

# SHARE & CARE

THE RECOVERY OF HOPE - THE HOPE OF RECOVERY

## THE POWER OF ART ON OUR MENTAL HEALTH

**M**aking art is fun, whether it be drawing, painting, crafting, scrapbooking, or colouring. But did you know that making art is also good for your mental health? Increased evidence demonstrates the positive impact arts activities have on mental health and well-being. Here are just a few ways that making art can help improve mental health.

### Encourages emotional expression

Art is a non-verbal medium of self-expression. It allows us to express how we are feeling when words alone aren't enough, or when we don't feel like talking. For instance, some might draw a face to show how they feel on the inside, and others might paint abstract shapes to represent how they would like to feel. Making art can also help us process and understand our emotions in a safe way.

### Reduces cortisol, increases dopamine

According to some studies, making art can promote relaxation and reduce lev-



els of the stress hormone cortisol. As well, some studies have shown that making art can increase dopamine levels in the brain. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter associated with feelings of pleasure and reward. An increase in dopamine can be beneficial for people struggling with poor mental health.

### Provides opportunities for mindfulness

Mindfulness is about being present in each moment, without judgement, and it

is associated with stress reduction. Focusing on the task of making art can be viewed as an opportunity to practice mindfulness. How does the brush feel as it moves across the canvas? Can you focus on the sensation of the clay in your hands when you sculpt? Are you able to stay focused on the craft you are making, without being distracted by thoughts or worries? These are just some examples of how making art can foster mindfulness.

### Facilitates social connections

Whether you are creating art with others in a class, or you are at home crafting with friends and family, making art with others can provide opportunities for social interactions—even virtually. Creating connections with people who share similar interests can decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation.

There are many ways to make art. Common art experiences are painting,

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**Brenda Cormier** is a long time volunteer who decided to ask her family and friends to donate to AMI for her birthday. We set up a personalized donation page on our website with photos and Brenda's lovely birthday message, and she raised \$3,143 for our programs! Brenda says, "I have to say I am thrilled with the way this all went. My friends and family were so generous. Honestly I am SO happy I did this. Makes me proud!!" Thank you so much, Brenda!



### Would you consider raising money for AMI?

Take a look at [amiquebec.org/Brenda](http://amiquebec.org/Brenda)—we can set up a page like that just for you! Email Diana at [info@amiquebec.org](mailto:info@amiquebec.org)—we are grateful for your support.



Art ... continued from page 1

drawing, scrapbooking, or sketching; or you may be interested in graphic art, photography, or sculpture. If visual arts aren't for you, you can also engage in writing, drama, dance, or music. Whatever medium you choose, engaging in an arts activity can be rewarding and beneficial to your mental health and well-being. Best of all there is no right or wrong way to make art – it is the process, not the outcome, that is important. □

–Gabrielle Lesage

Visit [amiqubec.org/sources](http://amiqubec.org/sources) for references

If you have a loved one living with mental illness, our Creative Expression workshop on April 7th is for YOU. Visit [amiqubec.org/creative](http://amiqubec.org/creative) and register today. You'll have the chance to make a collage like these ones.



## Relationships and Mental Health

### Answering some big questions

This article is based on our “Hot Topics – Relationships and Mental Health” Facebook Live event with AMI’s staff members Tony Alfonso, Marc Griffin, and Ella Amir. To watch the recording, visit [facebook.com/amiqubec/videos](https://facebook.com/amiqubec/videos).

Relationships are an important part of our lives and mental health. They bring us joy and fulfill our social needs, but they can also be challenging. Here is how our panel answered some big questions about relationships and mental health.

#### How do I tell someone about my mental illness?

Talking about your mental illness is important, but don't feel pressured to tell everything right away. You don't have to reveal your whole life story on a first date; instead, start slowly. For example, mention that you experience anxiety and that you have consulted a therapist for help. Sharing small amounts of information can be a good way to start the conversation. Listen to your instincts and share only as much information as you are comfortable with. There is no one way of telling someone about your mental illness; each person's experience will be unique.

#### My partner and I have different needs. How do we address that?

Communication is key. It is important to talk with your partner about your needs to ensure that you are both on the same page. If talking about it isn't easy, try to communicate in other ways, like participating in an activity together, which might help you feel more open to sharing your thoughts and feelings. Understanding that each person has a different way of expressing love and emotion and identifying your limits and boundaries can help with the discussion.

