The Family Mental Health Cafés

Facilitators' Toolkit

Planning and Running Café Events to Connect and Support

Families Living with Mental Illness
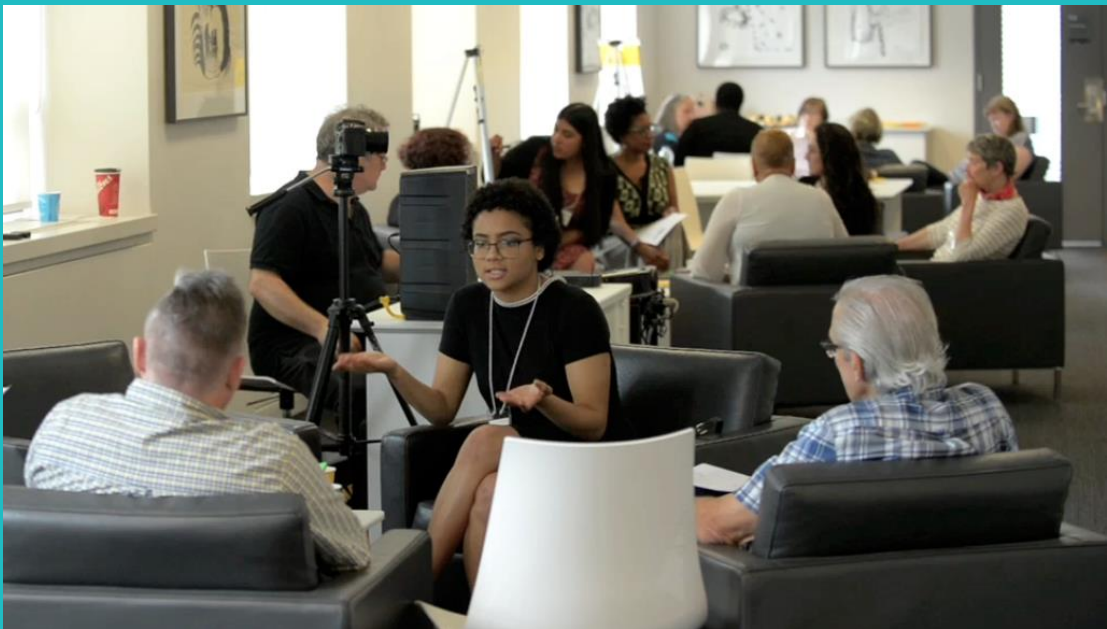
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What is a Family Mental Health Café?

The Project

Family Mental Health Cafés are events where adults diagnosed with mental illnesses and family members of people with diagnosed mental illnesses can come together with other families to discuss their experiences, their successes, the barriers and challenges they face, and the resources and supports they have found helpful. The Cafés were launched as a series of five events held across Ontario in 2018 and 2019 as part of a research study titled "United We Stand, Divided We Falter: Advancing a family-centred agenda for research on caregiving" (funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada), The study was conducted by Dr. Charmaine Williams and her research team at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. Participants in these events found them so powerful that many asked when they could attend another.

The World Café method

The design for Family Mental Health Cafés is based on the World Café method. World Cafés are a way of gathering people together for structured conversations that foster dialogue and generate ideas on a topic of common interest. The method was developed by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in 1995, for use in the private sector (Fallon & Connaughton, 2016). It has been evaluated as effective for generating new knowledge, as well as increasing the knowledge and understanding of those who participate. The process helps engage people in constructive dialogue around critical questions, build personal relationships, and foster collaborative learning (Fouché & Light, 2011).

At a World Café event, participants gather in a hospitable space, forming small groups around tables to discuss no more than three or four focused, thought-provoking questions posed by the main facilitator. At each table there is a set of coloured markers and chart paper, and the group can work together to record the highlights of the discussion. After the discussion of each question, the small groups then present their key findings, or "jewels,"[1] to the whole group.

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[1] We used the concept of a "jewel" in the study to mean a particularly powerful idea or story coming out of the discussion of each question, something that the smaller groups wished to share with everyone.

The World Café method is effective because it focuses on questions that matter to the participants. The process is one of collective discovery with a clear purpose. Diverse viewpoints are valued and encouraged.

For the Family Mental Health Project, the team adapted this method into an approach described in the following pages.

This guide

We hope that you as a service provider will want to hold Family Mental Health Café events at your agency. The rest of this document is intended as a guide for you to use in planning and carrying out your own such events. We have included detailed information about necessary supplies, a suggested schedule, a process for recruiting and screening participants, tips for making sure the day of the event runs smoothly, and more.

