arrive on time! Communication is key to the success of the program and speakers need to inform the organizers as soon as possible if they are unable to attend a presentation so that an alternate speaker can be arranged.
- Use the elements laid out in *Sharing Your Personal Story: Speaker Toolkit* as a guide to structuring your training program. **It should include story development, taking into account the audience,** key messages, presentation skills and dealing with anxiety a speaker might experience along the way.

Four key messages to be included in presentations are:

1. There is hope – people can and do recover from mental health problems and mental illnesses.
2. People are not defined by their mental health problems or mental illnesses.
3. People living with mental health problems or mental illnesses can and do have happy and successful lives.
4. Everyone has the potential to take steps to reduce stigma.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

In your role as a speaker trainer, you will hear very personal stories. You might also hear personal disclosures from students or teachers during or after a presentation.

Keep the things you hear confidential. This applies to your role as a trainer, as well as to the speakers in your program.

In addition, remember that speakers should never use the real names of family or friends, individual mental health workers, organizations or others when telling their story. Instead, use titles such as my "friend," "brother," "nurse," "doctor" to refer to these people. This will ensure that the speakers are honouring the rules of confidentiality.

When helping a speaker develop his or her story and a bad experience is being shared, public criticism of an individual or organization by name is not allowed. It is okay to talk about these experiences, but specific individuals or organizations should never be identified.

# Delivering Speaker Training in Groups



If you have more than one speaker going through the training process at the same time, it is beneficial to bring them together for certain elements. Use the Speaker's Toolkit to help your speakers work on presentation skills and discuss dealing with anxiety that speakers may experience along the way (p.16).

Each speaker brings their story to the training session, ready to read it out loud and receive feedback.

1. Ensure that you allow some time for people who don't know each other to get comfortable with one another. In small groups, you could do an icebreaker or just have a casual conversation over coffee before starting.
2. Give an overview of the training to take place that day – what you will be doing together and how long it will take.
3. Allow for breaks.
4. Practice your presentation – invite each speaker to read his or her story out loud.
5. Allow time for feedback after each speaker has read his or her story (see *Giving Helpful Feedback* on the next page).
6. Share a list of possible questions that students might ask following a presentation. Ask speakers to think through possible answers.
7. Talk about expectations of speakers, as well as the continued support you will be providing to them.
8. Explain next steps.

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# Giving Helpful Feedback



Giving feedback can be challenging. It's important to boost the speaker's confidence while communicating what needs to be eliminated, added or adjusted to improve the presentation. Some people can be very nervous about reading their story out loud and sensitive about receiving feedback, so communication needs to be done in an empathetic manner while also being clear. Here are some helpful tips for giving effective feedback:

1. Always ask the speaker for his or her thoughts on the presentation – before you comment. Now that the speaker has read the words out loud, they will likely want to bring up some changes or questions with you.
2. If you are in a small training group, ask the other speakers to give feedback. Ask them to start with positive comments first.
3. Your own comments should outline the positive aspects of the presentation, including tone, pace, gestures, use of voice and content.
4. Make suggestions in a way that is non-threatening using phrases such as: “Have you thought of...?,” “Another great way to get the point across is...,” “Other speakers have talked about...” and so on.
5. Remind the speaker of the importance of the key messages. Let the speaker know if the presentation “hit the target” and if these messages are clear to the listener.

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# Appendix A

## SAMPLE SPEAKER RECRUITMENT FLYER



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada

# HEADSTRONG



## The Youth Anti-Stigma Initiative

### INTERESTED IN BECOMING A HEADSTRONG SPEAKER?

**Are you living with a mental illness?  
Or are you a family member/caregiver  
of someone living with a mental illness?**

HEADSTRONG is always looking for new speakers to help reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

#### **HEADSTRONG SPEAKER TRAINING**

HEADSTRONG is privileged to work with people with lived experience of mental health problems and illnesses who share their recovery stories.

Speaker screening, training, support and Recognition is provided by HEADSTRONG to the dedicated individuals who are part of the program.

