



MOOD WALKS



A Program Manual for Educational Walking Groups to Promote Mental Health



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Acknowledgements

Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health is a mental health promotion initiative led by the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, in partnership with the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Conservation Ontario and Hike Ontario.

This project is generously supported by Government of Ontario through the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund.

The project partners would like to express their appreciation to the many individuals and organizations that contributed their time and expertise to help us develop the Mood Walks program and resources.

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Welcome to Mood Walks for Campus Mental Health!

We are glad to welcome you to Mood Walks, an initiative of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, in partnership with the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, Hike Ontario and Conservation Ontario, with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

Mood Walks provides training and support for postsecondary institutions across the province to launch educational walking programs for students at risk of or experiencing mental health issues. The program is also designed to encourage and support students (age 17-29) – including newcomers students who may be experiencing additional stress due to settlement changes and social exclusion – to be physically active, to engage with their community, and to benefit from exposure to healing effects of nature. Participating campuses will run a walking group for at least 10 weeks, with 8-12 participants.

Mood Walks groups:

- Receive Safe Hiker training from Hike Ontario, and some participants may be eligible to receive Hike Ontario’s Certified Hike Leaders training (see “Hike Ontario Training for Mood Walks Participants”)
- Participate in trail hikes and educational events organized by their local conservation area during the Healthy Hikes campaign (see “Group Challenges—Healthy Hikes”)
- Participate in project evaluation using the provided Mood Walks evaluation tools
- Share feedback with CMHA Ontario about their Mood Walks experience

We recognize that each Mood Walks group is unique. Mood Walks groups are occurring in diverse communities, all across Ontario. Groups will consist of unique student participants, staff members, and group leaders and supporters. Host campuses will differ in terms of experience and resources, as will project partners. Likewise, host communities will vary in terms of resources such as conservation areas, walking trails, and public transportation. We look forward to hearing of each group’s experience and expect the Mood Walks project will be a rich learning experience for all involved.

All the best to you as you embark on Mood Walks!

An Introduction to This Manual

Physical activity interventions are becoming increasingly valued as part of holistic, recovery-oriented mental health services. Walking is an effective, low-cost form of exercise that requires little training and equipment. In addition to walking's numerous physical health benefits, walking groups provide opportunities for social interaction and community exploration, which may be especially important for students who experience mental health issues. Furthermore, an increasing body of evidence supports the value of nature in supporting mental well-being, especially for individuals who experience challenges to their mental health (see "*The Importance of Walking Groups in Mental Health Services*").

This manual, produced by Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario, was developed with input from a variety of sources: people who work in mental health services, people involved with hiking clubs and Conservation Authorities, and people who have lived experience of mental illness. Some contributors had co-ordinated successful walking groups themselves, both within the mental health field and otherwise, and their experiences inform this guide.

The manual provides a framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating your Mood Walks groups, along with practical strategies and tools that can be tailored to meet your campus needs and goals. There is information about how to overcome challenges, spark enthusiasm among participants, and maintain motivation. Our objective is to provide practical information about how to facilitate a Mood Walks group; however, much of this information applies when facilitating other physical activity groups in mental health services as well.

This manual will be developed into a general guide for postsecondary institutions who want to implement walking groups, so your feedback is important! Please email info@moodwalks.ca to provide your comments or suggestions.

We hope this manual is a helpful resource for you, and that Mood Walks is a valuable addition to the services that you provide.

Happy trails!

The Importance of Walking Groups in Mental Health Services

This section outlines the value of walking groups and their role in supporting recovery for people who experience mental health issues. The topics covered include:

- How to incorporate physical activity interventions into mental health services
- The physical, mental, and environmental health benefits of walking outdoors
- Existing green exercise programs in mental health services

The Need for Physical Activity in Mental Health Services

The importance of physical activity for the maintenance of both physical health and psychological well-being has been well documented. However, people who experience serious mental illness (SMI) tend to be more sedentary than the general population. People who experience SMI encounter multiple barriers to engaging in physical activity. Social determinants of health, such as limited income and lack of transportation, may limit engagement in mainstream exercise programs. People who experience SMI may lack the confidence and self-esteem to join mainstream groups, and may fear they would be met with stigma and discrimination in such programs. In addition, serious mental illness is often associated with such disabling effects as medication-related weight gain, cognitive impairment, and lack of motivation and energy, all of which pose further challenges to engaging in physical activity.

There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the extensive physical, mental, and social benefits of engaging in physical activity among people who experience SMI. Physical activity can effectively reduce the heightened risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity that people who live with SMI experience. Physical activity bestows a range of mental health benefits, such as decreased stress, improved mood and self-esteem, and increased energy levels. For people who experience SMI, physical activity can help to facilitate recovery. Engaging in physical activity is a “normalizing” experience, focused away from the experience of mental illness. Moreover, physical activity interventions can empower participants by introducing them to an effective, accessible way to manage their own mental well-being.

As community mental health services continue to shift toward a recovery-oriented framework, physical activity interventions become an integral part of service provision. Mental health service providers have established professional relationships with people who experience SMI, and have an understanding of the barriers to engaging in physical activity that this population experiences. Furthermore, community mental health service providers are well positioned to partner with local health-promoting agencies to create programming that is innovative, effective, and sustainable.

Walking is an attractive physical activity for use by mental health service providers, as it is accessible by most participants and can be sustained with minimal funding. It requires little training or equipment, so almost anyone can incorporate walking into their own lives as a wellness-promoting activity. Walking lends itself to socializing, providing a means to counteract the limitations to social interaction that people who live with SMI often experience. Walking groups provide opportunities

for people who may otherwise spend limited time in the community at large to feel supported in exploring their environment. Groups allow participants to develop communication skills, expand social ties, and become more comfortable in social settings. Groups also offer opportunities for peer leaders to emerge, which may add new and valued roles to participants' lives.

The Benefits of Being Outdoors

Recent literature has been focused on the health benefits of being in nature. As we become increasingly reliant on technology and spend less time outdoors, our society has become increasingly removed from the natural world. Some experts argue that we have an innate biological need for connecting with nature. Evidence shows that simply being in nature has benefits for mental health, such as decreased stress, improved concentration, and enhanced mood, and some doctors are prescribing time spent outdoors for their patients.

People who undergo the greatest threats to overall mental well-being, such as high stress, low self-esteem, difficulty concentrating, and depressed mood, experience the greatest benefit from being in nature. Outdoor physical activity interventions are therefore well-suited for people who experience SMI.

Therapeutic use of the natural environment may even have environmental benefits. An emerging field, ecotherapy, is concerned with therapeutic methods committed to both human and environmental health. Ecotherapy posits that as we recognize the health benefits that nature has for us, we may increase our awareness of and concern for the natural world in a mutually beneficial relationship.

Existing Green Exercise Programs in Mental Health Services

Several well-established green exercise programs in mental health services are in the UK. Discovery Quest is a well-known walking and nature therapy program in England. Weekly walks over a 6-month period have resulted in improved self-esteem, communication skills, and overall psychological well-being among participants.

Mind, a national mental health charity in the UK, funds environmental projects through Ecominds. Projects support mental health and well-being for people who experience mental illness. Participants gain confidence and build social connections through outdoor interventions. Although participants experience physical health benefits, interactions with the environment and social contact have been found to be the major motivating factors for participants to sustain their involvement with Ecominds projects.

To find more information about these programs, please see "*The Natural Environment and Mental Health Services*" in the Resources section.

Potential Benefits of Mood Walks

Walking groups are an effective tool in mental health services. A recent survey of mental health organizations found that 77% of those who ran a walking group reported their group was a success! We expect that being involved in Mood Walks may provide the following benefits to a variety of stakeholders:

For participants

- Physical health benefits
 - Increased physical activity levels
 - Improved overall physical fitness
 - Reduced risk for chronic diseases
- Mental health benefits
 - Improved mood and confidence
 - Support for the recovery process
 - Increased feelings of control over one's mental well-being
 - Development and strengthening of coping skills
- Social benefits
 - Increased social interactions and improved social ties
 - Opportunities to develop communication skills
 - Reduction of social barriers to participation in physical activity
 - Peer leadership opportunities
 - Increased exploration of and comfort in the community
- Increased recognition of and participation in walking/hiking as a health-promoting activity
 - Increased awareness of the benefits of physical activity and the natural environment
 - Increased confidence in hiking ability and improved hiking skills
 - More frequent use of trails, conservation areas, and outdoor recreation settings

For your postsecondary institution

- Demonstration of your commitment to holistic, recovery-oriented service provision
- Development of partnerships with recreation service providers and other organizations
- Creation of new volunteer and peer-leader positions
- A new way for staff to connect with students
- Improved job satisfaction and stress management among staff members
- Support for a health-oriented workplace culture
- Increased awareness of the links between recovery, physical activity, and the natural environment
- Improved implementation capacity for physical activity interventions
- Shared knowledge and expertise among project partners and other postsecondary institutions

For the mental health service sector at large

- Support for holistic, recovery-oriented mental health policies
- Increased awareness of mental health issues
- Cross-sectoral involvement in mental health promotion

For the greater community

- Improved sharing of knowledge and resources through partnership
- Greater social inclusion through reduced stigmatization of and discrimination against people with mental illness
- Improved awareness of the importance of creating walkable communities
- Increased environmental awareness and usage of conservation areas and other natural settings
- Increased recognition of the value of conservation areas and other natural settings to our overall health

Funding Mood Walks Groups

The cost of running a Mood Walks program will vary based on campus needs and resources. On average, groups have been able to successfully start a program with \$500 to \$1000. Some funding is often needed to cover costs of transportation, food, or other materials associated with participation.

Program contributions can come from your own budget, from cash donations or corporate sponsors, from grants, or from in-kind contributions such as donated goods, commodities, services (e.g., volunteer hours), equipment, or meeting space.

Mood Walks group leaders should track their budget related to the group, as well as the value of in-kind contributions. Keeping a record of in-kind contributions is just as important as tracking cash expenditures, as it helps to show the “real” total cost of running a program.

Calculating the Value of In-Kind Contributions: Examples

- A local sporting goods store donates T-shirts and water bottles to your group. The cost is the estimated total cash value of the donation.
- Your local conservation area waives entry fees for your group, or provides a training space for your Safe Hiker training free of charge. The cost is the estimated cash value of entry or rental fees.
- Volunteers pre-walk a hike for your group. Volunteer hours are calculated at minimum wage (\$14/hour) unless acting in their professional capacity, which is calculated at a fair market value. The attributed cost is the total cash value of their time.
- A permanent staff member (other than one of the group’s designated leaders) provides a portion of their time to the project. This person receives a salary equivalent to \$15/hour. The cost is the total cash value of their time.

Please see the Online Appendices for an *Expense Tracking Form* and usage instructions.

A 15-Week Mood Walks Plan

Here is an outline of how you could conduct a group over 15 weeks, along with estimated time requirements. The order in which these events occurs is flexible—this outline is meant to give you an idea of what is involved in running a Mood Walks group from week to week. You will notice that the first several weeks will require more time; once the group is in action, time demands on group leaders will decrease. Activities in bold are related to evaluation. See *“Evaluating Your Mood Walks Group”* for details about evaluation, and *“Mood Walks Evaluation Tools”* for the documents.

Week	Goal	Activities	Time
1 & 2	Advertising and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a Mood Walks bulletin board with posters about the upcoming Mood Walks group and introductory session • Tell students, staff, and others involved in your campus about Mood Walks • Connect with project partners at Hike Ontario and Conservation Ontario • Advertise volunteer positions • Attend “Orientation to MoodWalks” webinar • Begin to plan routes and create schedule • Review safety plans and gather safety equipment • Arrange transportation, if required 	10 hours
3	Introductory Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite partners to join you in an information session for potential participants • Plan session and copy materials/handouts • Invite participants and run the session 	4 hours
4	Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite interested group members to attend an orientation session about the group • Plan session and copy materials/handouts • Run the session, including participant goal-setting • Complete Participants’ Mood Walks Pre-Program Questionnaire • Arrange Safe Hiker training with Hike Ontario partner or contact info@moodwalks.ca (see <i>“Hike Ontario Training for Mood Walks Participants”</i>) 	4 hours

continued...

5	Safe Hiker Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure training space is equipped with required equipment (see “<i>Hike Ontario Training for Mood Walks Participants</i>”) • Host training 	10 hours
6 & 7	Group Walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a theme for the walks • Prepare snacks • Lead the walks • Invite participants to upcoming Safe Hiker training • Debrief with partners, volunteers, students • Debrief with participants and look for opportunities for peer leadership • Update bulletin board and newsletter posts 	3 hours per week
8 & 9	Group Walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select a theme for walks • Prepare snacks • Lead walks • Debrief with partners, volunteers, and/or students • Debrief with participants and look for peer leadership opportunities • Update bulletin board and post newsletter • Complete Leader’s Tracking and Sign-In for Participants Forms 	3 hours per week
10	Midpoint Check-In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check in with participants’ progress toward goals • Discuss Certified Hike Leader training opportunity with participants (see “<i>Hike Ontario Training for Mood Walks Participants</i>”) • Get feedback about the group so far • Go for a short walk • Complete Leader’s Tracking and Sign-In for Participants forms • Teleconference with leaders from other mental health agencies 	5 hours

continued...