A note on Families and Mental Illness

The Family Mental Health Cafés held during the research study focused on experiences associated with diagnosed mental illness because research was concerned with how relationships and experiences with institutions and policies were affected after diagnosis. We recognize that many individuals and families are affected by mental illness even without a diagnosis in place and a family mental health café may still be a useful experience for individuals and families in that situation.

It is also worth noting that in the study our definition of 'family' was open. We had participants in our events that had legal or biological connections, others that attended without other members of their families, and others that joined us because of a close connection to a person affected by mental illness that made them "like family". All of these contributions enriched the experience and you may want to consider how you will share information with participants about how you are defining the 'family' that is included in your Family Mental Health café.

Running your own Family Mental Health Café: Resources and Tools

The following sections are based on the planning for, and lessons learned at, the five events held for the Family Mental Health research project. Feel free to adapt them and use what is relevant to you and your agency. You may already have a group of families coming together regularly to discuss mental health, or you may want to allot longer or shorter times, or ask more or fewer questions.

Recruiting participants

We recommend that there be at least 12 people at a Café event, in addition to the facilitators. Potential participants will need to know details about the event: what it is, who it's for, where and when it will happen, and how to register. There are many ways to circulate this information, such as social media, flyers, introductory phone calls to organizations, email, and whatever other communication channels your agency uses to share information with clients and the general public. It's very important to reach out to a wide variety of community sites across a diverse range of sectors (including grassroots and faith-based groups, libraries, healthcare facilities, churches, and peer support groups).

You will also need to set up an easy way for participants to register (e.g., Eventbrite). You may wish to conduct brief screening interviews, to answer questions about the nature of the event, make sure everyone's expectations of the day are clear and realistic, and verify that registrants will benefit from the discussions. You may want to consider assigning seats, as well, to create a mix of people at each table who can contribute different perspectives.

Screening participants

Are you going to set age limits for those attending? Do you want a wide mix of those with lived experience and family members, or educators or family support workers? Do you want to make sure participants are comfortable with the process and the event beforehand? If so, you will need to undertake a simple screening process. This might include having a questionnaire prepared in advance, and calling those who register before the event to make sure they understand the activities and are comfortable with them. This can also help your organization and facilitators understand who will be in the room.

Planning for the big day

These are the details of the approach to planning the events that we found to be most effective in ensuring a successful morning.

- Arrange for refreshments, such as coffee, tea, bagels, pastries, yogurt, and fresh fruit. Make sure there are vegan and gluten-free options, as well as options that may be appropriate to the local community or specific cultural groups.
- Review information about the registrants and consider seat assignments. This is to ensure that people can get fresh perspectives from people with diagnoses and from members of other families about their experiences.
- Create info packages. These can be literature from your own organization as well as information about other community resources. We can provide copies of preliminary findings from the FMH Café study, as well as information about how to follow updates about the study.
- Tailor a PowerPoint presentation and speaking notes for the specific audience. We can provide a sample PowerPoint file that contains information about the background of the project, suggested guidelines for the discussions in the large and small groups, and the recommended questions for the conversations.
- Make sure there are supports readily available for participants in case they find the discussion emotionally unsettling. Ideally, this would be a counsellor on site during the event, but you can also make sure that people have access to a crisis line. It may also be useful to have quiet space available for individuals who may wish to take a break during the event.
- Consider the accessibility of your space and your materials. Attention to details like accessibility of restrooms, availability of large-print documents and seating to reduce distracting noises encourage full participation for all the people at your event.

Checklist for the day of the event

- Participant packages
- Tables (x4) and chairs (enough for participants and facilitators) [café]
- Table (x1) and chairs (2-3) [registration/welcome area]
- LCD Projector screen & cables (HDMI)
- USB (PowerPoint presentation)
- Hardcopies of presentation
- Name tags or name cards
- Painter's tape for hanging up the notes on chart paper for each table
- Pens
- Markers
- Large pads of chart paper (ideally Post-It easel pads) – one for each table
- Table numbers
- Tissue boxes
- Refreshments (including plates, napkins, cutlery, and cups)
- Pitchers of water and glasses for each table
- Bins for recycling and waste
- Music

The day of the event

Who does what?

This section gives a brief outline of the responsibilities of both agency staff and Café participants during the morning of the event.

Staff/Facilitators	Participants
- Set out refreshments - Confirm setup of tables and projector - Greet participants - Hand out info packages - Answer questions about the process, the schedule, and so forth - Direct participants to the food - Give the presentation with the video clip - Facilitate discussions at tables (we recommend one facilitator at each table) - Take notes on basic concepts and key points	- Introduce themselves to staff and to each other - Pick up info packages - Pick up food - Listen to introductions - Watch video clip - Discuss questions - Choose who will present to the larger group

A suggested timeline

This section lays out the timeline that we used for Family Mental Health Café events during the research study. Again, please feel free to adapt it to your needs.