#### My partner is struggling with their mental health, and I think they should seek help. How do I tell them this?

It is important to prepare yourself before talking with your partner about their mental health. Try to be open and approachable and avoid telling them what to do. Use appropriate language to share your concerns. You may suggest that seeking help can be beneficial. You can tell them if you have received help with your own mental health issues before; it may encourage them to seek help too. Understand that your partner may resist at first. Seeking help is a big step, and they

might not be ready right away. The most important thing is to let your partner know that you support them.

#### How can I navigate conflict?

When two people stay in the same place without having some form of escape (which can be common during the COVID-19 pandemic), it can be like a pressure cooker: if there is conflict but no way to take a break, emotions can escalate. That's why it's important to have space to calm down. Whether it's going out for a walk, going to your room by yourself, or even sitting in your car, having space alone is essential to navigating conflict in a relationship. This can help during an argument. Creating this space also allows you both to identify what emotions they are experiencing. We are often quick to respond in anger in pressured situations, but anger can mask other emotions like sadness or anxiety. It is important to remember that it's okay to wait until the next morning to resolve the situation. If you step away from the conflict and sleep on it, it can be easier to deal with it rationally rather than in an emotional way. □

–Gabrielle Lesage

# CAREGIVING CAN MAKE YOU LONELY

## HERE'S HOW TO COPE

Caregivers can often feel isolated, leading to feelings of loneliness and affecting their emotional and physical health. Loneliness can feel overwhelming, but it can be managed. What are the signs and causes of caregiver loneliness, and how can you combat it?

### Signs of Caregiver Loneliness

Feeling lonely is an obvious indicator of caregiver loneliness, but other signs include:

- Significant changes in day-to-day routine without an apparent cause
- Isolation
- Less communication with others than usual
- Declining health
- Increased fatigue and symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Stopping all activities except caregiving

### Common Causes

Caregiver loneliness is experienced by everyone differently. It also has a variety of causes.

#### *Mourning a Past Lifestyle or Wanting Another Way of Life*

Becoming a caregiver can happen at any age, under a range of circumstances. A caregiver who feels lonely may feel sad or disappointed to have lost the life they had before becoming a caregiver; they may also desire a different situation than the one they are currently in.

### STAY INFORMED!

Find our most up-to-date information at:

[www.amiquebec.org](http://www.amiquebec.org)

For regular updates, follow AMIQuebec on:



Sign up for monthly emails:

[amiquebec.org/email](mailto:amiquebec.org/email)

Or call us: 514-486-1448

(1-877-303-0264 outside Montreal)

#### *Feeling Like Nobody Understands*

Caregivers often feel that other people don't know what it is like to walk in their shoes, even when those around them are compassionate and supportive. And unfortunately, some caregivers do not have a circle of family and friends that are understanding. Instead, others may judge or criticize how they care for an individual. Loneliness can be a result of feeling isolated, unsupported, judged, or criticized.

#### *Needing More or Different Communication*

Perhaps the person you are caring for is non-verbal, or the way they communicate with you does not fulfill your social interaction and communication needs. A lack of satisfying social interaction can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

#### *Being Housebound*

Some caregivers are housebound when they care for someone else. Being in the same place all the time and having limited contact with people from outside of your household can feel restricting and isolating.

### Tips to Combat Loneliness

What are some strategies to reduce or limit loneliness? Here are some recommendations that can help you get started.

#### *Limit Your Consumption of Technology*

Technology can be a blessing, but it can also be a curse. Using technology such as watching TV or playing a video game can be a relaxing activity, but it should not consume your whole day. Some studies show that watching excessive amounts of TV can contribute to feelings of depression and loneliness. Try to limit your use of technology and incorporate other small activities in your life like reading or knitting.

#### *Join a Support Group*

Many perks come with joining a support group, but one of the important benefits is interacting with others in a similar situation. Social interaction and feeling supported are key to combatting loneliness. (Visit [amiquebec.org/support](http://amiquebec.org/support) to discover our support groups.)



#### *Reach Out to Friends and Family*

Sometimes talking to someone you are close to can help you feel better and more connected. If you feel overwhelmed or have concerning fluctuations in your emotions, reach out to someone you trust.

#### *Contact a Community Organization*

Some caregivers do not have a support system like family members or friends, but community organizations often offer services and relief for caregivers. There are also listening lines if you need someone to talk to who is outside your social circle (visit [amiquebec.org/listen](http://amiquebec.org/listen)).