11–13	Group Walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update bulletin board and post newsletter • Select a theme for walks • Prepare snacks • Lead walks • Debrief with partners, volunteers, and/or students • Debrief with participants and look for peer leadership opportunities • Plan route for upcoming conservation area walk • Complete Leader’s Tracking and Sign-In for Participants Forms 	3 hours per week
14	Walk at a Conservation Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite partners from Hike Ontario and Conservation Ontario • Finalize transportation arrangements • Prepare snacks and lead the walk • Debrief with partners, volunteers, students • Teleconference with leaders from other postsecondary institutions and partners from the Center for Innovations in Campus Mental health, OCASI, Hike Ontario and Conservation Ontario • Complete Leader’s Tracking and Sign-In for Participants Forms 	6 hours
15	Final Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update bulletin board and post newsletter • Go for a final walk (See “Sample Themed Walks—Your Favourite Route”) • Complete Leader’s Tracking and Sign-In for Participants Forms 	3 hours
	Wrap-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run Wrap-up Session (see “Mood Walks Evaluation”) • Complete Participants’ Mood Walks Follow-up Questionnaire and facilitate Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group 	7 hours

continued...

- Attend “Sharing Your Successes” webinar with other walk leaders and partners from hiking clubs and Conservation Authorities
- Complete and submit Final MoodWalks Report

Total
Time:
70
hours

Time-Saving Tips

Involving student leaders, partners, or community volunteers can reduce the time demand on you! Some ideas:

- Ask your hiking club or conservation area partner to suggest walking routes for your group.
- See if a volunteer may be able to pre-walk your routes and provide you with feedback.
- Look for roles for participants who may be interested in helping out, perhaps by maintaining the group bulletin board, creating a group schedule, or receiving feedback from other participants.
- Find volunteers who may be interested in planning special events, such as guest speakers or an awards ceremony, or leading group activities such as a Photovoice project or a goal-setting session.
- Ask for volunteers willing and able to help participants complete the Participants’ Mood Walks Pre-Program and Follow-up Questionnaires if required.

What Makes a Good Walk Leader?

An enthusiastic leader is key to a successful walking group! A group leader should:

- Be enthusiastic, friendly, and easy to talk with, making walks fun
- Be encouraging and supportive
- Enjoy walking and be familiar with various routes and trails of varying difficulty
- Be organized, reliable and punctual
- Have strong group facilitation and observation skills
- Recognize progress and encourage participants to keep coming back
- Value group safety and risk management
- Know basic first-aid procedures
- Be able to respond effectively to unforeseen circumstances

Remember that leadership has a real impact on the success of the group.

Source: Walking Program Leader Handbook (BC Recreation and Parks Association)

Working with Partners

Partnerships are advisable when starting any health-promoting initiative, including Mood Walks. Partnerships improve your group's success by:

- Increasing your group's visibility in the community
- Affording you access to additional resources
- Supporting your group's sustainability
- Fostering a sense of accountability

Partnerships also build your organization's capacity and strengthen ties within your community.

Partnerships can also be an effective means to lessen the stigma associated with mental illness. Working with other community organizations affords them the opportunity for *first-hand interaction* with people who experience mental health issues, which can reduce stigma and discrimination. By partnering with you, community organizations will have opportunities to increase their comfort level in engaging with people who experience mental health issues while benefiting from your expertise.

Effective partnerships benefit all participants, organizations, and communities involved, and will help to support and strengthen your group.

Mood Walks Partnerships

Ideally, Mood Walks groups will run in conjunction with partners from Hike Ontario, Conservation Ontario, Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health and Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. What these partnerships will look like will vary by site: partners will work together to determine the best way to utilize each other's strengths, considering available time and resources. Your partners might participate in your group by attending regularly and leading a guided hike, or by providing instrumental support through information and resources.

In all cases, the faculty staff will assume leadership of the group, especially regarding interactions with group participants. However, your partners' knowledge and expertise will likely be of great benefit to your group.

Here are some partnership activities that we envision.

What a Campus Could Bring to a Partnership

It is very likely that your partners will look to you for information and support about working with people who experience mental health issues.

Ninety-six percent of Conservation Ontario staff who responded to a recent Mood Walks survey would like information about how to engage with people who experience mental health issues, and Hike Ontario respondents identified lack of knowledge and comfort engaging with people who experience mental health issues as the single greatest barrier to their participation in Mood Walks.

Here are some ways you might offer guidance and support about engaging with people with mental health issues:

- Before groups begin, invite partners to your campus for a tour and introduce them to some of your students. Have a discussion about the participants you will be working with and how partners can be supportive.
- Provide information and resources about mental illness.
- Offer to debrief with partners after Mood Walks sessions.
- Invite partners to attend workshops that may be of interest.

In addition, as a recognized postsecondary institution you can support your partners by spreading the word about their activities and initiatives, and looking for ways your students or campus could become involved. Here are some ideas:

- Is there a clean-up effort or trail maintenance group that Mood Walks participants might be interested in helping out?
- Is there a weekend hike that you, participants, or other staff members could attend?
- Can you become part of Conservation Ontario's Healthy Hikes Challenge, as a Mood Walks group or as an agency? Could you offer to help out at a Healthy Hikes event? You could lead an event or provide information about mental health. See "*Group Challenges—Healthy Hikes*" for more details.

What Your Partners Could Bring to Mood Walks

Your partners are likely to have a range of knowledge, expertise, and resources that will support your Mood Walks group.

Extend an open invitation to partners to be as involved with your group as their resources permit, and allow them to contribute in the way they feel most comfortable. Be sure to keep partners informed about what is happening with your group, and invite partners to Mood Walks events.

Here are some ways partners might contribute:

- Partners are likely to be excellent sources of knowledge about local greenspaces and hiking trails. Ask if they can provide maps of local conservation areas and trails, or if they can recommend a route for your group. These materials could then be posted around your agency.

- Partners may be interested in leading a Mood Walks hike, helping to plan a walk (perhaps by pre-walking your intended route), or attending the group as a supportive volunteer.
- Your Conservation Authority may be able offer your group a training space to host your Safe Hiker training session.
- Your hiking-club partner may be able to offer reduced or waived membership fees for participants to join your local hiking club.
- Partners may be social media-savvy and able to promote your Mood Walks group on their website or Twitter account.

Your Conservation Authority partner may also be interested in attending Safe Hiker training, or becoming a Certified Hike Leader (see *“Hike Ontario Training for Mood Walks Participants”*).

For more information about creating and maintaining successful partnerships, see *“Working with Partners: Forming Solid Partnerships.”*

Working with Other Community Partners

Involving other community organizations in your Mood Walks group helps to get the word out and thereby increase community engagement. Furthermore, community partners may be able to support you with equipment, transportation, and merchandise.

Some examples of community organizations suitable for partnership are listed below, along with potential resources they may possess:

- Fitness and Community Centres, such as the YMCA and other community recreation centres, could provide meeting space for your group.
- Local businesses may provide free or discounted walking apparel and equipment, or provide snacks for your group.
- Local community agencies serving immigrants may have clients or staff who want to become involved with your group.
- Local community agencies may have clients interested in volunteer opportunities (see *“Working with Volunteers and Students”*).
- Community Groups and Aboriginal Centres can be valuable partners, particularly if they reflect a cultural background similar to that of at least some participants.

Forming Solid Partnerships

Investing energy in developing and maintaining partnerships helps to ensure partners' expectations are met and the partnership is beneficial to all involved. It can be helpful to have a conversation early in your partnership to discuss each party's expectations, hopes, and goals. Introduce your campus and explain the goals of your walking group, as well as why you chose that particular organization to partner with. You may also want to explore your partner's hopes and goals in partnering with you.

Some questions to get you started include:

- How would you like your organization to benefit from this partnership?
- What resources or supports can our campus provide for you?
- What role will your organization take on as part of this walking group?
What actions will you take?
- Do you have any concerns about becoming involved with this walking group?
- What might you or your organization need from us to support your participation?
- What would indicate a successful partnership to you?

Clarifying expectations from the beginning can be helpful in managing relationship dynamics. Be sure to check in frequently with your partners as to their perspective on how the partnership is progressing, and address any perceived conflicts. Strong partnerships require open communication from all parties to ensure the partnership is mutually beneficial.

For more information about developing health-promoting partnerships, see *The Partnership Protocol: Principles and Approach for Successful Private/Not-for-Profit Partnerships in Physical Activity and Sport (ParticipACTION, 2010)*.

Planning Your Mood Walks Group

Here are some things to consider when planning your group.

Health Needs of Participants

It is important to keep in mind the specific physical needs of participants when planning your Mood Walks group.

Older Adults

According to the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, older adults should engage in activity that strengthens muscle and bone twice weekly, such as resistance training using weights. In addition, adults 65 or older with poor mobility may want to add mobility activities to enhance balance and decrease falls. As is true for all adults, more activity provides more health benefits!

The *Physical Activity and Aging Resource Guide*, developed by the Canadian Centre for Activity and Aging, reports that to best promote mental well-being in older participants, exercise programs should:

- Be designed with the needs and abilities of sedentary older people in mind
- Have a group format and be community-based
- Be run by trained leaders
- Occur at least twice a week, with sessions about 45 minutes long
- Include the following segments: warm-up, cardiovascular endurance, cool-down, muscle strengthening, balance, and flexibility

Be aware of the challenges older adults may experience in engaging in an exercise program. Be especially vigilant about warming up and cooling down, and be prepared to accommodate participants who use mobility devices. Encourage older adults to begin with 10-minute bouts of exercise and progress gradually, according to their comfort level.

Youth

The World Health Organization and the *Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines* developed by ParticipACTION recommend that youth and children get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day. Benefits of active young people include improved bone health, cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, and metabolic and cardiovascular health biomarkers. Additional benefits can include better performance in school, feeling happier, increased self-confidence, skill development, as well as making friends and having fun! Suggested activities should:

- Be as aerobic as possible
- Include vigorous-intensity activities that can strength muscles and bone at least three times a week
- Be active 60 minutes or longer — physical activity that extends beyond 60 minutes will provide additional health benefits for youth

Youth and children with disabilities should be encouraged to meet these recommendations whenever possible, with careful consideration given to the amount and types of appropriate physical activity as determined by their health care provider. Inactive young people can be encouraged through progressive increases in activity to eventually meet the 60-minute target. For a young person who has not been doing any physical activity, even doing amounts below recommended levels will provide them with more benefits than doing none at all.

Frequency, Meeting Time, and Format

How often should your group meet?

A key first decision to make is how frequently your group will meet. At least once weekly is advisable; more frequent meetings will have a greater benefit to your participants' physical health, but may feel overwhelming. Frequency decisions will depend on your organization's resources, as well as input from your participants: how frequently can they envision themselves attending a group?

When?

In terms of choosing a meeting time, ask participants what time-slot they would prefer (if you have some flexibility in terms of scheduling). Participants may initially be opposed to morning meeting times; however, participants who commit to morning walks often report that a productive, enjoyable day follows.

For how long?

Another important decision is how long your group will meet for. Keep in mind that physical activity guidelines developed by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology state that adults need at least 150 minutes weekly, or about 30 minutes most days of the week, of moderate-to-vigorous aerobic physical activity, which will cause some sweating and harder breathing. Youth and children require more, and should have at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.

A reasonable target might be for your group to meet once weekly for about an hour. This will ensure that your participants have a good start on their weekly activity requirements, and allow the group members to feel comfortable together.

Choosing Accessible Locations and Routes

It is good practice to choose a route you are familiar with, or to walk your route before a group visit: "Know before you go." Several factors will influence your choice of route: location, accessibility, scenery, terrain, overall safety. Some of your group members may require a mobility device, and you will want to ensure they can participate in your group safely and comfortably; see *"Accommodating Participants with Mobility Challenges"* for more information.

Be sure to describe the route and any hazards or challenges to your group before you set out. Explain your reasoning to participants so they understand why a particular route was chosen. Some walks may be chosen solely to appreciate the scenery, whereas other routes may be chosen for the challenge they present. Teaching participants about how a route is chosen will support them in

planning walks outside of the group.

Here are some things to consider in planning your route, keeping accessibility in mind:

Location and neighbourhood

Make sure start and finish points are accessible and convenient. Is public transportation available? Parking? Consider if toilets, shade, water, and rest areas are available along the way. Identify alternative shorter routes for those who are less fit, especially when they are beginners at group walking.

Try to choose a location where participants will feel safe. Avoid walking through areas that people may find worrisome, such as dark, narrow alleys. Look for scenery that is varied and enjoyable.

Be sure your route is easy to follow. Complicated routes with a lot of obstacles may frustrate and overwhelm participants, and make it difficult for your group to stay together.

Traffic and road crossings

Traffic creates noise and a less relaxing environment to walk in. Crossing a busy street can be challenging with a large group. Such crossings may also be challenging or intimidating for participants with mobility concerns; look for curb cuts at street crossings. Try to find a controlled crossing, such as a traffic signal or pedestrian crossing area. If a controlled crossing is not available, be sure your crossing spot allows plenty of visibility, so that you can see oncoming traffic and drivers can see the group.