Café Duration (TOTAL: 3.5 HOURS)	
Activity	**Time**
Participants' arrival	8:30am to 9:00am (arrival, light breakfast, filling out and collecting consent forms if needed) Duration: 30 minutes
Introduction from the main facilitator	9:00am to 9:05am Duration: 5 minutes
PowerPoint slides (slide 1 to 4) + video clip from *The Family Guide to Mental Health* documentary (see 'Additional Resources') + Presentation (explaining the history of the project and the group guidelines, describing family, and explaining what a "jewel" is)	9:05 am to 9:30am Duration: 25 minutes
Question #1: introduce question, discuss in small groups, record on chart paper. Clarify concept of a "jewel" and nominate a participant to present to the larger group. *[20 minutes]* + Discuss Question #1 as a larger group. Nominated speakers present the "jewel" *[10 minutes]*	9:30am to 10:00am Duration: 30 minutes [TOTAL]

Question #2 (introduce questions, discuss in small groups, record on chart paper [facilitator], nominate a speaker [participant] to present to the larger group) *[20 minutes]* + Discuss Question #2 as a larger group. Nominated speakers present the "jewel" *[10 minutes]*	10:00am to 10:30am Duration: 30 minutes TOTAL
BREAK	10:30am to 10:45am Duration: 15 minutes
Question #3 (introduce question, discuss in small groups, record on chart paper [facilitator], nominate a speaker [participant] to present to the larger group) *[20 minutes]* + Discuss Question #3 as a larger group. Nominated speakers present the "jewel" *[10 minutes]*	10:45am to 11:15am Duration: 30 minutes TOTAL
Question #4 (introduce question, discuss in small groups, record on chart paper [facilitator], nominate a speaker [participant] to present to the larger group) *[20 minutes]* + Discuss Question #4 as a larger group. Nominated speakers present the "jewel" *[10 minutes]*	11:15am to 11:45am Duration: 30 minutes
BREAK	11:45am to 11:50am Duration: 5 minutes
Wrap Up and Additional Thoughts • *How is everyone feeling? [Input from the larger group]* • Give participants a few minutes to complete the evaluation form. • Each facilitator is responsible for collecting the feedback forms and consent forms (if applicable) in the small groups. • Closing - Thank You	11:50am to 12:20pm Duration: 30 minutes

The questions that matter

For the Family Mental Health research project, we used the following four questions. We found that these questions generated rich discussion of family life and experiences, as well as sharing of helpful resources and opportunities for networking and collaboration.

> **Question #1**: From my perspective as a [insert role], when I hear **caregiver or care receiver**, I think… When I hear **caregiving family**, I think…
>
> **Question #2**: What makes caring in families affected by mental illness difficult?
>
> **Question #3**: What makes caring or caregiving **work well** in families affected by mental illness?
>
> **Question #4**: I think the way we could make caring and caregiving work well for families is....

Facilitating the table discussions: Digging deeper

This section contains questions that the facilitators of the small groups can use at the tables to stimulate thinking and discussion about each of the four questions asked to the larger group. Make sure you do not ask leading questions, that is, questions that guide the participants toward or away from a specific answer.

BEFORE PROCEEDING TO QUESTION #1: Introduce yourself and describe your role. Ask for everyone's name and primary role in the family or relationship.

Question #1: From my perspective as a [insert role], when I hear **caregiver or care receiver**, I think…

- **How well do you think that describes the way things typically are in your family?**
- How would you describe the caregiver-care receiver dynamic?
- What comes to mind when you think of the role "caregiver"?
- What comes to mind when you think of the role of a care receiver?

When I hear **caregiving family**, I think…

- **How well do you think that idea describes the way things typically are in your family?**
- What does a caregiving family look like?
- How would you define a caregiving family?

Question #2: What makes caring in families affected by mental illness difficult?

Can you think of a time when things were really hard? What do you think was making things difficult?

- What kinds of things get in the way of making caring work? What causes friction or weighs things down?
- From your experience, what made caring in your family or relationship difficult?
- What had to do with the people in the family? The people around the family (community)? The organizations or institutions you had to deal with?

Question #3: What makes caring or caregiving **work well** in families affected by mental illness?

Can you think of a time when things seemed good? What do you think was making things work well?

- What kind of things help make caring work?
- How can you tell when things are working well?
- From your experience, what made caring in your family or relationship easier? Fun? Joyful?
- What had to do with the people in the family? The people around the family (community)? The organizations or institutions you had to deal with?

