

# I'M NOT OKAY, NOW WHAT?

## **(1) Urgent Care Required**

If you are at risk of harm to yourself or someone else, here are a few ideas of where to call. Know that geographically, these options will change, however they may give you an idea of where to start.

Call 911 if someone is at imminent risk of ending their life or someone else's.

In Alberta:

HealthLink- A resource where you will be connected with a Registered Nurse who can provide health advice and help you navigate the next steps. Dial 811 in Alberta.

Mental Health Helpline (Alberta Health Services) – 1-877-303-2642

Visit <https://suicideprevention.ca/need-help/> to find local crisis centres for each province in Canada.

If you are a loved one who is worried about someone in your life, or you are struggling yourself, it can be difficult thinking about calling 911 for help. Sometimes when someone is struggling, they can lose insight, which means they may not have the ability to step back and see what is going on for them. This can make it hard to reach out for help in some situations, and having the support to navigate the system, and the courage to reach out, whether it be by calling 911 or a crisis line is important for change to begin through beginning the search for the right care.

## **(2) See your Family Doctor or call Sports Medicine Team**

Checking out to see if there is anything “organic” (or physical) going on is an important step as it can determine next steps for treatment. You need to tell your doctor to the best of your ability what is going on, when it started, any relevant history such as concussions, substance use, family histories, any other physical symptoms, etc. This is all important as many different medical conditions can cause someone to experience mental health symptoms. It is reasonable to ask for blood tests, and also to seek a second opinion if you do not feel that your concerns are being taken seriously. Family doctors have differing levels of comfort in dealing with mental health issues, so ensure that you are able to communicate and feel safe.

Medications may be prescribed or recommended. Remember, it is YOUR body and YOU GET TO DECIDE. I would encourage you to get as much information from your doctor and pharmacist as possible so that you can be most informed when you make a decision about medication. For some people, medication is incredibly helpful.

Many specialized assessments require a referral from a family doctor or sports medicine professional.

If you do not have a family doctor, you can call your local Primary Care Network to see if there are doctors taking new patients or attend a walk in clinic.

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or harm, tell the nurse when you call so that they can best guide you to find the most appropriate support.

**(3) As with treating anything,** if you are struggling with a mental health issue, doing more than one thing can be hugely beneficial (in some cases). Every mental illness and individual person is different so it is not a one size fits all approach, rather trying things until you find the right thing. For example, medication, counselling and exercise can impact symptoms of depression. Doing one is good, and a combination is better. This may include incorporating other forms of wellness too.

Counselling is an opportunity to process or work through thoughts, feelings and or experiences which are impacting you. There are many different forms of counselling or therapy, so it is important to find the approach and professional that best fits with you! See the “Tips for Finding the “Right” Therapist” sheet for some questions that may help you find clarity in what you are looking for.

**(4) The Psychologists’ Association of Alberta** recommended rate for a 50 minute individual therapy or assessment as of January 1, 2018 is \$200. There are private counsellors who charge more and some who charge less. If this is out of your budget, however you can afford paying some money privately, your municipality or local programs may be able to subsidize local professional’s rates.

What is the difference between private and public counselling or therapy services?

Private providers are most often paid directly by the client. The provider may operate independently or as part of an organization. Sometimes, private therapists are more specialized (not always the case) or it is easier to find a therapist that has more availability. They often have less formal criteria, etc for seeing clients.

Public providers on the other hand can have wait times (some private therapists can too) which can be frustrating if they are the only option for free therapy in your area. In some situations, the need is higher than the service availability and counsellors are doing their best to keep up. There often is eligibility criteria that clients need to meet based on the organization mandate, and they may be turned away if they do not meet it.

All providers are governed by their governing body. In Alberta, the Health Profession’s Act for example is one of the pieces of legislation by which many health professionals, whether public or private which guides the service provision, etc. This is in addition to Standards of Practice and Codes of Ethics from each individual professions’ governing body such as the Alberta College of Social Workers.

**(5) It is important to know what benefits you have access too.** Some plans have Health Spending Accounts which can help cover costs or services not provided by registered psychologists or social workers. There are also often limits on benefits provided, including possibly a yearly maximum or session maximum. If you find a therapist that you want to work with, you can call your benefits provider with their professional information (credentials and registration number). Also, some benefits providers have counsellors on contract that clients can access at no charge to them and or urgent telephone counselling services. Check out your plan and call to get more information.