Hike Ontario recommends that all participants line up between the leader and the final walker (the “sweep”). The leader directs the group when to cross, and everyone should cross together. Where room to do this does not exist (a steep embankment or vertical wall, etc.), you may have to cross in smaller groups. Be very directive at this time. Be aware that in a large group, walkers tend to follow the person in front of them, without exercising their normal caution.

Some paths may be shared with cyclists. Be sure to explain trail etiquette to participants: stay on the right side of the path, and do not block the trail.

Remain alert and aware.

Terrain

Consider the path you will be walking on. Is it wide enough to accommodate several walkers at once, or mobility devices? Is it an even, nonslip surface? Will it become muddy when wet? In the winter, is the path cleared of snow and ice? Poor surface conditions can cause falls. Be aware of any prickly or stinging plants you may encounter in forested areas.

Hills and stairs add challenge to a walk. Handrails are a help. Hills and stairs may be best included in the middle of a walk, so that participants are warmed up but not too tired to reach the top. Look for ramps that can be used as an alternative to stairs.

Source: Walking Program Leader Handbook (BC Recreation and Parks Association)

Accommodating Participants with Mobility Challenges

Some participants in your group may have challenges with mobility. Here are some tips to support their participation in your group:

- Choose routes that allow for a variety of speeds and distances. For example, an out-and-back route will allow participants to turn around at a specific time, whereas a loop route requires all participants to cover the same distance.
- Look for “rail trails” in your area—former railway tracks that have been converted into walking paths. They tend to be flat and wide, and may make a good route for participants with mobility issues.
- Ensure that your route has benches for rest stops along the way.
- Look for curb cuts at street crossings, and ramps as an alternative to stairs.
- Make participants aware of the route before the day of your walk. Participants with mobility challenges may prefer to check out the route beforehand, on their own or perhaps with a group volunteer.
- Make sure participants with mobility challenges are accompanied by another participant or volunteer at all times.

See “*Choosing an Accessible Location and Route*” for more information.

Safety Preparedness

Be prepared for the unexpected on walks. Thorough planning and careful route selection can help mitigate risk, but there is always the chance a medical emergency and/or psychological event could occur. For some participants, being outdoors and being in a social setting can be an emotion-provoking experience. Not only that, but participants who are not used to being active may be challenged by the physical demands of the walk.

Review your organization’s safety standards and risk-management policies related to physical activity programs, and discuss with co-facilitators, volunteers, and students how to respond in case of emergency. Adopt the rule that “No one walks alone”; this will allow facilitators to monitor the mental and physical state of participants, and respond to changes quickly. Be sure to always carry supplies that would be necessary in an emergency. Check in with participants frequently, and encourage rest breaks at need. See “*Leading an Inclusive Group*” for more information about warning signs to watch for during a walk.

Safety in Bear Country

Bears may be a concern in some areas of the province. Here are some tips about staying safe in bear country, courtesy of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

Avoid Encounters

- Never feed or approach a bear.
- Make noise as you move through wooded areas – especially in areas where visibility is restricted or where background noise is high, such as near streams and waterfalls. Singing, whistling or talking will alert bears to your presence, giving them an opportunity to avoid you.
- While outdoors, keep your eyes and ears open. Do not wear headphones. Scan your surroundings regularly.
- Watch for signs of bear activity: tracks, claw marks on trees, flipped-over rocks, or fresh bear droppings.
- Keep dogs leashed. Uncontrolled dogs may actually lead a bear back to you.

Think About Safety

- Carry and have readily accessible a whistle or an air horn.
- Carry and learn how use bear pepper-spray. Know its limitations.

If You Should Spot or Encounter a Black Bear:

- Stop. Do not panic. Remain calm.
- Do not try to get closer to the bear.
- Do not run, climb a tree, or swim.
- Always watch the bear. While watching the bear, slowly back away until the bear is out of sight.
- If you are near a building or vehicle, get inside as a precaution.
- Leave the area and report bear activity to others you meet.

Equipment and Supplies

For every walk, the following items are essential. Encourage participants to bring their own, but ensure group facilitators are always prepared. See “*Helping Participants Prepare for a Walk*” for tips about discussing how to prepare for a walk with participants, including dress, nutrition, hydration, and sun safety.

Food and Drinks:

- Water, especially important in the hot summer months!
- High-energy snacks, such as granola bars and trail mix

Communication Devices:

- A cell phone
- A whistle to summon help

Safety Supplies:

- A small amount of money in case of emergency
- A first aid kit
- Waterproof matches
- Bear whistle or spray, if you are in bear country! (See “*Safety in Bear Country*” for more information.)

Weather-Related Gear:

- Sunscreen
- Hiking poles and icers (strap-on ice cleats) in the winter!

If you are embarking on a longer, more remote hike, the following items may be helpful.

Orientation Supplies:

- A map
- Compass or GPS
- Flashlight

Items to Keep You Warm, Dry, and Comfortable:

- An emergency blanket
- Rain gear
- Extra clothes and socks

- Hand sanitizer
- Toilet paper
- Bug repellent

Other Items to Bring:

- Pocket knife
- Duct tape (you might wrap some around a water bottle)

Healthy Snacks

Bringing a healthy group snack to share following a walk can provide a good opportunity to socialize, as well as to model healthy eating habits. Food is also a good motivator! Here are some ideas for snacks to share after a walk:

- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Nuts or trail mix
- Popcorn
- Yogurt (can be kept in a cooler in a trunk, during a walk!)
- Cheese and crackers

Working with Volunteers and Students

A volunteer can be an invaluable addition to a walking group. They often bring energy, a fresh outlook, specific areas of expertise, and a willingness to learn. Here are some tips for attracting volunteers.

Advertising a Volunteer Position

Writing a job description for a volunteer position will help you to clarify the role you have in mind, and ensure that you attract a volunteer whose expectations align with yours. If you have difficulty recruiting volunteers from your campus you may consider a local volunteer organization that advertises opportunities. Many community agencies helping new immigrants have volunteer programs available. Craigslist and Kijiji are two websites where you could advertise a volunteer position at no cost.

Orienting Volunteers

It is essential to gauge volunteers' understanding of mental illness and comfort level in engaging with people who experience mental health issues. Some mental health organizations provide formal training and orientation for volunteers. If your school does not, some useful topics to cover when orienting volunteers include:

- The role of a volunteer as part of the group
- Inclusive communication and appropriate topics to discuss with participants
- Setting boundaries and sharing personal information
- How to respond if a participant experiences a physical or psychological crisis
- How to communicate ideas or concerns following a group walk or the program as a whole

If volunteers require more education about mental health issues, the Mental Health First Aid course offered through the Mental Health Commission of Canada (www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca) is a useful introduction to signs and symptoms of common mental health issues (although there is often a registration fee). The Canadian Mental Health Association (www.ontario.cmha.ca) is a source of useful information, as is the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (www.camh.net).

However, working firsthand with people who experience mental health issues is likely to provide the best learning! Making sure that you are available to answer questions and provide feedback to students and volunteers will help ensure a rich learning experience for them. Check out "*Working with Volunteers — Keeping Volunteers Engaged*" for tips.

Keeping Volunteers Engaged

Volunteers are invaluable; it is worth making a special effort to ensure that volunteers recognize the significance of their roles. Here are some tips:

- Get to know your volunteers and their preferences. Allow them to guide their own volunteer experience as much as possible, respecting their time and comfort level.
- Address volunteers frequently and publicly by name in your group, to ensure group participants are familiar with them.
- Check in regularly to ensure volunteers are benefiting from their experience.
- Communicate your gratitude for their volunteer services on a regular basis, and provide concrete examples of the impact they have on your group. Support participants in expressing their gratitude as well, perhaps by getting the group to sign a card for a volunteer on a special occasion.
- Look for specific tasks or roles for volunteers. They may be suited to leading a stretching session before a walk, keeping to the rear of the group (that is, acting as the “sweep” on walks), or welcoming new members on their first outing. These duties can be introduced gradually, as volunteers become more comfortable.
- Debrief with volunteers regularly, either in person, by phone, or through email. Discuss any tricky or uncomfortable situations that volunteers may have experienced. Act as a role model, and invite questions about how you interact with participants or decisions you have made. Try to facilitate a rich learning experience for your volunteers.

Source: Keeping Volunteers Actively Engaged and Productive (NAMI, 2010)

Attracting Participants

An essential step in running a successful Mood Walks group is to get the word out! You need students to gain momentum and make your group a success. Here is some advice about how to attract participants to your group.

Advertising Your Group

Advertising may occur at different points of group development, for both new and established groups. Marketing your program can help you attract new members, remind members who have taken a break to rejoin, restart your group after a hiatus, or promote a special event.

Your advertisements should focus on the benefits of walking groups that are likely to be most valuable to your target participants—see box below. The Mood Walks poster highlights these benefits, and the information can be adapted to suit your campus needs. Effective advertising uses the language of the people whom you want to attract, and:

- Grabs people’s attention —“That sounds good.”
- Gains their interest —“Think I’ll read on.”
- Encourages them to make a decision —“I will do that!”—and to take action —“I’ll pick up the phone and join.”

Source: Factsheet 1—Promote Your Walks (Let’s Walk Cymru)

In a recent Mood Walks survey of people who experience mental illness, the most important benefits of joining a walking group were:

- Increased physical activity level
- Improved mood
- Improved overall physical health

Social interactions are also important in keeping participants motivated to continue with the group!

Using Motivational Interviewing to Engage Participants

Motivational interviewing (MI) can be an effective tool in supporting students to make the decision to join your walking group, as well as for keeping motivation up as the group progresses. MI empowers people to decide to change health-related behaviour by helping them resolve ambivalence, build intrinsic motivation, and strengthen commitment. This technique, pioneered by psychologists William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick, has been widely applied in a range of health-related settings.

MI is a client-centered communication technique in which both parties aim to achieve mutual understanding. By using open-ended questions and *listening* to potential group members, you can empower people to choose to make healthy changes in their lives, instead of being prescriptive or authoritative. Your aim is to help group members move from status talk ('I can't' or 'It doesn't work') to change talk, where new possibilities are considered ('I want to' or 'I can'). MI recognizes that ambivalence is a necessary phase in behaviour change and aims to help people resolve this ambivalence to make healthy changes. The following techniques are useful in one-to-one conversations with potential group members, and are also helpful during group introduction, orientation, or goal-setting sessions.

Strategies of Motivational Interviewing

A good way to keep MI strategies in mind is the **OARS** acronym:

- Open-ended, probing questions
- Affirming or Acknowledging responses
- Reflective listening
- Summarizing

Open-ended, probing questions

In MI, questions typically start with 'what,' not 'why.' What-questions invite discussion and convey genuine interest, whereas why-questions often make people feel defensive. What-questions also supply more information so that you can better understand potential group members and their needs and goals, as well as resources or supports that they may require.

The following questions may be useful in exploring a potential group participant's feelings before joining the group:

- I have some information about a walking group that is starting up. Would you like me to share it with you?
- What's important to you about your health and well-being? Your social interactions? The way your days are spent?
- What would be a benefit for you of being part of this walking group?
- What would you need to be a part of the group?
- What could I do to help?

Affirming or acknowledging responses

Your goal in responding is to convey a sincere acknowledgment of the difficulties and challenges your potential group member has experienced, while supporting and promoting their self-efficacy and validating their feelings. Look for past experiences that demonstrate their strengths and successes, and highlight them. Affirming often goes hand-in-hand with reflective listening.

Reflective listening

Reflective listening requires being actively engaged in conversation, having a genuine interest in the person you are speaking to, and desiring a true understanding of their experience. Mirroring, or reflecting back what you have heard, demonstrates your interest and allows you to verify that your understanding is accurate. Reflecting feelings you have observed is the most involved application of reflective listening.

- It sounds like you have faced some challenges in keeping up with exercise, like having some tough medication side-effects and feeling kind of sluggish. I'm impressed that you make the effort to walk to the grocery store once a week.

Summarizing

Summaries are often helpful at a turning point or toward the end of a conversation. Summaries reinforce what has been said, show that you have been listening carefully, and prepare the client to move on. Summarizing can help potential group members clarify their goals and values related to joining the group, as well as highlighting feelings of ambivalence and helping potential participants to recognize discrepancies.

- I've heard that you think a walking group could be a good way to get some exercise, but you have a difficult time with mornings.

Four Principles of Motivational Interviewing

Keep these principles in mind when trying to engage group members:

1. Express Empathy

Be sure to convey to potential participants that you understand that joining the group may be challenging or intimidating for them, and acknowledge their struggles. Empathy needs to be genuine and rooted in respect for your potential participants.

2. Develop Discrepancy

You want potential participants to become aware of their own decision-making process, and recognize whether their current behaviour aligns with their values and goals. It can be helpful to explore the pros and cons of joining your walking group, or the likely effects upon them of joining the group versus not joining the group. You might help potential participants identify small steps they could take in order to eventually join the group.

3. Roll with Resistance

Avoid being prescriptive or giving unsolicited advice. Do not argue with potential members, as arguing in favour of a position leads to an increased commitment. For example, if a potential member tells you he cannot join the group because he doesn't have time (although you know that he does), acknowledge that he is feeling busy and avoid sharing observations that contradict him. Your goal is for him to recognize that he needs to change and to make his own argument to do so, perhaps by supporting him in recognizing that his health is very important to him.