Question #4: I think the way we could make caring and caregiving work well for families is....

- What have you imagined would make this work better?
- What have you seen or heard about that you think could make things work better?
- What do families need? What do individuals in families need?
- From your experience, what could improve the caregiving experience?

Basic flow—keeping time!

A major key to a successful Family Mental Health Café is keeping a close eye on the time and sticking to the schedule. The conversations may be slow to start, as families' experiences with mental illness is not often discussed publicly. Mental health recovery is a challenging, emotional, personal, and powerful experience for most. After the discussions get underway, however, participants come to understand they are with others who know the issue intimately and "get it," and tend to open up a great deal, leading to rich and deeply meaningful conversation.

We strongly recommend that you watch the time! The Family Mental Health Café as described in this guide is designed to move through four table discussions of approximately 20 minutes each, with each table discussion followed by 10 to 15 minutes when the large group hears the key two or three points from each table. This takes about 30 minutes per question, or two hours just for the four questions. With a welcome and introduction at the beginning of the event, a short introduction to each question, a few breaks, and a wrap-up at the end, the Café can easily take more than three hours. We suggest designating one person, perhaps the main facilitator, to act as the timekeeper and give a five-minute and two-minute warning before each table discussion is scheduled to end.

Ending the event

After each group has finished discussing and presenting all of the questions, the main facilitator can offer some closing remarks about the themes and resources that have come up over the day's discussions, and point to existing programs and services that may be helpful to the Café's participants. Once the formal part of the session is finished, we suggest leaving a few minutes for participants to connect with each other and share information, perhaps even plan to meet up for a coffee sometime in the future.

A key goal of the Family Mental Health Café is to foster new connections and community, so we sincerely hope your participants have a rich experience, learn a lot, share a lot, and meet others who can make a difference to them.

The final step? Cleaning up the space and considering the great learning that was accomplished.

We also suggest a follow up email to participants to thank them, and provide them with contact information if they have any questions or suggestions.

We wish you all success with your event!

Notes on Adapting to a Virtual Mental Health Café

Although we conducted all our Mental Health Cafés in person, you might wish to host yours online. Virtual Cafés are more accessible to people who cannot attend in person, whether because of distance, caregiving responsibilities, or other reasons. A virtual Café can also be an opportunity to connect people anywhere in the country or world. Therefore, we wanted to put together some information based on our experiences with in-person events in combination with our knowledge of virtual technologies.

There are benefits and challenges associated with both in-person and virtual Mental Health Cafés, so we hope you find this information useful as you decide on a Café format that works best for your community.

Picking a platform

There are several videoconferencing platforms available, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and others. Before you choose one, we suggest taking stock of the needs you require for hosting a Café. Here are some things to look for when picking out an appropriate technology:

- User-friendliness
- Accessibility of platform for participants (including an option to dial in by telephone)
- Ability to facilitate your number of attendees
- Lack of time limits
- Availability of breakout rooms
- Security and privacy

To have access to features such as breakout rooms, you may have to purchase a subscription. Consult with your organization, professional college, or privacy office to ensure the platforms you use meet any required standards for confidentiality and privacy. It is a good idea to let your participants know that videoconferencing platforms are never entirely private or confidential so they can make an informed decision about whether to participate.

Do your research well in advance so that the Café can run without hitches, and so that participants have ample time to review any concerns with you. Links to additional resources and technology considerations are listed at the end of this booklet.

Recruiting and screening participants

In addition to planning the videoconferencing platform in advance, you may wish to start recruiting and screening Café participants early as well. Consider limiting the number to one that you and your team can manage. Think about how many facilitators you have and which people you want in the breakout rooms (we suggest 4-5 participants and one facilitator for each room).

When you call potential participants to see if they are eligible, you can also take the opportunity to build rapport, explain logistics, and answer any questions. Ask participants about any accessibility needs as they engage in the virtual Café, and plan for different levels of comfort and knowledge around technology.

Let participants know beforehand if you plan on following up with them during the Café if technology issues occur or if participants leave the videoconference unexpectedly. Given that people often multitask during virtual events, emphasize the importance of participants carving out protected time for them to be as focused and present in the discussion as possible.

Planning for the big day

By email or otherwise, confirm each participant's ability to participate in the virtual Café, and consider sending tip sheets about how to use your chosen platform, to ensure any questions or concerns have been addressed in advance. You may wish to hold "dry runs" with participants who are less comfortable with online videoconferencing. You may also wish to send the following items to participants before the Café:

- Info package
- A PDF of the PowerPoint presentation
- The questions to be asked at the Café
- A list of mental health resources

We suggest having a counsellor in attendance so that participants can meet with them privately in a breakout room should they find the discussion emotionally unsettling. That person can also follow up with participants who leave the Café unexpectedly or who might need a check-in call after the session.

