

Sheridan



# THE PARDESI PROJECT

## Facilitator Guide





# THE PARDESI PROJECT

Spotlighting the Mental Health of  
South Asian International Students

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# THE PARDESI PROJECT

Spotlighting the Mental Health of South Asian International Students

The Pardesi Project is a mental health promotion short film initiative aimed at addressing the unique mental challenges of South Asian International students. In Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi “par” means other and “des” means country. Pardesi is the label for a foreigner, immigrant, and/or newcomer. This project is a collaboration between SOCH Mental Health, Sheridan College and the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (CICMH).

The purpose of this guide is to assist facilitators to start the mental health dialogue among South Asian international students and encourage help seeking behaviour by providing information on how to access support. The stories shared in the films are both individual to the South Asian international students and universal to all. We encourage users to consider the key themes below into the conversation with the support of the videos in a meaningful and safe way.



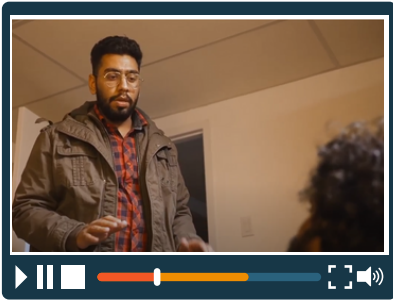
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## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Be aware that the videos may be triggering to some viewers. Acknowledging this to viewers prior to watching and discussing the videos as well as encouraging viewers to step away should they feel triggered at any time. Please seek professional support as needed.
- Consider focusing on one video at a time that is most relevant to your topic in the given space. However, facilitators are welcome to use the videos as they see fit.
- As these conversations can be triggering and challenging at times, consider having designated support systems in place like counsellors who are equipped in providing suitable assistance. You can review other mental health resources shared in this document.

# THE PARDESI PROJECT FILMS

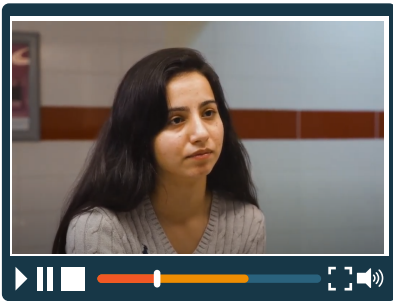


## FILM 1: INTRODUCTION TO MENTAL HEALTH

This is an introductory short film to normalize the mental health dialogue among international students. This film encourages all individuals to accept mental health as part of their overall well-being and reach out for help if going through a difficult time.

[English](#)

[Punjabi](#)



## FILM 2: ADJUSTING TO CANADA

Adjusting to a new country as an international student can be very challenging. This film highlights some of the difficulties that students may encounter as they try to navigate a new education system, culture, and climate all while being away from their loved ones.

[English](#)

[Punjabi](#)

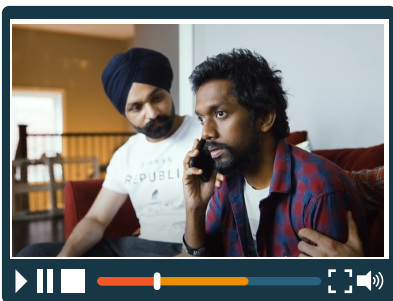


## FILM 3: DEPRESSION

Depression can impact individuals from all walks of life but those struggling with this condition may not be able to explain what is happening to them. This can make it challenging for their family and friends to understand their situation as well. This film portrays the challenges of a young international student who is struggling with depression while highlighting the lack of awareness of those around her.

[English](#)

[Punjabi](#)

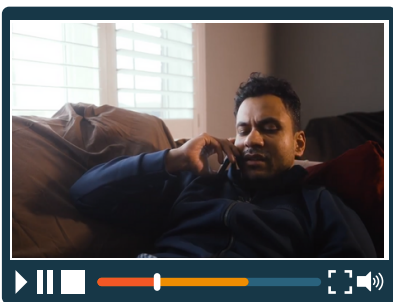


## FILM 4: RISKY BEHAVIOURS - ALCOHOL

When international students encounter challenges with their mental wellness, they may resort to unhealthy coping mechanisms to manage their stress. One such risky behaviour is drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. This film portrays the difficulties of a young international student who is managing his stress through alcohol use while his friends continue to worry about his circumstances.

[English](#)

[Punjabi](#)



## FILM 5: ADDRESSING SUICIDE

Suicide is a highly stigmatized topic that we do not discuss openly in our communities. This film aims to dismantle myths regarding suicide while providing tips on how to provide support to a loved one who may be struggling with these challenging thoughts.

[English](#)

[Punjabi](#)



# UNDERSTANDING YOUR GROUP'S NEEDS

## IMMIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

While mental well-being is a concern for all students, international students face additional challenges. South Asian International students are part of diverse groups and come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. They may also speak many different languages apart from Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. In addition to vast amounts of stigma mental health supports, preventative screening, and mental health programs can be very limited in their home country. Additionally, language barriers and lack of understanding of a new health care system can further prevent international students from accessing supports. Adjustments to a new culture, loss of connection of family and social supports, and unfamiliar education systems make their journey very challenging.

## MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA AND SHAME WITHIN SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES

Mental Health concerns are not widely discussed within South Asian communities due to the deep-rooted stigma associated with mental health. Many believe that mental illness is not a real illness, but rather a product of a person playing the victim or influenced by western culture. An individual with concerns of anxiety or depression may be dismissed as being weak and playing the victim card. People who deal with mental illness experience feelings of shame which often prevents people from seeking help. Families may also attempt to isolate the individual from the rest of the community and try to manage the problem on their own to prevent others from finding out and to bring further shame to the family.

## SEEKING HELP AND TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

Many South Asian communities may not voluntarily seek help from mental health experts due to a lack of awareness and understanding of mental health and the resources available. Instead, advice may be taken from spiritual and religious leaders in the form of performing prayers and donations. Places of worship and spiritual and religious leaders play an integral role in the South Asian communities' beliefs.

## FAMILY PRESSURES

International students face many pressures from family members in the forms of academic success, family responsibility and financial burden. Migration and resettlement create two narratives whereas the parents are tied to traditional South Asian roots and international students are trying to adjust to the western world. The constant struggle between the dual identity leads to languishing mental health among international students. Families often liquidate their resources to send their children to study internationally to provide them with a better life but to also secure the future of the rest of the family as well.

# POSSIBLE FACILITATED CONVERSATION TOPICS

## SHARING PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

Encourage storytelling by asking individuals to share their journey and feelings.

- A** Ask open-ended questions that allow others to share their experiences (e.g., “how would you describe your journey as an international student?”, “Did you resonate with the film and the characters?” and “How did you feel while watching the films?”).
- B** Allow silences in the conversations and do not give up if the student is slow to talk.
- C** Validate their struggles and experiences (e.g., “that must have been a difficult time” or “that sounds really hard”).

## WELLNESS AND MENTAL WELL-BEING

The Mental Health Continuum explains that mental wellness can look different for everyone and mental health impacts everyone. However, mental health is a spectrum, it is not binary. This means that people living with mental illness can experience positive mental health, while people without mental illness can experience poor mental health. Mental health is fluid, that changes throughout our lives as we experience various circumstances. To learn more about this, click here: [The Mental Health Continuum Model](#).

- A** Reflect on a time when you were having a hard time mentally, or feeling sad, or down, what factors were impacting your well-being?
- B** How would you define optimal mental well-being? What does mental well-being mean to you? How do you know that your mental well-being is good?

# POSSIBLE FACILITATED CONVERSATION TOPICS

## SELF-PERCEPTION AND SELF-CARE

Our perception and views about ourselves are vital in how we feel mentally. It is important that we start and continue to have check-ins with ourselves to support our overall well-being. Our mind and body always give us cues that we need to seek help. Through those regular check-ins, we can start understanding those cues.

- A What are some simple ways that we can care for ourselves?
- B Reflect on a time when your mental health was suffering, what did you do to maintain your well-being? Did you know or access supports that could have helped you?

## MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Mental illness like many other illnesses is recognized as a clinical and medical condition. However, mental health concerns and mental illness among the South Asian population is sometimes not seen as a legitimate illness like many other illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. Due to this poor mental health can become an individual burden.

- A How can we, as a community, advocate for community support and start the conversation about positive mental health support?
- B How do we spread awareness and education within the South Asian diaspora?

# SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

## HELPLINES

- **Distress Centre of Toronto (formerly Spectra Helpline)**

Offers its programs and services, (i.e., crisis and suicide assessment and intervention, emotional support, and outbound check-in calls) in 8 languages: English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Portuguese, Spanish, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu.

**Visit:** <https://www.spectrahelpline.org/>

- **Sikh Family Helpline**

A non-emergency helpline providing support and connecting individuals to service providers in English and Punjabi

**Visit:** <http://www.sikhfamilyhelpline.com/>

- **Kids Help Phone**

**Visit:** <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

## FINDING A THERAPIST

- **Psychology Today**

Find a Registered Psychotherapist in Ontario

**Visit:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists/ontario>

- **South Asian Therapists**

Home of the largest global community of South Asian therapists, including therapists of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Afghani and Nepali heritage.

**Visit:** <https://southasiantherapists.org/>



# SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

## MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

- **Canadian Mental Health Association Peel Quick Guide**

Provides information on local mental health resources within the Region of Peel, broken down by which area you need support in.

**Visit:** <https://cmhapeeldufferin.ca/documents/quick-guide-mental-health-addictions-resources/>

- **24.7 Peel Mobile Crisis**

Puts you in touch with a mental health professional for crisis support for a loved one struggling with a mental illness.

**Visit:** <https://www.connexontario.ca/Directory/Program/8202>

- **Catholic Family Services of Peel**

**Visit:** <http://cfspd.com/walk-in-counselling-clinic/>

- **Family Services of Peel**

**Visit:** <https://fspeel.org/services/counselling/walk-in-counselling/>

- **Punjabi Community Health Services**

A South Asian agency providing mental health support in Brampton and Malton. PCHS offers Mental Health & Addictions Programs.

**Visit:** <http://pchs4u.com/about-us/>

- **WellCan**

Created by Morneau Shepel, WellCan is a hub of mental health resources and tools to help Canadians develop coping strategies during these stressful times.

**Visit:** <https://www.morneaushepell.com/ca-en/wellcan-community-support>

- **BounceBack**

BounceBack is a free, guided self-help program that's effective in helping people aged 15 and up who are experiencing mild-to-moderate anxiety or depression, or may be feeling low, stressed, worried, irritable or angry.

**Visit:** <https://bouncebackontario.ca/>

For more information please contact:

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