#### *Practice Self-Care*

Sometimes it is difficult for caregivers to find the time for themselves, but even a few minutes of self-care a day can alleviate negative emotions that contribute to loneliness. Self-care is personal, and it can be something you find relaxing or enjoyable, such as going out for a walk or writing in a journal. □

–Gabrielle Lesage

**M**indfulness: it is a term that we hear often, but what does it mean? Contrary to popular belief, mindfulness is not about paying *more* attention to each moment but changing *how* we pay attention, according to Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., a world-renowned expert in the art of mindfulness.

**Thinking vs. Experiencing**

Kabat-Zinn distinguishes two modes of attention: a *doing mode* and a *mindful mode*. One is not better or worse than the other; they are simply different ways of engaging with our worlds.

A **doing mode** is our natural way of paying attention; it is automatic and habitual. We are concerned with how things *should* be rather than how they actually are. In a doing mode, we engage with our experiences intellectually, filtering our experiences through critical thinking and analysis; thus, we are continually evaluating and judging our experiences. In a doing mode, we are goal-oriented and focused on fixing problems or achieving results.

On the other hand, a **mindful mode** does not come naturally to us. It is a learned way of paying attention that is intentional and cultivated; in other words, we have to choose to be mindful and practice being mindful. Instead of thinking about our experiences, we engage with our world directly, using our body senses, emotions, and intuition. We observe our experiences, thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations with detachment; in other words, without judging them as good or bad. We experience things as they *are*, not what we think they *should* be.

To better understand the distinction between our typical way of paying attention (doing mode) and a mindful way (mindful mode), consider the everyday experience of eating a snack. In a doing mode, you might feel your stomach rumbling, judge that feeling to be bad and unpleasant, grab whatever food is close, and eat the food without noticing much about it. The goal: to make your unpleasant feeling of hunger go away.

However, in a mindful mode, you might feel your stomach rumbling, observe the sensation for a few moments, name that observation as “hunger,” intentionally choose a snack, and notice each aspect

of the sensory experience of eating that snack: the look of the label; the feel of the package in your hand; the smell, colour, and shape of the food; the sound it makes when you eat it; and, of course, its taste.

**MINDFULNESS?**  
**What is it?**

You may observe that your stomach no longer rumbles once you finish. Being hungry is not judged to be good or bad or a problem to be solved.

**Mindfulness Techniques**

So, how do we switch from being in a doing mode to being in a mindful mode? Our minds will naturally desire to judge, attain goals, and analyze our experiences. In a mindful mode, we don't fight this instinct, but we choose to engage with our perceptions differently. To do this, we have to train ourselves using some simple techniques and exercises. **Remember, always consult with your health-care provider before beginning any new health-care practice.**

One mindfulness technique is to observe your sensory experiences during routine activities. For instance, instead of rushing through the dishes to “get it done,” you might take time to feel the soapy water on your hands, notice the smell of the detergent, and observe the sparkle of clean plates once you've finished.

Another technique is to observe physical sensations inside your body. One way to do this is to set aside a few minutes each day to sit quietly and observe the breath in your body without controlling it.

As you practice being in a mindful mode, you may notice your mind wandering, with memories of the day, thoughts about the future, or even emotional responses distracting you from your sensory perceptions. Instead of judging or reacting to these thoughts and feelings, you can simply notice the thought and label it as “thinking,” “worrying,” “judging,” or “remembering”. Then return your attention to whatever you are doing.

**Is Mindfulness Right for Me?**

Research has demonstrated numerous psychological and health benefits of mindfulness practice, including:

- reduced stress
- increased positive feelings
- decreased negative emotions
- reduced anxiety, depression, and somatic distress
- improved immune functioning

Mindfulness is about choice: it provides an alternative way to engage with the world. If you think that you might benefit from incorporating mindfulness techniques into your life, visit [amiquebec.org/sources](http://amiquebec.org/sources) for links to other articles about mindfulness, pick up one of Jon Kabat-Zinn's books, such as *The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*, and talk with your health-care provider to see if mindfulness is right for you. □

*Jan Barbieri, MA, MTA, is a vocalist and accredited music therapist practicing in mental health, developmental disabilities, and geriatrics. For more information, visit <https://fb.me/musictherapymontreal>.*

*Visit [amiquebec.org/sources](http://amiquebec.org/sources) for references*

**Meet Connie.** *Connie has been with AMI for many years, and has been especially critical to our work this year. When you call the office, it is Connie who will guide and reassure you. Because of the pandemic, we are receiving more phone calls now than ever before. Our callers are so grateful for her patience, caring, and ability to calm people who are having a difficult time. We could not have made it through this past year without her!*