4. Support Self-Efficacy

Communicate that joining your group is an attainable, realistic goal. Be optimistic that change is possible and highlight past successes, while acknowledging that change may be difficult. Try to help potential participants recognize strengths and supports that may help their efforts.

*Source: What are you willing to change to promote your patients' oral health?
Find out how Motivational Interviewing can help you help your patients
(Clive S. Friedman, Don Morrow, & Jennifer D. Irwin, 2013, in the Ontario Dental Journal)*

Running Introduction and Orientation Sessions

Participants will want some information about what to expect from your Mood Walks group before committing. An *Introduction Session* can be a useful tool in attracting participants to your group; an effective introduction generates enthusiasm and pulls participants toward joining. Running an introductory session will also allow you to screen participants' readiness to engage in physical activity.

Once participants have committed to being a part of the group, an *Orientation Session* will allow you to get to know participants' goals and needs, and provide more detailed information about the group.

This information could be provided on a one-to-one basis, or be combined into one session.

In any case, here are some ideas for how you might introduce participants to your group.

A Sample Introduction Session

Icebreakers and Activities

- Start with an icebreaker. Participants might introduce themselves and share a favourite place to walk, now or in the past.
- Invite participants to brainstorm all of the benefits of walking outside. Review ideas they came up with, and circulate the Mood Walks infographic poster and invite discussion.

Information about Your Walking Group

Some information to share might include:

- When and where the group meets, and how participants will get there
- The format of a typical group (warm-up, 40-minute walk, stretches, snacks)
- Any requirements in terms of mobility and general fitness level (e.g., participants must be able to use their mobility device independently or provide their own support person)
- How many participants you expect to attend
- Volunteers who may be involved

Health Screening and the PAR-Q

- Let participants know that being more physically active will provide numerous health benefits. Some people, however, should check with their doctor before increasing their physical activity levels.
- Hand out the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q) and collect the completed questionnaires from participants. The PAR-Q is a one-page form to assess if participants

should check with a doctor before becoming more physically active. It is included in the online Appendices and can be printed from the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology’s website (www.csep.ca).

- Let participants know that answering “Yes” to any of the PAR-Q questions means that they will need to be screened by a doctor, either in person or by phone, before joining the walks.
- If participants do not have family doctors, Community Health Centres offer clinical care from doctors and other health practitioners for people who may face barriers to accessing health care.

The “Are You Ready to Be Physically Active?” Tool

Even if participants are physically ready to be more active, they may not be mentally ready to make a change. Have participants complete the “*Are You Ready to Be Physically Active?*” questionnaire included in the online Appendices. Here are some ideas for discussing the results:

- Get a show of hands how many people chose A, B, C, D, and E.
- Remember where people are at. This tool can also help you as a leader recognize what stage your participants are at and how to provide support, as follows.

	Stage	How to Support Participant
A	Pre-Contemplation: Not ready to make a change right now.	Encourage continued reflection about the group and the benefits of exercise.
B, C	Contemplation and Preparation: At a good stage to join a new group.	Discuss how to overcome any barriers or challenges.
D, E	Action and Maintenance: Familiar with benefits of physical activity. May make good peer leaders.	Provide continuing support and encouragement. Look for leadership opportunities.

See “*Using Motivational Interviewing to Engage Participants*” for more information about how to support participants.

- Find out who walks regularly. Find out where people walk for exercise, and where they walk as transportation.
- As a group, brainstorm two lists:
 - o Challenges to Being Physically Active
 - o What Helps You Stay Physically Active (Group members who are not active now can think about a time in the past when they were active, or what keeps the active people they know motivated.)
- Discuss how joining a walking group could help participants overcome the challenges they listed, and how a group could provide some of the support that helps keep people active.

Are You Ready to Join?

Get a show of hands as to who would like to join, who is unsure, and who is not interested. Use the following questions for discussion.

- For participants who are “in”:
 - What they are hoping to get out of the group?
- For participants who are unsure:
 - How will they make their decision?
 - Are they open to trying the group to see how it goes?
- For participants who are not interested:
 - What would need to be different for them to join?
 - How will they keep up their physical activity?

Your aim is for participants to leave your introduction session feeling excited about the possibility of joining the group and making some changes in their lives. Be sure to assure potential participants that it is common to feel intimidated when joining a new group, and these feelings tend to pass—walking can be an easy way to connect with others. Highlight the benefits of participating and share your enthusiasm. Be an inspiration for others to make a change!

*Sources: Ecotherapy (Mind for Mental Health)
Walk This Way Leader’s Guide (PARC)*

A Sample Orientation Session

After an introduction session, participants may need some time to reflect on the material you have provided so far and decide if the group is right for them. Once participants have decided to join the group, an orientation session can be an opportunity to:

- Sign physical activity waivers and consents to use of image
- Set a goal for participating in the group
- Complete the Mood Walks Pre-Program Questionnaire
- Set norms and rules for your group
- Describe how participants should get ready for a walk (see “*Helping Participants Prepare for a Walk*”)

Signing Participant Agreements

- Let participants know that although they will receive numerous health benefits by participating in the group, there is a small degree of risk involved. Let participants know that the program is being planned carefully to limit the risk involved.
- Explain to participants that information pertaining to the Mood Walks evaluation will be collected as part of the group, and explain how this information will be used (see “*Evaluating Your Mood Walks Group*”). Outlining this information at the beginning of participants’ involvement with a group conveys respect and transparency, and communicates that your participants’ preferences and need for privacy are important to you.
- Ask participants about their comfort level in having their photograph taken and used in promotional materials for your group.

Your organization may have its own consent forms that you can use. If not, check out the “*Physical Liability Waiver*” and “*Consent to Use of Images*” forms in the online Appendices.

Goal-Setting

It is useful for participants to set a goal for their participation in the group. Also, the Mood Walks Pre-Program Questionnaire asks participants to identify a personal goal. See “*Goal-Setting*” for information about how to help participants set goals for themselves.

The Mood Walks Pre-Program Questionnaire

Participants are required to complete this questionnaire before the walking group starts, and an orientation session presents an appropriate opportunity. See “*Evaluating Your Mood Walks Group*” for more information.

Group Rules and Norms

Creating group norms can be a team-building process that increases participants’ feeling of ownership over the group. These may be modified as your group develops. Groups can create their own rules about how they would like the group to operate.

Here are some example rules:

- Respect your body and go at your own pace.
- Let the group know if you need a break, or if you are not feeling well.
- Watch out for each other; let others know about hazards.
- No one walks alone!

Areas for group discussion might include:

- How long to wait for latecomers
- Headphone and cellphone usage while on walks
- Smoking while on walks
- Bringing pets or other people to the group

For more information about group rules, see the “*Frequently Asked Questions by Participants*” section.

Helping Participants Prepare for a Walk

Here are some tips to review with participants.

Dressing for a Walk

- Wear comfortable, nonrestrictive clothing.
- Dress in layers, since climate and body temperature both change. Light layers can be removed and tied around the waist or shoulders.
- Wear loose-fitting layers in warm weather to allow ventilation, and close-fitting layers in cool weather for insulation.
- Synthetic fibres designed to wick moisture, such as polyester or polypropylene, are better to wear against skin than cotton in cool weather. Cotton absorbs water (such as sweat) and can leave you feeling chilled. Similarly, jeans tend to be uncomfortable in humid or rainy conditions.
- An outer shell to protect against wind or rain can be handy.

Having appropriate clothing and footwear will greatly improve your participants' comfort level when walking, and may help to prevent injury. See “*Troubleshooting: Overcoming Obstacles*” for ways to support participants in obtaining gear.

Footwear

- Well-fitting socks will help prevent blisters.
- Be sure to have a well-fitting, supportive, sturdy, broken-in shoe before heading out on a hike. Shoes should have:
 - o A snug fit
 - o A well-cushioned heel
 - o Good arch support
 - o Adequate toe room
 - o Flexible, slip-resistant soles
- Look for soles with a tough outer layer of rubber and a soft mid-sole that runs the full length of the shoe.

Source: Walking Program Walk Leader Handbook (BCRPA)

Sun Safety

In the summer, be sure to discuss the effects of the sun. Here are some tips for summer walks:

- Cover up—Wear light-coloured, long-sleeved shirts, pants, and a wide-brimmed hat made from breathable fabric.
- Wear sunglasses that protect against both UVA and UVB rays.
- Between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., limit your time in the sun. When your shadow is shorter than you are, the sun is very strong. Look for places with lots of shade, like a park with big trees.
- Check the UV index forecast online, or on local radio or TV stations. When the UV index is 3 or higher, wear protective clothing, sunglasses, and sunscreen.
- Use sunscreen, especially when the UV index is 3 or more.
- When the weather is very hot, consider canceling your group walk.

Source: Sun Safety Basics (Health Canada, 2012)

Hydration

The importance of hydration, especially in warm summer conditions, cannot be overstated!

Drink plenty of liquids before, during, and after a walk. Here are some guidelines about when and how much to drink:

4 hours or less before exercise	Drink about 1–2 cups of fluid (250-500 mL)
2 hours or less before exercise	Drink about ½–1½ cups (125–375 mL) of fluid if you have not produced any urine or only a small amount of bright yellow urine
During exercise	Keep fluid with you when you exercise. Sip it during your workout. Drink enough to replace water lost through sweat.
Immediately after exercise	If you drank enough during your exercise, let your thirst guide you through the rest of the day.

Water is typically the best choice for moderate activity or exercise under an hour in length. Water is also a good choice after a walk, but drinks such as milk, chocolate milk, 100% (unsweetened) fruit juice, and sports drinks can be included, although they provide extra calories.

Avoid carbonated soft drinks, regular (e.g., sweetened) fruit juice, fruit drinks, lemonade, and energy drinks that contain a lot of sugar or caffeine, as they may cause stomach upset and discomfort while walking.

Source: Dietitians of Canada

Nutrition

Encourage participants to have a small, balanced meal before heading out on a walk.

Some areas for discussion:

- Have a small meal 1–3 hours before exercise:
 - A serving of oatmeal with nuts
 - A slice of toast with peanut butter and some fruit
- Have an easily digested snack 30–90 minutes before exercise:
 - A banana
 - Half a bagel or an English muffin
 - Yogurt
- Pay attention to what works for you!
 - Encourage participants to try different foods at different times to see what works best for them.

Source: Dietitians of Canada

Goal-Setting

One goal of the Mood Walks project is for participants to recognize and utilize walking as a health-promoting tool they can use outside of the group. Goal-setting can be a great way for participants to link their participation in the walking group to changes they may want to make outside of the group.

Goal-setting can also be an effective tool in helping participants stay motivated. Setting goals provides concrete proof of their successes, and helps them identify what a next milestone might be.

Mood Walks goal-setting may occur formally as a structured group session, or may occur outside of the group in one-to-one sessions, perhaps as part of an OCAN (Ontario Common Assessment of Need) assessment.

An Orientation to Mood Walks session can be a good opportunity to start setting goals with participants about what they would like to achieve. See “*A Sample Orientation Session*”—it contains tips and examples that may help you support participants in setting SMART goals. In addition, see the “*My Mood Walks Goal*” worksheet in the online Appendices.

In a recent Mood Walks survey, staff at community mental health agencies who had conducted a walking group identified *including structured goal setting* as something they would do differently next time!

Setting SMART Goals

“SMART” is an acronym often used when setting goals:

S = Specific

M = Measurable

A = Attainable

R = Realistic

T = Timely

Specific

Goals should be straightforward. Clearly define what you’re going to do by explaining:

What are you going to do?

Why is this important to do at this time? What do you want ultimately to accomplish?

How are you going to do it?

Instead of setting a goal to “lose weight” or “be healthier,” set a specific goal—for example, to walk five kilometres at an aerobically challenging pace.

Measurable

Goals need to provide measurable progress, so you can see the change occur. How will you know when you reach your goal? Be specific! “I want to walk in my neighbourhood four times a week on my own before Victoria Day” shows the specific target to be measured. One’s progress on “I want to start walking” is not as measurable.

Attainable

Goals should be within reach. You cannot commit for very long to working toward goals that are just too challenging. Aiming to lose 20 pounds in one week simply isn’t achievable. But setting a goal to lose one pound per week and then, when you’ve achieved that, to keep losing one more pound each week until you reach your (specific) healthy weight—that will keep the goal reachable.

Realistic

Realistic, in this case, means doable: the skills needed to accomplish the goal are available, and the goal fits with your personal plans. A goal of conquering the most challenging trail in the area may not be realistic for someone who is new to walking. It may be more realistic to set a goal of completing the easier trail on regular basis, and then continuing to progress.

Timely

Set a timeframe for the goal: for next week, in three months, by my next birthday. Putting an endpoint on your goal (that is also measurable, attainable and realistic) gives you a clear target to work toward. If you don’t set deadlines for yourself, the commitment is too vague and there’s no urgency to begin taking action.

Source: Minding Our Bodies Toolkit

Ideas for Goals Related to Mood Walks

Participants are likely to attend the group for different reasons and will differ in terms of what they want to accomplish. Participants might set goals related to walking and physical health, or one related to participating in an activity beyond the group. For example, Mood Walks partners might have initiatives that participants could aim to join. Here are some ideas of participant goals directly related to Mood Walks, as well as strategies for working toward them.