For more information, contact:  
[Speaker trainer/organization]  
[Contact information]

**Purpose:** To inspire students to Be Brave, Reach Out and Speak Up about mental health.

**Goals:** HEADSTRONG is teaching student leaders how to recognize and reduce stigma, and become change agents in their schools.

#### **Success Factors:**

##### **The power of contact-based education**

Contact-based education works by showing the real human story, and is the most effective tool in reducing stigma. You will teach students about what it is like to live with a mental illness and what helped you recover. You will help empower students to take action on stigma.

##### **Community coalitions**

Right now, all across Canada, health organizations, related service delivery agencies, the education sector, the public sector and community members are all working together to bring HEADSTRONG Summits and youth driven school-based action committees into their communities.

**Join the Team: Your experience of mental illness and recovery is an essential part of HEADSTRONG approach.**

# Appendix B

## SAMPLE APPLICATION FORMS



## The Youth Anti-Stigma Initiative

### GUEST SPEAKER APPLICATION

Please note that applicants must be 18 years or older to apply

Date:		
Name: (Mr. Mrs. Miss Ms)		
Address:		
City:	Province:	Postal code:
Day Phone Number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Call # first	
Night Phone Number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Call # first	
Cell Phone:	<input type="checkbox"/> Call # first	
Email:	<input type="checkbox"/> Call # first	
*Please indicate which number you prefer we call first		

1. How did you hear about HEADSTRONG? Please be specific.

2. What information do you know about HEADSTRONG?

3. How do you feel about public speaking?

4. What past experience have you had regarding public speaking?

# Appendix B

## SAMPLE APPLICATION FORMS

5. How do you feel about sharing your personal story in front of others?

6. How would you feel about having your story on video?

7. Can you volunteer your time during the day?

Yes  No

8. Please describe your involvement with the mental health system?

9. How would you describe your current mental health and/or well-being?

10. Is there a situation/issue that could potentially cause you personal discomfort or concern?

11. Do you have access to transportation to attend speaking engagements?

Yes  No

12. Do you have other skills or strengths, which you feel may be beneficial to the HEADSTRONG program?

**PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION VIA MAIL TO:**  
**Mental Health Commission of Canada**  
**Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4**

**OR EMAIL TO:**  
**[headstrong@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:headstrong@mentalhealthcommission.ca)**

Once your application has been reviewed by the Commission, you will be promptly contacted.  
Thank you for your interest in the HEADSTRONG Program.



# Appendix B

## SAMPLE APPLICATION FORMS



## The Youth Anti-Stigma Initiative

### HEADSTRONG VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM

Must be 14 years or older to apply

Please Print

First name:	Last name:
Address:	
City:	Province: Postal code:
Telephone N° (Res.)	(Bus.)
Cell N°	Email:
Emergency Contact:	Phone No.

Why are you interested in volunteering with HEADSTRONG?

How did you hear about volunteering with us?

Have you had any academic, volunteer or practical experience related to work in the mental health field? Please describe.

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how comfortable you are in public speaking  
(1 being Very Uncomfortable and 10 being Very Comfortable)

1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

Please check off the times you are most available to volunteer.

Daytime: Mornings  Afternoons

There may be some Evenings  and some Weekends

# Appendix B

## SAMPLE APPLICATION FORMS

Please list your volunteer experience.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	YOUR VOLUNTEER ROLE

Please list your work experience.

NAME OF ORGANIZATION	LOCATION	YOUR ROLE

Please give three references that we may contact on your behalf. Include paid or volunteer work, professionals, and friends.

CONTACT PERSON	STREET ADDRESS/CITY	POSTAL CODE	DAYTIME TELEPHONE N°

The above information has been provided to the best of my knowledge.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU FOR FILLING OUT THIS APPLICATION. PLEASE RETURN BY MAIL TO:**

**Mental Health Commission of Canada  
Suite 1210, 350 Albert Street Ottawa, ON K1R 1A4**

**OR BY EMAIL TO:**

**[headstrong@mentalhealthcommission.ca](mailto:headstrong@mentalhealthcommission.ca)**



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du Canada

# HEADSTRONG

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