

# TIPS FOR FAITH, RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Young South Asian women (YSAW) saw an important role for faith communities to take the lead on mental health and substance use issues in their communities, by providing services and spaces for conversation, learning and supports.

## 1 Mental Health is Health

Understand that mental health is health.

## 2 Spectrum

Mental health is on a spectrum and holistic - this includes religious and spiritual practices, accessing faith spaces, and formal and other approaches to healing. They noted a number of helpful religious and spiritual practices including meditation, prayer, ayurvedic practices and staying in an ashram.

## 3 Openness to formal supports

Recognition that prayer and meditation will not work for everyone and be open to advising individuals and families about formal Western mental health supports.

## 4 Religious experiences

Experience of religion is often shaped by parents and family, and spirituality shaped individually and through personal experiences.

## 5 Younger Generations

Find ways to connect with the younger generation born in Canada. Try not to limit communication to parents, ensure engagement with the youth, and provide education and additional resources to parents too. YSAW want to learn about the history of practices before taking them up fully.

## 6 Inclusive space

People with mental illnesses may come to a faith space to seek support. There are a few things you can do to create an inclusive space:

- i. ensure you have information about local resources,
- ii. complete the Mental Health First Aid course,
- iii. connect with your local mental health service providers and have them engage with the congregation

## 7 Peer programming

Develop peer programming where women and youth leaders can share personal experiences and provide supports to others in need.

## 8 Gender inclusivity

Create gender inclusive spaces. Address multiple forms of discrimination experienced in the faith space by YSAW including exclusion during menstruation, gender and sexual identity, disability, age, mental illness and substance use.

## 9 Safety of women

Be mindful of how religious teachings can create cycles of discrimination and result in people feeling excluded. Faith spaces must ensure the safety of women. YSAW in our study reported being sexually objectified which led to them disengaging and losing respect for faith communities. Ask consent before touching any individual.