Increase my ability to take on more physically demanding walks.

- See “*Keeping Participants Engaged—Present Manageable Physical Challenges*” for ideas about how to make one’s demands progressive.

Make walking a regular component of my routine.

- Use walking as a form of transportation to do a regular errand or attend appointments.
- Take a short walk daily at a certain time, such as first thing in the morning or after dinner.
- Make a weekly walking date with a friend or family member.

Attend group regularly.

- Commit to attending a certain number of walks over the next ten weeks.

Socialize with group members.

- Walk with a different group member for at least a portion of each week.
- Make weekly reminder phone calls to a group buddy.

Take on a leadership role within the group.

- Plan one walk for the group, and explain the route.
- Be in charge of welcoming new members or maintaining the group bulletin board.

Explore new places to walk.

- Try out one new street per week.
- Check out one new park or trail per month.

Become part of the walking/hiking/conservation community.

- Go on one walk with a local walking or hiking group.
- Try an urban poling workshop.
- Apply to become a Certified Hike Leader (See *“Hike Ontario Training for Mood Walks Participants”*)
- Join a volunteer conservation or clean-up effort.

Hike Ontario Training for MoodWalks Participants

Safe Hiker Training

Hike Ontario's Safe Hiker training is an introduction to the skills required to hike safely, the benefits of hiking, and the trails that exist in Ontario. Hike Ontario has modified the Safe Hiker training to ensure that it is relevant to Mood Walks participants. Some topics included in the training include:

- Preparing for a Hike—collecting the required information to plan a safe route, informing others of hiking plans, and anticipating potential risks
- Packing and Outfitting—what to include in a first aid and safety kit, how to hydrate and eat during a hike, how to dress, and what to bring
- Hitting the Trail—getting to the trail, following a planned route, and monitoring hiking conditions to ensure safety, including what-if scenarios, Leave No Trace principles, and trail etiquette

Arranging Safe Hiker Training

Group leaders can email info@hikeontario to arrange the delivery of Safe Hiker training. An experienced instructor from Hike Ontario will provide the training, which is approximately eight hours long and typically held over two days. The majority of the second day typically occurs outdoors. The training format is flexible and will be tailored to meet the needs of your school.

Training can be held in classroom or meeting space at your campus or your local conservation area if it has an appropriate space. To host the training session, you will require a meeting space equipped with a computer, a projector, whiteboards, and chart paper. If you do not have access to such a space through your campus, see *“Working with Partners”* for suggestions as to how to find an affordable meeting space locally. Group leaders can also be trained as Safe Hiker Instructors under a “Train the Trainer” model.

Certified Hike Leader Training

Qualified participants from Mood Walks sites have the opportunity to become trained as a Ontario–Certified Hike Leader Hike. These individuals may be group leaders, volunteers, placement students, or peer leaders from your campus, or partners from your local hiking club, Conservation Authority or community agency who have been involved in your Mood Walks group.

Certified Hike Leader training is geared to individuals who are interested in leading organized hikes and walks in Ontario. To become certified, individuals will be required to meet the standards outlined by Hike Ontario. Hike Ontario requires that Certified Hike Leaders are able to:

- Demonstrate good physical fitness and the ability to move confidently and efficiently when traveling on trail
- Present a positive and commanding attitude on safety when leading a group
- Demonstrate a high standard of leadership and route-finding

- Show ability to establish effective communication with regard to hiker safety, comfort, and enjoyment
- Demonstrate respect and care for the environment
- Have a proper standard of equipment as required for day-hiking trips

In addition, candidates for Certified Hike Leader training must:

- Be Safe Hiker–certified or demonstrate a level of hiking competence and experience
- Have completed a minimum of five day-hikes
- Present a letter of reference from a recognized authority such as a Mood Walks group leader, a Certified Hike Leader, or a hiking club

For More Information

For costs and more information about Safe Hiker, Safe Hiker Instructor, and Certified Hike Leader training, please visit Hike Ontario’s website (www.hikeontario.com).

To find out if there is a hiking club near you please go to Hike Ontario website at <http://hikeontario.com/about/memberclubs/>

Making the Group Your Own

Organizational and environmental factors such as staffing resources and skill sets, geographic location, and cultural environment will influence how your group develops. Your group will be most effective if it is tailored to meet the needs of your participants. Involving participants in planning and making changes to your group, as well as helping to develop the group's "identity," will encourage participants to feel ownership of the group.

Here are some tips for individualizing your group:

- Ask participants to suggest walking routes, or vote on the route your group will take.
- Create a bulletin board where you can display group accomplishments, news articles related to walking, or physical activity guidelines.
- Ask the group to suggest possible names for your group, and then vote on a winner.
- Look for peer leader opportunities. A participant may feel comfortable leading the group walk one day, or leading some aspect of the group, such as a stretch or a warm-up. A participant may also be interested in creating a schedule for your walking group, acting as a group spokesperson to connect with other people who may be interested in joining, or maintaining the bulletin board.

Leading an Inclusive Group

A successful group is one that ensures all participants feel included and positive about their involvement. Read on for tips about how to ensure all participants stay safe and feel like valued group members.

Pacing

Participants will have differing levels of physical fitness. Some participants may be able to walk at a brisk pace for an extended period of time without feeling any exertion, whereas others may walk more slowly and need to take regular breaks. The “talk test” is a simple method to ensure participants are not overdoing it: participants should be able to carry on a conversation at all times.

Participants may be motivated to walk for various reasons: some may view the walk as their daily exercise and may be looking for a challenge, whereas some may be more motivated by social connections or the opportunity to observe the environment around them. For these reasons, it is necessary to have at least two facilitators supporting your group walk, with more support providing extra benefit. Having additional staff, students, volunteers, or peer leaders means more people can be comfortably accommodated and feel supported as part of your group. For tips on how to accommodate walkers at different levels, see “*Troubleshooting: Overcoming Obstacles.*”

The following Walking Distance Table can be helpful in route-planning as a rough guideline for the time it will take walkers to cover a specific distance (without breaks!):

Walking Speed	Time			
	10 minutes	20 minutes	30 minutes	60 minutes
Slow	0.6 km	1.2 km	1.8 km	3.6 km
Medium	0.9 km	1.8 km	2.7 km	5.4 km
Fast	1.1 km	2.2 km	3.3 km	6.6 km

Source: *Walking Program Walk Leader Handbook (BCRPA)*

Another way to estimate your walk timing is to use the following guidelines, courtesy of *Hike Ontario*:

Leisurely	Less than 2 km/hour
Slow	2–3 km/h
Moderate	3–4 km/h
Fast	5 km/h or greater

Social Interactions

All students should feel safe on group outings, and recognize that they are valued and included group members. For some students, joining a walking group may feel like a risk, and they may harbour doubts or insecurities about being part of the group. They may not spend much time in public places and may be self-conscious in the community. Students may be socially isolated outside of this group and feel intimidated by social interactions, or experience troubling thoughts in social situations. Initiating and sustaining conversations may be challenging.

As a leader you can help create a safe, inclusive, supportive group environment by keeping the following in mind before, during, and after a walk:

When Planning a Walk

- Designate one group facilitator to lead at the front of the group, and one to keep up the rear (the “sweep”) to ensure the group loses no one.
- Remind all facilitators that no one walks alone! Participants can buddy up, or walk with a group facilitator.

Before a Walk Begins

- Arrive at your meeting location a few minutes early to welcome new members and assure people that they are in the right place.
- Ensure all participants know each other’s names, as well as those of volunteers and guests. When new walkers join your group, start with a round of introductions and maybe a quick icebreaker. Participants can introduce themselves and state their favourite place to walk, or how long they have been involved with the group.
- Remember how many walkers you have with you, and remind participants not to leave the group without letting a facilitator know.
- Introduce the route: describe its length, how long it will likely take to complete, the terrain and gradients, and its overall difficulty.
- Outline any hazards you may encounter. Encourage participants to share their perception of any other hazards with the group to help keep everyone safe.
- Make sure everyone has a buddy, and encourage participants to change their buddies sometimes! This will ensure that no one walks alone and allows your participants to get to know each other.
- Get walking within five minutes of the advertised start time, to keep the group on track.

During a Walk

- Group leaders and volunteers can move among pairs of walkers, facilitating conversation and observing participants' physical exertion and overall mood.
- Make sure all walkers are managing the demands of the walk—use the “Talk Test” (see “*Leading an Inclusive Group—Pacing*”). Be attuned to signs of physical distress. Dehydration can be a concern; watch for light-headedness, nausea, headache, or cramping. Encourage participants to respect their bodies' limitations; reduce the pace or call a rest break when needed.
- Some participants may be directive with others, ask overly personal questions, or share uncomfortable personal information. Be attuned to conversations that may leave participants feeling deflated or frustrated, and intervene. Be prepared to step in if a participant appears uncomfortable.
- Observations about the natural environment and wildlife you may encounter can be a safe, engaging topic to facilitate conversation.

After a Walk

- Do a quick head count to make sure everyone has returned, and congratulate the group for their efforts.
- Be sure to ask participants for their feedback on the walk: How was the pace and the length of the walk? What did they think of the route? Are there any suggestions for the next walk? See “*Documenting Participants' Experiences*” for other questions for debriefing after a walk.
- Update the group about the next meeting or any upcoming events they should know about.
- Offer specific feedback to participants, perhaps in private, about your observations of them as part of the group. If a participant made an effort to include another participant, or seems able to walk more comfortably, let them know! For some, participating in the group may be a major accomplishment, and recognition may help keep their motivation up.

Source: How to Lead a Walk (Walk4Life, Walk England)

Warm-Up and Cool-Down Exercises

Warming up and cooling down are helpful to prevent injury when walking, and also to create a sense of routine and order within your group. If you use the same exercises at each group, participants may feel comfortable taking turns leading warm-up and cool-down exercises.

Warming Up

Warming up before you start walking increases the temperature in your muscles and joints and increases blood flow. A warm-up will reduce the risk of injury and make exercise more comfortable.

The following routine of six exercises will take less than three minutes to do.

1. Ankle Circles

Standing on one foot, lift the other off the ground in front of you. Slowly flex that ankle through its full range of motion, making circles with the toes. Do 6–8 circles; then reverse the direction of your circle and do 6–8 more. Switch feet and repeat.

2. Leg Swings

Standing on one leg, swing the other leg loosely from the hip in a front-to-back motion. Keep it relaxed and unforced, like the swinging of a pendulum. Your foot should swing no higher than a foot or so off the ground. Do 15–20 swings of each leg.

3. Figure-8 Leg Swings

Just like the leg swings above, swing one leg from the hip in a front-to-back motion, but this time, trace a figure-8 with your leg. Your leg should trace a circle in front of the body and another circle behind. Do 15–20 swings of each leg.

4. Pelvic Loops

Stand with your hands on your hips, your knees gently bent, and your feet hip-width apart. Keep your body upright and make 10 slow, continuous circles with your hips, pushing them gently forward, to the left, back and to the right. Then reverse directions and repeat.

5. Arm Circles

Hold both arms straight out from your sides, making yourself into the letter T. Make 10–12 slow backward circles with your hands, starting small and finishing with large circles, using your entire arm. Shake out your arms, then repeat with 10–12 forward circles.

6. Hula-Hoop Jumps

Begin hopping in place on both feet. Keep your head and shoulders facing forward, and begin to twist your feet and lower body left, then right, going back and forth on successive hops, 20 times.

Source: America's Walking (PBS)

Cooling Down

After the main portion of your walk is complete, encourage participants to walk at a slower pace for 5–10 minutes. Consider including the following stretches as part of your cool-down; warmed muscles are more pliable and can be stretched safely. Instruct participants to hold each stretch with a comfortable amount of tension, on both sides, for a count of 20. Do not bounce.

1. Standing Gastrocnemius (Upper Calf) Stretch

Stand in a walking position with one leg stretched straight behind you and the other leg bent in front of you. Using a wall or chair for support, lean forwards and down until you feel the stretch in the upper part of your back calf. Make sure that both feet are pointing straight ahead and that your heels stay on the floor the whole time.

2. Hip Flexor Stretch

Stand in a stride standing position. Put both hands on your front knee while keeping the back knee straight. Push your pelvis forward while keeping your back straight. The stretch should be felt in front of the hip and slightly down the front of the thigh.

3. Standing Hamstring Stretch

Place one heel on a low step or bench and, keeping your knee and back straight, bend your upper body forward from your hips. You should feel the stretch behind your knee.

4. Standing Achilles Tendon Stretch

Standing with one leg slightly behind the other, push your heels down while bending your knees.

5. Standing Quadriceps Stretch

Hold onto something for support with one hand and grab your ankle with the other hand. Pull your ankle toward your bottom, then try to straighten your knee while resisting with your hand and allowing no movement. Then pull your ankle toward your bottom again.

Source: Walking Program Walk Leader Handbook (BCRPA)

Sample Themed Walks

The following themes can be used to plan your Mood Walks sessions. Walks should be reasonably challenging for participants, and should gradually increase in difficulty as confidence and physical fitness improve. Feel free to change the order or to modify the following outlines to meet your group's needs.

