



## [Transitions Dalhousie Students Survey 2014/2015](#)

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### **Background:**

*Transitions (2nd edition)* is a comprehensive life skills resource with embedded mental health information that addresses the needs of first year of college/ university students. Developed by Dr. Stan Kutcher, the Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health, it includes information on how to deal with challenges young people will encounter during this period of their life, such as time management, relationships, academic challenges, sexual activity, mental illness, stress, suicide, addictions and more ([TeenMentalHealth.org/Toolbox/Transitions](http://TeenMentalHealth.org/Toolbox/Transitions)). Information on mental health and mental illness is seamlessly embedded in this resource in a de-stigmatizing manner. There is also information on mental health self-help/helping others and useful and practical suggestions about how students can access help when needed. These domains are consistent with those identified as mostly currently unavailable but important information needs in a recent study of Canadian post-secondary students (American College Health Association, 2013).

The first version of *Transitions* was created in 2007 with similar goals of helping students address common life challenges at this time period, improving mental health literacy, de-stigmatizing mental illness, and increasing help-seeking efficacy. Research conducted on the impact of the first edition showed that 40% of respondents reported discussing the resource with their friends and 16% reported seeking mental health care as a result of what they read (Potvin-Boucher et al., 2010).

The second version of *Transitions* was created and launched in 2013 in order to substantially revise existing components and add much more new information, incorporate new research findings and include a number of more up-to-date technological means of accessing the resource (such as an e-book version and iPhone app). This edition improves significantly upon the content and

accessibility of the resource, organizes the information in a more systematic way, uses a harm reduction approach, and maintains youth-friendly language. There are also more detailed descriptions of mental health and mental illness. The new version, *Transitions*, includes two booklets: one full version for student service staff (such as counsellors, residence supervisors, health center staff, etc.) and interested others that can be downloaded as a pdf document or e-book, and one passport-sized condensed booklet for students that can be downloaded as a pdf document and as an iPhone app which can be obtained at no cost. Throughout this report *Transitions* refers to the second edition of the resource.

The resource was developed by Dr. Stan Kutcher with inputs from mental health professionals in consultation with local university faculty, counsellors, administrators, youth and parents. In the first month after its launch, approximately 6,000 university students in Nova Scotia received a copy of *Transitions* and it was viewed over 13,500 times electronically on the website [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org). It has been endorsed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, The Kids Help Phone and The Jack Project.

This report provides the survey results from students at Dalhousie University who had read *Transitions* and evaluated the resource in the late fall of 2014.

### **Process:**

We worked with Dalhousie communities to disseminate *Transitions* prior to administering the survey. We placed hard copies of *Transitions* at different campus locations, such as health clinics, the student services office, counseling office and other on campus sites at the beginning of fall term, 2014. Also, two weeks prior to the survey being conducted a number of volunteers put up posters describing the *Transitions* resource and how to obtain it in key campus locations. Additionally, information tables were set up in the university library foyer and short (five minutes duration) information sessions introducing first year students to *Transitions* were provided in some first year classes with the permission of the faculty who taught the classes.

Both an online and a paper version of the survey were created. The survey is anonymous and is identical in both formats, consisting of 21 questions, including five questions pertaining to respondents' demographics, three questions about whether or not they had read *Transitions*, one question about whether or not they had already completed the survey, and 12 questions pertaining to their opinions of various aspects of the resource (e.g., mental health knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking efficacy) (see Appendix 1 for the full survey). The survey took approximately five minutes to complete. The online survey was available through the TeenMentalHealth.org website. The paper version was distributed by five non-first year Dalhousie students, trained in its application who approached other students outside of selected campus buildings using a scripted interview model. Responding students completed and returned the completed survey immediately. All completed surveys were entered into a data-base created for the purpose and analyzed using PASW 17.

### **Statistical Analysis and Results:**

Eighty-two Dalhousie students who had read *Transitions* completed the survey. Nearly half (48.8%) of respondents were in first year, over a quarter (26.8%) were in second year, and the remaining students were in third year (6.1%), fourth year (7.3%) or "other" (11.0%). Students represented a wide range of academic programs including Arts, Biology, Commerce, Engineering, Music, Nursing and Social Work. Twenty-one (25.6%) students were visa/international students. Almost two thirds (64.6%) of students were between 17 and 20 years old, with a mean age of 20.4 (SD= 3.0). Fifty people (61.0%) identified as female, 27 (32.9%) as male, one (1.2%) as "other" and four (4.9%) did not answer the question on sex/gender or had irretrievable information on the question.

All respondents included in this report had read *Transitions* and had not previously completed the survey. Of the different formats of the resource, 65.6% of respondents had read the printed version, 8.5% had read the E-book, 18.3% had read the online version (free PDF), and 14.6% had used the Mobile App.