You will need the same number of facilitators as breakout rooms, and an additional team member whose role is to remain in the main room and address technology questions or issues. We strongly recommend that there be a designated person to troubleshoot technology issues for the entire event to promote a smoother experience for everyone.

You will be saving time and money on things like transportation, refreshments, space rental, stationery, and set-up. However, a lot of time should be budgeted to curating a welcoming and user-friendly experience. Work under the assumption that something with the technology will go wrong, such as internet outages, platform failure, or issues with sound or video, and have contingency plans for each step of the Café. Think about designating roles to each team member and ensuring they have the appropriate administrative permissions on the platform to perform their roles. Some examples of these roles are as follows:

- Letting participants into the virtual space
- Assigning participants to breakout rooms
- Monitoring the chat
- Checking to see if anyone has raised their hand

The day of the event

We recommend opening the virtual space at least 10 minutes before the start time, and encouraging participants to join early for help with technology or navigating the platform. Building community and trust

within the group can take more time in virtual spaces, so here are some actions to consider as participants are entering the virtual space for the first time:

- Greet and welcome participants
- Have a welcome slide shared on the screen
- Play soft music in the background
- Encourage keeping cameras on, if possible
- Ask participants to type something about themselves in the chat

Budget additional time at the beginning of the Café to provide an overview of the platform and flow of the event so that participants are clear on how to navigate the space and know what to expect. Inform participants whether you wish for them to stay on mute unless they want to speak to the group, and let them know whether you will be muting or turning off participants' video as necessary. Share what to do if participants have an issue, comment, or question, and draw their attention to the team member who will be helping with any technology issues.

At the beginning of the virtual Café, ensure you address confidentiality and privacy. As participants will be in their own spaces, there may be other people nearby who can overhear conversation. You could encourage participants to use headphones or be in private spaces, but this simply will not be possible for everyone.

Keeping time can be more challenging in virtual spaces, so it will be important for all facilitators to be comfortable directing participants accordingly. We suggest having a way for facilitators to communicate with each other (perhaps through an external chat platform or group text) to communicate about timing or technology issues.

For breakout rooms, you may wish to either randomize assignments, or intentionally assign people to specific groups to promote a mix of people and perspectives in each discussion. Ensure that the composition of each group remains the same throughout the Café to promote community building. If you choose to take notes, try a collaborative note taking platform like Google Docs or OneDrive. Given it takes longer to build rapport in virtual spaces, we suggest providing the Café questions in advance so that discussions can start more quickly, and lengthening breakout discussions to 30 minutes.

It can be challenging to manage different people's levels of tolerance for online events. Put simply, a three-hour virtual Café may intimidate or discourage participants. You may choose to follow the schedule outlined earlier in this booklet, or you could instead break your event into smaller Café sessions, answering a different question at each Café. We recommend these mini-Cafés be closed to new members and require that participants commit to attending all sessions. Consider asking for input from potential participants, and go with whatever works best for your clientele.

At the end of the Café, although people cannot connect as easily as in person, you may wish to keep the room open for a period of time for participants to share contact information, as well as local resources and ways to follow up about issues that are important to them. Remind participants about the distributed list of resources and any future Café sessions.

We recommend emailing participants after the Café to thank them for their participation, ask for their feedback through a virtual feedback form (such as on SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, or Qualtrics), and share a list of mental health resources again.

Good luck, and all the best with your event!

Additional information:

[Considerations when using video-teleconference products and services](#) by the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security

[Videoconferencing – Maintain your physical distance, but keep your personal information close](#) by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada

[Video conferencing: Using services securely](#) by the National Cyber Security Centre, UK

References

Fallon, H., & Connaughton, L. (2016). Using a world café to explore new spaces and new models for front line services: a case study from the Irish university library sector. New Review of Academic Librarianship, 22(1), 43-59.

Fouché, C., & Light, G. (2011). An invitation to dialogue: "The World Café' in social work research. *Qualitative Social Work, 10*(1), 28-48.

Additional Resources

Family Guide to Mental Health website: http://www.familyguidetomentalhealth.com/

World Café method:
- http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/
- https://workshopbank.com/world-cafe
- https://www.unicef.org/knowledge-exchange/files/World_Cafe_production.pdf

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We welcome the use of this guide by organizations planning their own Family Mental Health Café events. This guide is intended as a resource. Use of this guide does not imply affiliation with the SSHRC-funded Family Mental Health research project or oversight by members of the project team.