Week One: An Introduction to the Group

For your first week, focus on ensuring all group members feel comfortable and have a positive first experience. Be sure to start with an icebreaker activity. Use your first walk to observe participants, considering their physical fitness levels, apparent mood and energy levels, and social interactions. At the end of the group, hold a check-in about how the walk went: ask about the pace and the route, using this feedback to plan the next session. See if participants noticed any change in their mood and energy levels after the walk, and congratulate participants for their efforts.

Your first walk is also an important opportunity to focus on group safety, especially if you are walking near busy roads. See *“Planning Your Mood Walks Group—Choosing an Accessible Location and Route”* for details.

Week Two: Focus on Posture

Spend some time before the second group walk reflecting on how participants felt after the first walk and whether anyone felt stiff or sore afterwards. After the warm-up, briefly review good posture when walking, and encourage participants to notice their posture throughout the walk. Here are some tips about posture.

- **Head:** Centered, with ears over shoulders. Chin parallel with the ground. Eyes looking forward 2–3 meters.
- **Shoulders:** Down and back, not forward. Think *tall*.
- **Chest:** Think of broadening the chest.
- **Arms:** Swinging naturally and comfortably. Arm-swing should not cross the centre of the body.
- **Legs:** A comfortable and efficient stride length. To increase speed, take quicker, shorter steps instead of reaching for a longer stride.
- **Feet:** Toes pointing forward. Heel touches the ground first, then your weight rolls forward to the ball of the foot.

Check with participants during the cool-down to hear if they noticed anything about their form or posture during the walk. Challenge participants to try to fit in a short walk (with good posture!) on their own time, sometime during the coming week.

Week Three: Trail Etiquette

Take a walk on a local trail, perhaps at a local conservation area. Use the opportunity to discuss trail etiquette and “Leave No Trace” principles. Here are some trail etiquette tips to share, courtesy of *Hike Ontario*:

- Stay on existing trails.
- Avoid very wet and muddy conditions.
- Know the local rules, regulations, and concerns about the area
- Obey gate closures and signs.
- Slower traffic has the right-of-way: yield to those who are going uphill.
- Keep to the right, except when passing others.
- Get the owners’ permission to walk on private land.
- Do not disturb trees, plants, or wildlife.
- Leave the trail cleaner than you found it.

Week Four: Mindfulness – A Walking Meditation

Walking can be a way to incorporate mindfulness and meditation techniques. Before beginning this day’s walk, encourage participants to bring their attention into the present moment, using all their senses. The idea is to quiet the thoughts of the mind and to experience a sense of calm. You might guide participants to focus on each of the following aspects during different moments throughout the walk, while limiting conversation.

- **Breath:** Focus on the experience of breathing. Notice the rate and depth of breath, the temperature of the air, the filling and contraction of the lungs.
- **Stepping:** Try to feel each phase of movement in the feet and legs—pushing off with the foot, lifting and swinging of the legs, and each foot contacting the ground. Notice the rate of stepping.
- **Senses:** Take in all of the sights in the environment—colours, textures, lights, objects, vegetation, animals. Notice different scents along the way. Feel the temperature of the air, the feeling of a breeze on the skin. Be aware of bodily sensations throughout the walk—the feeling of the heart beating, or of blood pumping throughout the body.

Afterward, ask how participants experienced mindfulness throughout the walk, and if they use mindfulness techniques in other settings.

Week Five: Mix It Up

At this point, hopefully, participants will be developing some familiarity and comfort with each other. Invite participants to get to know at least one new group member this week. Challenge participants to walk with someone new: find out where they are from and if they have a favourite walking trail or route, past or present. Invite participants to share what they have learned during the cool-down.

Week Six: A Scavenger Hunt

Provide teams of participants with a checklist of items to look for on your walk, and reward the most successful team! Here is a sample list of nature items that could be looked for:

- A feathered friend
- Animal tracks
- Another person walking
- Beetle
- Dead tree
- Flowering plant
- Fork in the path
- Furry friend
- Hole or tunnel dug by an animal
- Leaf with pointed edges
- Leaf with rounded edges
- Plant bearing fruits or nuts

The scavenger hunt can be adapted to suit more urban settings: look for cars, signs, or certain-coloured houses; or go people-watching, looking for couples, people wearing red, or people walking dogs.

Week Seven: How Walkable Is Your Neighbourhood?

If appropriate for your group, go for a walk around your campus and see how pedestrian-friendly it is. Pay attention to the condition of the sidewalks, street crossings, traffic and noise concerns (there are various community walkability checklists and tools online you could use).

Compare observations at the end, and discuss changes that would make the neighbourhood more walkable. If participants are keen to take action, the group could inform local recreation centres, health departments, traffic engineering or public works departments, or the media.

Week Eight: Learning about Your Community

Make this walk a learning experience. Find out if your group is interested in local history or flora and fauna. Students or volunteers may have knowledge to share, or consider inviting a guest speaker to lead your group.

Week Nine: Planning with a Map

Before this week's walk, work with the group or several group members to use a map or online mapping website such as mapmywalk.ca to plan a route your group will take. Estimate the total distance of the walk, the difficulty level, and the time it will take your group to complete it. Time your walk and see how accurate you were.

Week Ten: A Special Outing

Revisit a favourite route chosen by participants and extend the walk, perhaps sharing a picnic afterwards. Have a group discussion about how participants use walking outside of the group and places they might like to walk in future.

Group Challenges

Special challenges for the group can help keep it fresh and can be a great way to bring together participants with different levels of ability. Challenges can also help to gradually “up the ante” for group participants. Some ideas for challenges are:

- Provide group members with pedometers (some public libraries will loan them free of charge!) and encourage them to record their number of steps per day. Set a goal for total number of steps for the group—10,000 steps daily per person is recommended. Recognize the participant with the most steps over the week, or the biggest increase in total steps from one week to the next. Or connect with another Mood Walks group and challenge them as a group!
- Use a free website like mapmywalk.com to monitor how far your group walks per week, and gradually increase your distance.
- Display the total distance your group has covered on a map on a bulletin board. Set a group goal for the total distance you want to cover.

Healthy Hikes

Conservation Ontario’s annual Healthy Hikes campaign encourages Ontarians to spend time hiking in conservation areas and offers some great events that your group may be able to get involved in. As part of Healthy Hikes, Conservation Authorities and Healthy Hikes partners will be hosting special events at various conservation areas, such as guided hikes, educational talks, and other workshops.

Your Mood Walks group may be able to attend an event as a group, or participants may be interested in signing up on their own. For more information about Healthy Hikes, including an Events Calendar, visit healthyhikes.ca.

Keeping Participants Engaged

Staying committed to physical activity is challenging for everyone. To reap the benefits of a walking group, participants will need to stay motivated and committed. This section outlines some strategies for helping your participants stick with it.

Be Aware of the Common Barriers

Commonly cited reasons for not exercising include:

- Lack of energy
- Lack of motivation
- A dislike of exercise
- Competing priorities
- General poor health or mobility concerns that make exercise difficult
- Transportation challenges

In a recent Mood Walks survey of people with lived experience of mental illness, the most frequent reasons for discontinuing with a physical activity group (aside from cost barriers) were:

- The group did not fit into my schedule
- I did not feel I fit in socially with the group
- I got injured

Here is a list of common barriers to participating in physical activity groups, as well as some strategies to help participants overcome them:

Barrier	Strategy
Lack of energy	<p>Exercise is energy-boosting! Suggest to the participant to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with short periods of exercise and notice any energy boosts afterward. • Try journaling energy levels, and notice what activities are energy-draining or energy-boosting. Try to schedule energy-draining activities so they do not fall just before group time, and include energy-boosting activities to motivate you before the group walk.
Lack of motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set goals and track progress (see “Goal-Setting”). • Congratulate participants on their achievements, and encourage them to reward themselves.
Scheduling conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve participants as much as possible in selecting the group’s timeslot. • Mornings tend to be a difficult time to get going. Point out that exercising first thing can help start the day on the right foot. (It also limits excuses.) • Encourage participants to make their health a priority, and try to schedule other commitments around group time.
Not fitting in socially	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep group communication inclusive and role-model good social skills. • Enlist volunteers and peer leaders to ensure no one walks alone. • In a private setting, offer participants constructive feedback about their social interactions. • Brainstorm ways to start conversations with other participants, and discuss observing other participants to gauge their reactions to and interest in social interactions. • Remind participants that other people may be experiencing their own difficulties, and not to take perceived slights too seriously. Not all people will connect, and that is okay.
Fear of injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide warm-up and cool-down activities to limit the risk of injury (see “Warm-Up and Cool-Down Exercises”). • Remind participants to go at their own pace and listen to their bodies, taking breaks when necessary.

continued...

Weather conditions

- Encourage participants to plan ahead for the weather. Discuss appropriate clothing (see “*Helping Participants Prepare for a Walk*”) and how to obtain it affordably (see “*Troubleshooting: Overcoming Obstacles*”).
- Consider having a back-up plan for inclement weather, such as meeting at a mall or track, where you could walk indoors if necessary.
- Present varying weather conditions as opportunities to experience a familiar environment in a new light. Suggest that participants bring dry clothing on rainy days to change into after their walk.

Support Participants’ Attendance

Be sure that your participants remember when each walk is to occur, and that participants plan ahead in order to attend. Offer reminder phone calls the day before a walk, reminding participants to dress appropriately and have adequate food and water before your walk (see “*Helping Participants Prepare for a Walk*”). Visual prompts at your organization and at participants’ homes can be a reminder to those without a phone that they are invited to participate.

Get in touch with participants if attendance is poor, to encourage them to participate. You could also use incentives, such as “frequent flyer” cards. Participants could collect points for each walk that could be redeemed for prizes (for example, their fifth walk might earn them a T-shirt).

Present Manageable Physical Challenges

Gradually increase the physical challenge associated with walks. Seeing their physical capabilities improve will provide participants with a sense of achievement, as well as physical health benefits. Here are some ways to gradually increase the physical challenge level of your walks.

Increase your speed.

- Check out “*Leading an Inclusive Group—Pacing*” to get an idea of the relative speed of your group.
- Time yourself on one route, and then revisit the route several weeks later with a group goal of beating your previous time, even by a small amount.

Take less frequent or shorter breaks.

- Encourage participants to rest whenever necessary, but with a goal of decreasing the total amount of time they spend resting.

Extend the length of your walks.

- Tacking on an extra five minutes of walking each week is a reasonable goal.

Tackle more challenging terrain.

- Walking on more rustic trails can present challenges, such as uneven or muddy walking surfaces, and obstacles like fallen trees or rocks.
- Take routes with more frequent or steeper hills.

Documenting Participants' Experiences

Joining a walking group may be a catalyst for change in your participants' lives. Keeping track of changes will help participants recognize their growth and feel proud of what they accomplish, which in turn will keep them motivated to continue their efforts. In addition, personal accounts are often very valuable tools in convincing others to join your group, or demonstrating the effectiveness of your group, be it to other staff members of your organization, management, other organizations in your community, or potential funders.

Pay close attention to what your participants say about their experience in the group, and write this information down using the provided **Leader's Tracking** form (see "*Evaluation Tools*"). Direct quotes often provide a wealth of rich information about how your participants have benefited by participating in the group. Here are a few questions you could ask after a walk, to get some feedback:

- What is the first word that comes to mind?
- What was the best thing about the walk today for you?
- What would have made today's walk better for you?

Some participants may be journaling or blogging about their experiences. If participants keep such records, they may be comfortable sharing a quote or two. Let participants know you are always looking for feedback about their experiences, and they may surprise you by sharing. Posting such feedback on your group bulletin board (checking with participants before using any identifying information) may provide some incentive for others to contribute.

Using Photovoice

Photovoice is an effective, empowering way to learn about real-life experiences of people who live with a mental illness and to support their process of recovery. It is a form of Participatory Action Research, where participants are contributors to the data collected, as well co-researchers who assist in directing the purpose of research and analyzing data. Photovoice aims to:

- Identify and record participants' strengths and struggles
- Explain participant experiences through reflection and discussion
- Inform decision-makers and influence policy

In Photovoice, participants take photographs of their experiences and then discuss what these images represent for them. This technique is effective in beginning to understand what is important to your participants. It also allows participants to build connections based on shared experiences, in a fun and engaging way.

Before Starting a Photovoice Project

As with any component of your walking group, participating in a photovoice activity is optional; participants should feel free to decline to participate or withdraw at any time. Remind participants that the photographs and words produced belong to them, and be sure to ask their permission before sharing them in any way.

Participants may use their own camera, be provided with a disposable camera, or take turns sharing a group camera. It is important to provide some information about camera usage, as participants might have little or no experience. If possible, involve a guest photographer to support your group. Be sure to cover basics such as how and when to use flash, how to advance the camera to take the next picture (if applicable), and how to handle a camera. Also, be sure to discuss the ethics of taking photographs in public prior to beginning (i.e., ask other people before taking their photo, and obtain written consent before sharing photos of other people). You could instruct participants to take photos that represent their experiences as part of your walking group, barriers and supports to their participation, and aspects of the group they would like to change or keep. Participants may also find it helpful to journal about their photos and experience taking photographs to support future discussion.