**(6) Finding a private counsellor can be overwhelming.** There are so many databases online and it can be hard to learn about someone through their website. Sometimes, family and friends, or even other professionals may recommend someone that they have had success with or found helpful. Remember, the same therapist and approach may not work for everyone, so if it does not, it simply is just not a fit.

You are not a flawed human being because “I can’t even do therapy right”! The most frustrating thing I hear as a provider is that “I tried therapy once and it didn’t work for me so I won’t do it again.” Even incredibly skilled and experienced therapists may provide interventions that are contradictory to another skilled therapist. It simply is differences in personalities, approaches, and what they believe is best for the client and where they are at in the moment.

It is important to let a counsellor know if you are also working with another counsellor (for example and marriage counsellor for your relationship and a therapist to process your own thoughts, feelings and experiences). It can actually become a confusing place for a client if they are getting contradictory information and are not sure how to navigate it. It also helps a therapist to individualize their interventions. For example, if you are a person who finds yoga helpful, a therapist may provide more of a mindfulness approach as to reality based interventions.

**(7) Free counselling does not mean poor quality services.** Some providers work in public systems due to the stability of a regular job, client flow, training support, consultation, etc. It is important to share any level of risk right away if you are calling your local mental health or counselling centre so that they can properly triage your situation and either get you in right away or guide you to somewhere that can. There may be criteria that they utilize to determine client eligibility, so if you do not meet it, ask where you can go. Some communities have numerous options, and others do not. If you book an appointment that is a few weeks out, be sure that you ask what to do in the meantime if you begin to struggle. Sometimes just having an appointment booked can be helpful in breathing through the struggle, and other times care in the meantime is important. This may mean calling a crisis line (visit <https://suicideprevention.ca/alberta-crisis-centres/> for Canadian based crisis resources) just to have someone trained who you can talk to, visiting a walk in counselling centre (most often available in larger centres such as Calgary, Edmonton, Red Deer, etc), talking to a spiritual leader at church, engaging in self care such as a massage, getting outside or reading a good book, or attending a support group.

**(8) Counselling and medical resources are not your only options.** They are the places where many people start searching for answers and support, however are often not the only things they find helpful. Many other interventions are labelled “alternative” however many find them as actually the right fit. These options include things such as yoga, Naturopathic Doctors, Sports Therapists, Meditation, Accupuncture, nutritional support, exercise specialists, and more if they are a fit with your beliefs and values. Some of these professionals are governed by provincial regulating bodies, and other are not, so ensure that you do your research. If a practitioner is not governed by a regulating body, it means that they are not held to larger standards and often do not have a license that they have to maintain. AND they may provide excellent service that is the correct fit for you! It is just important for you to be informed and comfortable with the options you pursue. If you have a health benefits plan, some of these options may be covered.

For example, I call myself an Equine Co-Facilitated Therapist, and a Counsellor. I am a Registered Social Worker with the Alberta College of Social Workers, and maintain certification in the Equine Gestalt Coaching Method. There are many people who partner with horses to support people in healing who have taken extensive training and are incredibly skilled. They may not be registered with a legislating body, however they may maintain high levels of continued education and training and maintain certifications. Because the area of equine wellness is currently not legislated, people can start a business completely independently, can take a weekend course and start a business while some take programs that are comprehensive one or two year programs with varying levels of learning, growth and personal

healing required. All of these factors may influence the care you receive, price of service, depth of healing, etc, and it may not. Remember, the correct fit is an individual things, not universal.

***This document was created by Amy Monea, MSW, RSW. Please contact her to replicate or alter it.***

*Amy Monea is passionate about working with moms, in particular rural women, as they transition to motherhood and move forward in this often identity redefining role.*

*The rural way of life is a lived experience that is difficult to understand unless one has walked that path themselves.*

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*Her days are spent parenting two children, working on the farm, and as a therapist both in an office setting and in the arena partnering with horses to provide Equine Co-Facilitated Therapy. She also enjoys writing and moving forward the importance of mental health initiatives for the rural community.*