



Build a bridge for mental health this Canadian Agricultural Safety Week

By Gerry Friesen for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association
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How often have you heard the term “get over it”?

I know I’ve used it occasionally, and I suspect that, in few of those instances, I’ve used the term inappropriately.

There are certainly times I need to be reminded to get over it. Like when I lose patience with the flow of traffic, or my food order takes a while to arrive, or it rains when I’d like to golf. However, if the phrase is used at times when people are dealing with overwhelming stress or mental health issues, it can be hurtful and counterproductive.

Recently, one of my kids said “get over it” to one of their siblings. Then, in the background, I heard someone else say, “build a bridge.” Excuse me, build a bridge? “When you’re told to ‘get over it’ what do you need? You need a bridge,” the individual explained.

That got me thinking. Instead of muddling our way through, fighting everything we’re trying to avoid, we need to build a bridge. Like a bridge that crosses a river, but, in this case, the river is a personal crisis.

Picture a river with a swift and turbulent current. As you start to cross the river, the water gets deeper and colder. Mud is sucking at your feet. The flow is throwing you off balance while rocks are digging into your heels. Then, when the water gets too deep for walking, you start swimming. The current takes you downstream, and you end up in places you did not want to go.

In a worst-case scenario, those unexpected places could lead you to drown.

The crux of the matter is that people who are experiencing debilitating stress or mental health issues often feel like they’re alone. I know first-hand that people dealing with

mental pain wish they weren’t. They want to experience all that life has to offer. They want to have meaningful contributions to their local community. They view this river as being between





themselves and the rest of the world. So imagine the possibilities if a bridge were built to help them “get over” that river.

With a bridge in place, it becomes possible to circumvent potentially harmful situations. That means being able to stay dry, on course, and safe while observing the river from afar.

There’s another side to this. Many often find it difficult to respond to those who are hurting. Perhaps it’s because of the feeling that responding means taking responsibility for the problems of others. Maybe it’s about being unsure of what to say. But, for those who work to build a bridge, it provides a way for people to help them with crossing the river.

There’s no question that building a bridge takes time and effort. But if the construction starts on both sides, it becomes an easier, more fulfilling task.

What’s more, once that bridge is built, it can be used time and time again.

As mental health awareness increases, more people are talking about it and reaching out for help. That heightened awareness has also helped produce a higher level of comfort for others to help those individuals who are hurting. The challenge is to become more proactive in building bridges, regardless of which side of the river you find yourself.

The best part is no one needs to build a bridge on their own. Find your supports. Your friends, family, and neighbours are all prepared to be on the “construction” crew.

So let’s build more bridges and “get over it” together.

This editorial is a part of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is an annual campaign held the third week of March of each year. In 2019, Safe & Strong Farms: Build an AgSafe Canada, takes place March 10 to 16. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca.

Cutline Gerry Friesen: Gerry Friesen, the recovering farmer, is the founder of Signature Mediation.