Due to a relatively small sample size for responses in each category and for the sake of simplicity, we collapsed "strongly agree" and "agree" responses into

one positive consideration category, relabeled neutral responses as neutral considerations, and collapsed “disagree” and “strongly disagree” responses into one negative consideration category. There were certain questions that did not have a complete response rate. In these circumstances the row totals do not add up to 100%. Please see Appendix 2 for figures of more detailed responses.

**Overall Perception of *Transitions* and Impact on Knowledge:**

As shown in Table 1, respondents’ general considerations about the value of *Transitions* were positive. The vast majority (87.8%) of Dalhousie students who had read *Transitions* and answered the survey found *Transitions* helpful overall. Just under two thirds (64.6%) of respondents reported feeling more prepared for college or university overall after reading *Transitions*. Almost three quarters (72.0%) of respondents believed that their knowledge about mental health and mental illness had improved as a result of reading *Transitions*. Most respondents (89.1%) would recommend *Transitions* to someone they know.

**Table 1: General Considerations about the Value of *Transitions***

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>
Overall, I find <i>Transitions</i> helpful	87.8%	11.0%	1.2%
Overall, I feel more prepared for college or university after reading <i>Transitions</i>	64.6%	30.5%	2.4%
As a result of reading <i>Transitions</i> , my knowledge about mental health and mental illness has improved	72.0%	26.8%	1.2%
I would recommend <i>Transitions</i> to someone I know	89.1%	8.5%	1.2%

**Impact of *Transitions* on Attitudes:**

As shown in Table 2, *Transitions* had positive effects on attitudes toward mental health and mental illness. For example, 84.2% of respondents reported becoming more comfortable having someone with mental illness in their class as a result of reading *Transitions*. Furthermore, 85.4% of respondents reported

understanding that most people with mental illness can live a productive life as a result of reading *Transitions*.

**Table 2: Impact of *Transitions* on Attitudes**

Statement	Positive	Neutral	Negative
As a result of reading <i>Transitions</i> , I am comfortable having someone with mental illness in my class	84.2%	12.2%	3.6%
As a result of reading <i>Transitions</i> , I understand most people with mental illness can live a productive life	85.4%	12.2%	2.4%

**Impact of *Transitions* on Behaviour:**

As shown in Table 3, students who read *Transitions* talked about it with many different people in their lives. Over half (54.9%) of survey respondents reported that they talked about what they read in *Transitions* with friends. Meanwhile, 13.4% reported that they talked about what they read in *Transitions* 2 with their parent(s), 2.4% with their teaching assistant(s), 20.7% with their roommate(s), 13.4% with their sibling(s), 7.3% with their acquaintance(s), 25.6% with their classmate(s), 11.0% with their co-worker(s), and 15.9% with someone other than the specified options.

**Table 3: Talking about *Transitions***

Statement	Yes	No
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with friends	54.9%	45.1%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my parent(s)	13.4%	86.6%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my teaching assistant(s)	2.4%	97.6%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my roommate(s)	20.7%	79.3%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my sibling(s)	13.4%	86.6%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my acquaintance(s)	7.3%	92.7%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my classmate(s)	25.6%	74.4%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with my co-worker(s)	11.0%	89.0%
I talked about what I read in <i>Transitions</i> with someone other than the specified options	15.9%	84.1%

### Impact of *Transitions* on Help-Seeking Efficacy:

As shown in Table 4, *Transitions* had a highly positive impact on readers' reports of help seeking efficacy. Nearly three quarters (74.4%) of survey respondents reported positive considerations for the statement: "As a result of reading *Transitions*, my knowledge about treatment of mental illness has improved." Even more (85.3%) students reported positive considerations for the statement: "As a result of reading *Transitions*, I would suggest someone I know get help for a mental health concern." Additionally, 83.0% reported positive considerations for the statement: "After reading *Transitions*, I would feel more comfortable seeking help for a mental health concern if I needed to."

**Table 4: Impact of *Transitions* on Help Seeking Efficacy**

Statement	Positive	Neutral	Negative
As a result of reading <i>Transitions</i> , my knowledge about treatment of mental illness has improved	74.4%	24.4%	1.2%
As a result of reading <i>Transitions</i> , I would suggest someone I know get help for a mental health concern	85.3%	11.0%	3.6%
After reading <i>Transitions</i> , I would feel more comfortable seeking help for a mental health concern if I need to	83.0%	14.6%	2.4%

A sizeable proportion (14.6%) of students planned to seek help for a mental health concern because of what they read in *Transitions*. Over a quarter (26.8%) of respondents was thinking about seeking help because of what they read in *Transitions*, 8.5% were not considering seeking help despite having a mental health concern, and 47.5% were not considering seeking help but did not have a mental health concern.

### Format Preference for *Transitions*:

Students mostly preferred the printed version of the resource (43.9%). This was followed by the online version/ free pdf (18.3%), mobile app (15.9%), all formats equally (12.2%) and the e-book (3.7%).