Photographs and Group Discussion

Taking photos may be an ongoing component of your group, perhaps with several participants accessing the camera each week. After you have amassed some photographs, your group should meet at least once to share their pictures and discuss what the photographs mean to them. Participants may bring written explanations of their photos if they like. Some questions to facilitate discussion include:

- What does this photograph mean to you?
- How does this picture relate to your life?
- What does it say about wellness?
- What does this photograph say about our community? Our environment?
- What strengths does this image show?
- Does this picture show a need for change of some kind? If so, what needs to change? How could this be done?

The facilitator of this session, potentially a peer leader, should be known to and trusted by participants. Throughout the session, open-ended questions can be used to encourage people to explore any deeper meaning or themes behind their photos. Attention should be paid to the uniqueness of participants' experiences as well as to the elements participants share in common. If participants are willing, recording this discussion can be helpful in reviewing information that is shared, and creating captions for photographs that may be displayed.

Sharing the Benefits

Your group may want the opportunity to show the photographs they have produced. If so, involve your participants in a discussion about how these images could be shared and who the audience should be. Ideal audience members are those who are in a position to make changes or influence decision-making, or are members of your community who share similar interests. Some people who may be interested in your showing include:

- The local city or town council, including city planners
- Mental health and human service agencies
- Health-promoting organizations
- Hiking or walking groups
- Conservation Authorities or environmental groups
- Other local colleges or universities
- Government agencies and departments
- Interested community members

By strategically targeting audience members, you will maximize the potential impact of your exhibit.

A photovoice project can be a valuable addition to a walking group. It can be a choice means for participants to express themselves in a new and creative way. Such images provide a great starting point for discussion and can help participants connect through shared experiences. Photos can also provide excellent promotional materials for your group, created by participants themselves!

Source: A Practical Guide to Photovoice (Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence)

Creating Opportunities for Peer Leadership

Finding avenues in which participants can take on a leadership role is empowering to them and supports participants in their recovery. Be on the lookout for individual strengths and ways to utilize these to benefit the group. Ideas for peer leadership are noted throughout the manual, but here are some suggestions:

- Match participants up to be “activity buddies” who can support each other with reminders, or have a participant-leader take on this role, offering reminder phone calls to those who want them.
- Peer leaders may be helpful in gathering feedback and suggestions on how to improve the group. Participants may be more willing to share constructive feedback with peers, or report negative experiences to them. If a group member is willing to take on this role, let the group know and encourage participants to share their feedback. (Trained leaders can also conduct interviews and focus groups to get feedback about the group.)
- Ask if any group members are interested in selecting a route for a group walk. Have the participant describe the route, including terrain and difficulty, before the walk begins.
- Participants may be interested in leading warm-up or cool-down exercises, especially if the group follows the same format each week.
- Ask if participants are interested in maintaining the group bulletin board, or tracking group progress during a group challenge.

Peer leadership can support the leader’s recovery journey, as well as inspire other participants. Involving participants in leadership roles also helps contribute to the sustainability and success of your walking group.

Participant Awards

Consider presenting an award to each participant to recognize their achievements; for example, “Most Dedicated Walker,” “Most Observant Walker,” or “Most Considerate of Others.” Awards can be a valuable way to recognize the unique contribution each participant has made to the group. You might add an awards ceremony to your Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group (see “*Evaluating Your Mood Walks Group*”).

Frequently Asked Questions from Participants

When running a walking group, questions are likely to abound! The following guide may help you field some of the commonly asked questions participants may have about your walking group.

Can I bring friends or family on the walk with me? What about support people?

Participants may be interested in bringing other people along on a walk. Although friends and family are a fantastic support, their presence may compromise the privacy of other participants: other group members may be concerned about “outsiders” seeing them as mental health service recipients. Furthermore, your organization’s liability policy may not permit group nonmembers to join walks.

Formalized supports, such as case managers, counselors, or peer workers, are typically bound by a confidentiality policy, and their presence may have less of an impact on other group members. It is always a good idea to check with group members before permitting a nonmember on a walk.

Can I bring my dog along?

Animals bring joy and energy to groups. However, certain group members may be uncomfortable around dogs or have an allergy. Again, it is best to check with group members before permitting pets on walks.

Can I smoke during the walk?

Some organizations may have a policy that governs smoking while on organization-sanctioned outings. Be sure to comply with the rules of your organization. If your organization does not have rules about smoking, this can be decided upon with input from group members. Participants who smoke may be open to challenging themselves not to smoke during walks. If not, encourage participants to consider the impact they have on other group members when they smoke, and to be considerate. Discuss how to dispose of cigarettes properly. Some conservation areas and other outdoor public spaces have ban smoking altogether, so be sure you are informed before you walk.

What if I can’t make it to a walk?

Encourage participants to call the group leader if they are unable to make it. This fosters a sense of accountability on behalf of the participants, and also lets them know they are valued group members whose presence is expected. Encourage participants to listen to their bodies if they are feeling unwell and not up to attending, but be sure to let them know they were missed!

Will the group walk ever be canceled? How will I be notified?

At times, you may need to cancel the walk because of extreme weather or facilitator illness. Discuss with the group under what circumstances the walk will need to be canceled, and at what point this will be decided. Be sure you have a way to get in touch with all participants. Encourage participants to use their judgment about attending group in challenging weather, and to respect their limits.

Can I talk on my cellphone or listen to my headphones while on a walk?

Our society is becoming increasingly tied to technology; participants may therefore be in the habit of chatting on a cellphone or listening to headphones while out walking. Although either may be a useful coping strategy for the individual, encourage participants to see themselves as part of the group and contributors to the group's experience of others. Limiting cellphone and headphone usage can help to increase group cohesion and facilitate social connections among participants. Encourage group members to use their judgment and try to limit the use of technology to times when it is urgent or otherwise necessary for them to do so.

Participants are starting to carpool together to get to group, and I am concerned about accident liability.

Carpooling can be practical and help build community. However, be sure to let participants know that it is their choice to give or receive a lift, and that it is possible to politely decline if they feel uncomfortable. Remind group members that they are responsible for their own safety on the way to and from the group walk.

Troubleshooting: Overcoming Obstacles

Implementing a Mood Walks group is bound to present some obstacles. Read on to gain ideas about how to manage challenges.

I am worried about liability if a participant is injured during a walk.

Good planning can help you decrease the likelihood of an unforeseen event during a walk. Before starting a walking group, be sure to check the “*Planning Your Group*” and “*Leading an Inclusive Group*” sections of this manual, which contain information about safety preparedness, choosing a route, and what to look out for during a walk. Having extra hands to help is also a good idea: students and volunteers can help monitor any worrisome changes in participants.

Be sure participants sign a waiver assuming associated risks before starting your walking group; check out the “*Physical Liability Waiver*” in the online Appendices.

Have a plan for how your group facilitators will respond in case of emergency, and be sure to always carry a cell phone. Although there is some degree of risk involved in a Mood Walks group, the benefits greatly outweigh the risks!

I have a group of people who are interested in a walking group, but they do not have appropriate attire. How can I support them?

Hurray that you have an enthusiastic bunch! Obtaining appropriate clothing and footwear is a real challenge for many people who experience mental health issues, and can be a barrier to joining a walking group. Some ideas for obtaining gear:

- Your Mood Walks budget—Is there a way to provide gear for participants in a fair manner?
- Try second-hand stores. Reasonably priced outdoor attire can often be found. A group outing could be arranged if several potential participants are in the same boat and require guidance about what types of clothing and footwear are appropriate.
- Might your partners have any resources? For example, if you have partnered with a local hiking group, perhaps they have gently used athletic gear they could donate.
- Is there a local athletic clothing store that may want to sponsor your group? If your group is publicized in the community, their sponsorship could bring in business.
- Is there a grant you could apply for to support your group? Some of the funding may be used to equip group members. See “*Next Steps—Finding Funding*” for some potential sources.

I am not sure what walking trails exist in my community or where to find this information.

Partners from Hike Ontario and/or Conservation Ontario are likely to be great sources of information about trails!

In addition, some municipalities offer a map of local parks and trails. Try contacting your local Parks and Recreation department.

To find information about conservation areas in your area, visit Conservation Ontario's "Guide to Conservation Areas in Ontario" website (ontarioconservationareas.ca). Clicking on "Search by Activity" will allow you to find conservation areas that are free, or accessible to people with disabilities. You can also search for coming events at conservation areas.

Hike Ontario's website (hikeontario.com) provides suggestions for walks at conservation areas, rail trails, and provincial and national parks; look in their "Resources" section.

I am having difficulty attracting participants for my Mood Walks group.

Reflect on how you are marketing the group to potential participants. Be sure you have an idea of what their goals and values are, and highlight how the group fills the bill. Revisit some of the tips and tools contained in the "Attracting Participants" section of this guide. Involving potential participants in planning is important, as well.

Get to know what is stopping participants from joining the group, and help them create a step-by-step plan to overcome challenges. For example, if participants are worried they will not be able to keep up, encourage them to start some walking on their own, and check in as to how they are progressing.

Tailor your group to meet participants' needs, and highlight the excitement of trying something new! Encourage potential participants to take a healthy risk by joining your group.

I have a group of participants who have greatly varying fitness levels. How will I manage to run a cohesive group?

This is where additional support people are crucial. Volunteers and peer leaders help to ensure no one walks alone. It can be challenging to ensure all participants are getting a reasonable workout when participants' physical fitness levels differ greatly. For participants who experience the group as less strenuous, encourage them to reflect on other benefits they may be deriving from the group: the social aspect, the sensory experience, visiting new places in the community. Participants who are in better physical condition can be inspiring role models for those who are more challenged by the demands of walking.

For participants who struggle with the demands of the walk, be sure to recognize their efforts in coming out and walking, and provide them with feedback for progress they make: "I noticed you walked for 20 minutes today without needing a break! You are making gains." Reassure them that walks will get easier with practice, and remind them of the health benefits they are receiving through their hard work.

Try to foster a sense of community among participants. Remind group members that everyone is in it together, and that all benefit from the enthusiasm and support of the group.

Evaluating Your Mood Walks Group

Evaluation is an essential part of program development; it allows us to determine if our program is effective. Evaluating your group by means of the Mood Walks Evaluation Tools will help you recognize your group's successes, and will permit us to gauge the success of the Mood Walks project and compare the success of groups across the province. In addition to the outcomes our evaluation plan looks at, you and your organization may have unique objectives and outcomes that you would like to measure.

Evaluation is a key component of Mood Walks. It provides us with information about:

- How participants perceive the group
- If participants experience any personal changes related to participation
- What program activities are fundamental to a successful Mood Walks group
- Effective novel approaches that Mood Walks groups have used
- If and how the program is affected by geographical region

Evaluation will also allow us to demonstrate program benefits to funding sources, and likewise enable you to demonstrate successful outcomes to your campus, potential funding sources, and your community at large. Results could support a request for additional funds to expand your Mood Walks group or to offer it in other locations.

Using Mood Walks Evaluation Tools

As a recognized postsecondary institution, you can help us gather information about participants' experiences in Mood Walks, and provide us with your experience as a Mood Walks host.

Here are some details about the evaluation tools we are providing, all of which are contained in the online "*Mood Walks Evaluation Tools*" section.

Participants' Pre-Program and Follow-up Mood Walks Questionnaires

These questionnaires, which participants complete before and after 10 weeks of walks, will help us discover how and if participants' physical and mental health, beliefs about physical activity and nature, and confidence in their hiking ability changes over the course of 10 weeks of walking.

These questionnaires ask participants about their goal for participating in Mood Walks. For information about how to support participants in setting goals, see "*Goal-Setting*."

The Pre-Program Questionnaire should be completed before your group begins walks, perhaps during an orientation session (see "*A Sample Orientation Session*"). The Follow-up Questionnaire is to be completed after 10 weeks of walking, regardless of whether your group continues or not. It could be completed as part of your Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group.

Components of the Pre-Program and Follow-up Mood Walks Questionnaires

These questionnaires are each comprised of three parts: the SF-12v2 Health Survey, the Nature Relatedness Scale, and some additional questions about walking and physical activity. All three sections should be provided to participants stapled together, with a cover page indicating the date and Participant ID.

Here is more information about the three components of these questionnaires:

1. SF-12v2™ Health Survey: Your Health and Well-Being

The SF-12v2 Health Survey is a brief, standardized tool that tracks changes in functional health and well-being from the respondent's point of view. It is widely used and valid across a range of ages and populations. It provides summary measures of both physical and mental health by assessing eight health domains:

- Physical Functioning
- Impact of Physical Health on Role
- Bodily Pain
- General Health
- Vitality
- Social Functioning
- Impact of Emotional Health on Role
- Mental Health

The SF-12v2 takes about 2-3 minutes to complete, and can be self-administered or interview-administered. More information about the SF-12v2 can be found at sf-36.org.

2. Nature Relatedness Scale

The Nature Relatedness Scale measures cognitive, affective, and physical connectedness with the natural world. People who experience nature relatedness:

- Feel connected to nature
- Understand the importance of all aspects of nature
- Are concerned with how human actions impact living things
- Are familiar with and comfortable in the natural world
- Desire to be out in nature
- Are aware of and fascinated with nature around them

The brief version of the Nature Relatedness Scale is included in the Mood Walks questionnaire. It takes about 2-3 minutes to complete and can be self-administered or interview-administered. More information about the Nature Relatedness Scale can be found at naturerelatedness.ca.