# SPRING 2021

## SUPPORT GROUPS

Mondays, 6:30pm on Google Meet  
For family, friends, and people with mental illness unless otherwise indicated.  
For details visit [amiquebec.org/support](https://amiquebec.org/support)

## FAMILY AND FRIENDS for relatives and friends

March 29; April 12, 19, 26;  
May 10, 17, 31; June 7, 21, 28

## BPD for relatives and friends

April 12; May 10; June 7

## ANXIETY/ OCD

April 12; May 10; June 7

## BIPOLAR DISORDER

April 19; May 17; June 21

## DEPRESSION

April 19; May 17; June 21

**Please note: due to COVID-19, all our programs are taking place online and by phone, not in person.**

**Visit [amiquebec.org/coronavirus](https://amiquebec.org/coronavirus) or call 514-486-1448 for access details and the most up to date information.**

## HOARDING

March 29; April 12, 26; May 10, 31; June 7, 28

## KALEIDOSCOPE for people living with mental illness

March 29; April 26; May 31; June 28

## SOUTH SHORE for relatives

Wednesdays 6:30pm  
March 17; April 14; May 12; June 16

## INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS

Registration required for programs below. Call 514-486-1448 or visit [amiquebec.org/workshops](https://amiquebec.org/workshops) for details or to register.

### One-Time Workshops

6-8 pm on Google Meet

For family and friends

### Creative Expression

April 7

### Anger and Caregiving Relationships

April 20

### Intro to BPD

May 5

### Coping Skills

May 18

### Validation Practice Group

May 26

### BPD Emotion Regulation

June 13, 10am-12pm

### Boundaries & Setting Limits

June 15

### Workshop Series

Online on Google Meet

For family and friends

Must attend all days

### Mood Journals for Young Caregivers

April 1 and 8, 6-7:30pm

### Meditation

Starts April 14

Runs for 10 weeks on

Wednesdays, 11am-12pm

### Caregivers Group

- Monday group

starts April 19

Runs for 6 weeks on

Mondays, 7-8:15 pm

- Wednesday group

starts April 21

Runs for 6 weeks on

Wednesdays, 3-4:15 pm

For everyone

### Hot Topics Q&A

Online on Facebook Live

7-8:15pm

### Affordable Mental Health Services

March 25

### Indigenous Realities & Mental Health

April 15

### AMI Spotlight: Family & Friends

April 29

### Rural Settings & Mental Health

May 13

### AMI Spotlight: Depression

May 27

### Calming Techniques

June 17

### AMI Spotlight: Kaleidoscope

June 23

## BOARD MEETINGS

Tuesdays 7:00pm on Jitsi

April 6; May 4; June 1

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

June 8, 7pm

Online on Google Meet

# What do you think about psychiatry?

## An Overview of the Debate

There has been a lot of debate on the pros and cons of psychiatry. Some people feel that the profession needs to restructure its approach to treating mental health disorders; others feel that psychiatry offers effective treatment. This article will explore two commonly debated topics: diagnosis and medication.

### Diagnosis

Some people are critical of the diagnostic process in psychiatry. They feel that diagnoses are based largely on the observations of the individual doctor, and that this subjectivity in the diagnostic process could lead to a person receiving different diagnoses from different doctors. For these people, a psychiatric diagnosis is unreliable. Furthermore, some people feel that receiving a diagnosis such as “bipolar disorder,” “schizophrenia,” or “generalized anxiety disorder” labels them for life. This label may negatively affect their sense of identity and hopes for the future. Finally, other people feel that receiving a diagnosis means that their mental illness is beyond their control, a perception that can interfere with the recovery process.

On the other hand, some people support the diagnostic process in psychiatry. These individuals feel reassured that psychiatric diagnoses are based on diagnostic categories compiled over years of research. Others are relieved when they obtain a diagnosis because they find comfort in naming and understanding their symptoms. For these individuals, obtaining a diagnosis can be validating, and it can open the door to treatment options.

### Medication

Another hot-button topic is medication. One commonly cited issue is the negative side effects that accompany many medications used to treat mental health disorders. Furthermore, some people feel that it takes too long to find the right type of medication for their needs, or that they are prescribed too many different medications at once.