## Sex Differences in Responses:

Cell counts were too small (<5) to conduct chi-square tests on questions that used the 5 point Likert scale. Even using positive, neutral and negative consideration categories there remained several cell counts below five. Therefore the neutral responses were eliminated and positive versus negative considerations among males and females were compared using contingency tables and binomial tests. As only one respondent identified their gender as “other” we were only able to analyze differences between males and females.

Among respondents who self- identified as male or female and answered with either positive or negative considerations, female students were more likely to have talked about what they read in *Transitions* with friends (68.0% vs. 29.6%;  $p=0.001$ ).

**Table 5: I talked about what I read in *Transitions* with friends**

Response	Female	Male	P-value
Yes	34	8	0.001*
No	16	19	

\*statistically significant difference

As revealed through Fisher’s exact test, there were clear sex differences in responses to the help-seeking question “I plan to seek help for a mental health concern because of what I read in *Transitions*”. One female (2.0%) said “No, I don’t plan to seek help although I have a mental health concern,” while five males (18.5%) felt this way ( $p\text{-value}=0.018$ ). Twelve females (24.0%) responded “Yes, I plan to seek help for a mental health concern because of what I read in *Transitions*,” but not one male did ( $p\text{-value}=0.006$ ). Blank answers and responses of “No, I don’t have a mental health concern” and “I am thinking about it” did not have statistically significant differences based on sex. No other questions revealed statistically significant differences by sex.

**Table 6: I plan to seek help for a mental health concern because of what I read in *Transitions***

Response	Female	Male	P-value
Blank	0	1	0.351
No, I don't have a mental health concern	25	11	0.481
No, I don't plan to seek help although I have a mental health concern	1	5	0.018*
I am thinking about it	12	10	0.292
Yes	12	0	0.006*

\*statistically significant difference

### Discussion, Limitations and Conclusions:

*Transitions*, is a comprehensive life skills resource with embedded mental health information targeted towards students transitioning from secondary school to post-secondary institutions. The considerations about and impact of the resource on knowledge, attitudes towards mental disorders, and help-seeking efficacy were evaluated in a sample of students from Dalhousie University, Halifax Nova Scotia.

Although the sample size was relatively small, these data overwhelmingly support the utility of applying the *Transitions* resource in this post-secondary educational context. Overall, *Transitions* was positively considered by the students surveyed, was viewed by those students who read it to decrease stigma related to mental health and mental illnesses, and was reported to make a positive and substantial impact on various components of help-seeking efficacy. Of particular interest are the findings that over half of the students discussed what they read in *Transitions* with friends, about 85% reported that they would suggest that someone they knew seek help for a mental health concern and about 15% reported that they themselves would seek help for a mental health concern as a result of reading *Transitions*. These data are similar when compared with those reported in an earlier study using an earlier version of *Transitions* (Potvin-Boucher et al., 2010) and taken together constitute reasonable evidence of a



positive impact on mental health knowledge, attitudes and help seeking efficacy, as an outcome of being exposed to a relatively simple and easily accessible life-skills/mental health resource.

These results are highly encouraging, particularly given the increasing concerns about the mental health and general well-being of students in post-secondary institutions (Davies et al., 2014; Saïas et al., 2014; Bewick et al., 2010). This suggests that post-secondary institutions may be able to positively and proactively impact their students' mental health literacy (knowledge, attitudes and behaviors) by providing and promoting wide spread access to *Transitions* on campus.

According to recently published research of Canadian post-secondary students, there is a large demand for information in all of the domains that are already found in the *Transitions* resource (Davies et al., 2014; Saïas et al., 2014; Bewick et al., 2010). Since this resource is completed, field tested and has been evaluated with positive results and is easily available, Canadian post-secondary institutions can readily obtain and apply it within their own campuses, without engaging in lengthy and costly development, testing and evaluation of other resources..

Of additional interest is that most students surveyed endorsed using *Transitions* primarily in the hard copy large book format. This finding is contrary to what many may have been expected given the ease students have with digital communication and confirms the value of having numerous *Transitions* formats available for students to choose the format that best meets their needs. This information suggests that while all forms of *Transitions* should be made available, the large book hard copy should be provided.

This study has a number of important limitations. First the sample size was relatively small. Secondly it relied solely on self-report. Thirdly the setting (Dalhousie University) may not be representative of all post-secondary institutions in Canada. None-the-less the results were robust and were consistent with an earlier published study undertaken by a different research team using an earlier version of the resource (Potvin-Boucher et al., 2010). Certainly further

research designed to address these limitations is needed and our team is currently planning a follow-up study with a much larger sample as the next step.

At this time, given the highly positive nature of the results of this study on post-secondary students' perceptions of *Transitions* and the reported positive impact of *Transitions* on improving mental health knowledge, decreasing stigma and enhancing students' help-seeking efficacy simply through their engagement with this resource, it is reasonable to suggest that post-secondary school settings strongly consider making this resource easily available to their student populations.

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