3. Walking and Physical Activity

The remaining questions are concerned with participants' perceived abilities, beliefs, and behaviours regarding walking and physical activity, as well as their goal for participating in Mood Walks.

Sign-In for Participants

Participants can rate their mood, anxiety, and energy level before and after each walk, and can also jot down the first word that comes to their mind after a walk.

Leader's Tracking

As the group leader, you can report on group attendance, details about your walk, your observations about participants, and any unfavourable incidents that may have occurred.

Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group

The purpose of this focus session is to get an understanding of participants' experiences in Mood Walks. A focus-group format ensures that all participants have an opportunity to express their views. The focus group should take about half an hour, with three main areas to explore:

1. Reactions to Mood Walks
2. The impact of Mood Walks participation
3. Suggestions for how Mood Walks could be improved

The Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group form provides a guiding question for each section, followed by several prompts you could use to facilitate discussion.

The closing question, "Would you participate in Mood Walks again?" can be a good opportunity to go around the room and get a response from each participant, since some participants may be less forthcoming in a group setting.

Final Mood Walks Report

The final Mood Walks report allows us to gather information about your experience with Mood Walks. The report asks for specifics about your group and how it was implemented, your experience with project partners, your feedback on Mood Walks resources, and the impacts that participating in the project may have had on your agency. You may find it useful to fill in the forms as your group progresses, when the information is fresh in your mind.

Evaluation Timeline

Here is a timeline as to when the data should be collected:

Before Walks Begin*

- Participants complete Mood Walks Pre-Program Questionnaire.

*See “A Sample Orientation Session” for more information.

During the Ten Weeks of Walking

- Complete a Sign-In for Participants form *before* and *after* each walk.
- Complete Leader’s Tracking *after* each walk.

Following Ten Weeks of Walking

- Participants complete the Mood Walks Follow-up Questionnaire.
- Host a Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group.
- Submit the Mood Walks Final Report with all completed records.

Using Unique Participant Identifiers

You will notice that the evaluation tools require “Participant ID.” How participants would like to be identified is up to them, or up to you as group leader. Although data can be collected anonymously, we need to be able to link each participant’s data to their unique identifier over time.

Here are some options that participants can use to identify themselves:

- Participants can use their first name and last initial, first and last initial, or all three initials if they are comfortable doing so.
- Participants can select their own identification number, or you can assign a number to each participant.

As a leader, please ensure participants are using the same ID throughout Mood Walks, and that no two participants are using the same ID. This will help us conduct a more accurate Mood Walks evaluation!

Types of Data We Are Collecting

The Mood Walks Evaluation Tool measures two types of outcomes:

1. Whether your organization is delivering Mood Walks according to plan (i.e., the process)
2. The impact of your walking group on participants (i.e., outcomes)

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation looks at how a group operates compared with the manner in which the group was intended to operate. Our evaluation plan gathers information about the following:

- How many participants attended the group
- How frequently the group met
- Where the group walked
- What program activities were carried out
- Whether partners and volunteers were part of the group

Outcome Evaluation

Outcome evaluation provides a picture of the results or effectiveness of a group in achieving its intended goals. Here are some of the outcomes measured:

- Any changes in participants' mood, energy level, and anxiety level after walking
- Changes (hopefully, improvements) in participants' overall health
- Changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour related to walking
- Whether participants achieved their goals for participating in the group

We are collecting two types of data in order to measure these outcomes: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data pertains to things you can count and measure. The participants' questionnaire results and mood, energy, and anxiety ratings are some examples of quantitative data we are collecting.

You may wish to gather other types of quantitative data by taking pre- and post-program measurements such as:

- Weight
- Waist circumference
- Resting heart rate
- Blood pressure

Gathering these physical measurements is helpful for getting an idea where participants are at the start of your walking group (their *baseline*) and then measuring any changes that occur as they participate.

Qualitative Data

In contrast to quantitative data, qualitative data is rich and descriptive and contributes to an in-depth understanding of an individual's experience. With our evaluation tools we gather qualitative data about participants through observation, discussion, and focus groups.

Engaging Participants in the Evaluation Process

You may find that participants are reluctant to participate in evaluation: "Another questionnaire?" Participants may be tired of filling out forms, or may find paperwork to be challenging. Volunteers can be very helpful in assisting participants to complete forms one-to-one if necessary.

It is helpful to inform your participants early on that you will be obtaining information and feedback from them about their experience in the group, explaining why this is important, and explaining how the data will be used. Participants might be more interested in providing information if they are aware that their input will contribute to the success of your group and the Mood Walks project overall by demonstrating what works, and what could be improved.

It is also recommended to share evaluation findings with participants to highlight their achievements to them, as well as validating their feedback and demonstrating their importance in shaping and developing the group in the future.

Mood Walks Reporting for Host Campuses

Please submit any evaluation materials you wish to share to:

Attn: Mood Walks Project

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division

180 Dundas Street West, Suite 2301

Toronto ON M5G 1Z8

Or send copies via email to: info@moodwalks.ca

If possible, please include:

- Participants' Mood Walks Pre-Program and Follow-up Questionnaires
- Sign-In sheets for participants
- Leader's tracking sheets
- Feedback from the Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group
- Additional evaluation strategies you might have used and their outcomes
- Final Mood Walks Report

Getting the Word Out and Having an Impact

Now that you've started a Mood Walks group, spreading the word can help your group gain traction. A strong communication strategy can attract new participants, new partners, and new sponsors. Following are some ways to get started.

Raise Awareness within Your Campus

Ensure that your postsecondary institution is informed about your program's value. Decision-makers in your organization may need some initial education about the value of your program and the effectiveness of physical activity in preventing chronic disease and promoting recovery from mental illness.

Consider ways to keep your board members and management staff up-to-date on your Mood Walks group. Celebrating group achievements in a public forum, such as a Mood Walks bulletin board, can help raise awareness in your campus.

Don't overlook the other programs within your own campus—they may be your closest partners. Let everyone else know what you have to offer. There may be an opportunity to introduce your Mood Walks group into another program or department at your campus. Or invite your co-workers to attend a walk and bring along students who may be interested in joining your group; being accompanied by someone familiar can raise the student's comfort level in a new situation. Those same students may tell their peers about their experience and help generate excitement. Word of mouth is one of the most effective ways to promote your program. Connecting with others in your school is also a good way to extend your reach: your co-workers can help spread the word through their own network of partners and help you make new connections in the community.

Shift Your Campus Culture

Launching a Mood Walks group for your students presents an opportunity to promote workplace mental health as well. Look for leaders on your campus who can serve as champions for your group. Ask them to lead by example and demonstrate a commitment to physical activity at the office. You can make the case for improved productivity and a happier, healthier workforce. For more information, see "Workplace Mental Health Promotion: A How-To Guide" (wmhp.cmhaontario.ca).

Are there ways to have other staff involved in your Mood Walks group? Perhaps there are staff within your campus who have expertise in walking or fitness. Are there ways to encourage the whole staff team to also become physically active? Consider holding an campus-wide challenge. If you and your co-workers walk the talk, it only strengthens your ability to motivate and inspire the students in your Mood Walks group.

Use Your Local Media

The local community is an important audience to reach.

One way to reach out is through the local media. This will raise your group's profile, but it will also raise the profile of your postsecondary institution as a whole. Local media could offer the necessary promotion and outreach, as well as educate the community around physical health and its relationship to mental health issues.

Connecting with local media can also assist in forming partnerships. As mentioned in the "*Working with Other Partners*" section, partnerships can help spread the word about your walking group, and also be valuable sources of merchandise, transportation, and equipment.

Check out the "*Sample Press Release*" provided in the online Appendices to get started communicating with the media!

After the Mood Walks Program

Although Mood Walks groups are only required to go for ten walks together, we hope your group continues well beyond! Here are some ways to ensure your participants and your campus keep up your momentum.

Supporting Participants' Engagement in Physical Activity in All Seasons

Say you have created a successful Mood Walks group in the milder months. What next? How will you manage the winter? Hopefully, participants are growing accustomed to engaging in physical activity and will continue their efforts. Here are some ideas to keep up physical activity as a group through the entire year:

- Some participants may be open to walking year-round. Provide education about dressing appropriately, and consider ending the walk at a coffee shop, with a hot beverage to warm your walkers up. Walking outside in the winter is a great way to get a little vitamin D and appreciate the season.
- Try meeting at a mall or large public area that would permit indoor walking. Depending on weather conditions, your group will then have the option of walking outdoors or inside.
- Look to your own school. Does your campus have an indoor track, recreation centre, or a pool that would permit your group to work out ?
- Is there a winter sport your group could try out? Snowshoeing is good exercise and not too challenging to learn. Skating can be a fun group outing if people have skated before. In some areas, urban poling (also called Nordic walking or exerstriding) has become popular. Again, look to community partners for affordable equipment and instruction.
- Think creatively about how to expand your resources. Could your group meet and work out to an exercise DVD once a week? Check the library for DVDs to try out. Do you have access to a Wii console and a physically demanding game?

Staying Connected to the Mood Walks Project as a Leader

We hope that being part of the Mood Walks project has lent some inspiration to you as a leader. Here are some ideas on how to stay connected to the project:

- Look for ways to continue the Community of Practice you developed through the project. Consider maintaining regular meetings, mailing lists or phone calls with facilitators from other campuses you have connected with.
- Form a partnership with a sister campus that is also interested in maintaining their Mood Walks group. Your groups could compete with each other in terms of number of steps or group kilometers walked.

- Look for ways to grow and develop your Mood Walks group. Could you expand to include other programs at your campus? Could you partner with another community walking group? Having more people involved in your Mood Walks plan makes your group more sustainable.
- Inform your community about your group and its successes. Recruiting more participants or targeting a new segment of your service population will help keep your group fresh.

Maintaining Relationships with Partners

Just as it is important to get feedback from participants, it is also important to solicit feedback from partners. A change in season is a natural time to review your partnership so far and ensure that it is mutually beneficial. Revisit the expectations you established when creating your partnership (see “*Working with Partners—Forming Solid Partnerships*”) and ensure both parties’ needs are being met. Establish a plan for how the partnership will continue to grow, based on your experiences so far.

Next Steps – Finding Funding

Now that you have started a successful Mood Walks group, what's next? Perhaps your group wants to branch out and try something new: urban poling, geocaching, or incorporating a strength training or flexibility component as part of your group's activities. Or perhaps your group wants to meet more frequently or expand membership. Making these changes may require funding!

Funding agencies are a source of revenue. The application process can vary according to the amount of work involved and the time of year that funding decisions are made. Before you submit an application or spend a lot of time writing your proposal, be sure to contact the funder to make sure your program is eligible. Many funders will also be happy to provide advice to help you strengthen your application.

Some funders look for applications that include strong partnerships with other community organizations. Partners can provide in-kind resources that take some pressure off your budget. They can also make your program more sustainable by reducing your reliance on one-time funding sources. See *“Working with Other Community Partners”* for more information.

Here are some places to look for funding sources and grants:

- Charity Village lists numerous funding agencies and foundations of interest to nonprofit organizations (charityvillage.com/directories/funders).
- Community foundations across Canada focus on funding community vitality in a broad sense; learn more at cfc-fcc.ca.
- A list of Funding Opportunities in Ontario for Physical Activity, Nutrition and Environmental Initiatives created in 2010 by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario can be found at otf.ca.
- A list of organizations that offer funding opportunities related to physical activity promotion programs for adults can be found in the Resources section of the Minding Our Bodies toolkit at mindingourbodies.ca.

You could also consider a fundraising initiative that promotes physical activity. A group challenge such as a walk-a-thon, dance-a-thon, or golf tournament can engage participants and attract individual donors or organizational sponsors.

Strategies for Effective Proposal Writing

Writing an effective proposal can be challenging and time-consuming. The Health Communication Unit (THCU) offers a free online course, developed in partnership with the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, to help you plan and prepare a good proposal. You can access the course at www.pwc.ohcc-ccso.ca.

Conclusion

We hope this manual is helpful to you in running your Mood Walks group, and that your group is a success!

A reminder that this manual will be revised periodically to further benefit campuses that want to implement walking groups for people who have a mental illness, so your feedback is important! Please contact info@moodwalks.ca to provide us with your comments or suggestions.

Online Appendices

Visit the Mood Walks website at www.moodwalks.ca for helpful links and resources, including the following tools:

- Expense Tracking Form
- External Mood Walks Referral Form
- PAR Q
- Are You Ready to Be Physically Active?
- Physical Liability Waiver
- Consent to Use of Image Form
- My Mood Walks SMART Goal
- Sample Press Release
- Sample Mood Walks Donation Request Letter
- Sample Mood Walks Group Poster
- Mood Walks Evaluation Tools
 - Participants' Mood Walks Pre-Program Questionnaire
 - Sign-in for Participants (Pre-Walk)
 - Sign-in for Participants (Post Walk)
 - Leaders Tracking
 - Participants Mood Walks Follow-up Questionnaire
 - Mood Walks Follow-up Focus Group Guide
 - Final Mood Walks Report for Host Agencies