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# BIPOLAR DISORDER

## A Path to Recovery

Despite what many people believe, it is possible to recover from bipolar disorder. Each person's path to recovery will be different, but there are a few guidelines to consider when organizing your plan.

### Follow the Right Treatment Plan

A good treatment plan is a crucial part of recovery, and it often includes both medication and therapy. Medication can help control symptoms and regulate mood. Therapy and complementary treatments can help change perception and improve certain habits. Examples of therapy effective in bipolar disorder are cognitive behavioural, interpersonal, and family therapy. Complementary treatments include mindfulness meditation and acupuncture, among others. Work with your health-care provider to find the right combination of medication and therapy for you.

For a treatment plan to be effective, it is important to follow it consistently, even when you start to feel better. Do not make changes to your plan without consulting your health-care provider because this

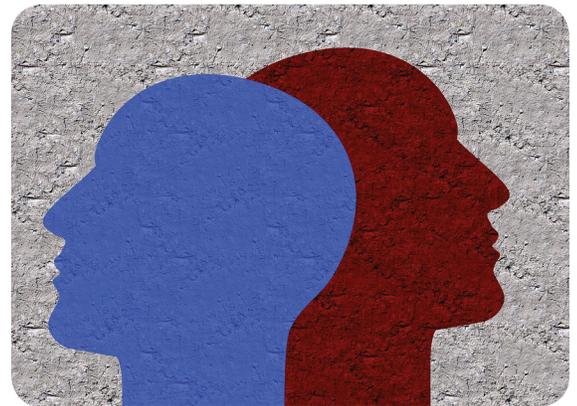
can have serious, even dangerous, consequences. For instance, stopping medication on your own can trigger physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping and anxiety, and lead to relapse. Keep track of what is working in your treatment plan and what is not, and discuss this with your health-care provider so that together you can adjust your plan as necessary.

### Keep a Daily Journal

Keeping a daily journal to record your thoughts and feelings can help you manage the symptoms of bipolar disorder during recovery. Journaling can help you safely express your thoughts and feelings. It can also help you notice patterns in thoughts, feelings, and life events that precede and even trigger bipolar symptoms. Identifying healthy and unhealthy thought and feeling patterns and avoiding triggers can help you manage your symptoms and identify when it is time to ask for help.

### Identify Coping Skills

What are some things that help you feel better when you are depressed, stressed, or tired? Are there other things that help you feel calm and in control when your mood is elevated? These are examples of coping



skills that can help you manage stress and stabilize mood. Coping skills can take a variety of forms, such as going for a walk, playing a video game, meditating, or talking with a friend. Select coping skills that help you manage stress and stabilize mood over both the long and short term.

### Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is also important to recovery. Your food choice, your exercise habits, and your quality of sleep all play a role in stabilizing your mood. Healthy choices include:

- eating a variety of healthy foods
- exercising regularly
- reducing stress
- getting enough sleep
- maintaining a routine
- avoiding drugs and alcohol

Healthy choices can contribute to your overall well-being and help keep you on track for a successful recovery.

*Emma Jackson is a high school student who founded an organization called Happy Human. Their mission is to provide a wellness and lifestyle hub for teens and young adults following the core values of being happy, healthy, and charitable. Their hope is to inspire others with the idea that social awareness and self care is crucial in being a happy*



*human and creating a healthy attitude and perspective within your environment. (Visit [happyhuman.live](http://happyhuman.live) for more details.)*

*Emma is putting these ideals into practice! She raised \$200 for AMI by selling bracelets. Thank you, Emma, we foresee a bright future for you and Happy Human, and are very grateful that you chose AMI as the recipient of your generosity.*



*continued on page 7*

*Bipolar... continued from page 6*

**Reach Out for Support**

Having a support system can help you stay grounded. Whether it be friends, family, or a community organization, don't be afraid to reach out to others for help or support. You don't have to be alone on your recovery journey.

**Keep Learning About Bipolar Disorder**

To effectively manage bipolar disorder, it is important to stay current on issues that impact your treatment and recovery plans, such as coping skills, medication side-effects, and new treatments. Ask your health-care provider to recommend resources to help you understand your diagnosis and stay informed about best practices and developments in bipolar disorder.

**Be Kind to Yourself**

Above all else, have patience and be kind to yourself during your recovery. Some days will be easy, others will be difficult. Don't be hard on yourself if things don't go according to your plan. You can always try again tomorrow!

For places that can help you or a loved one cope with bipolar, visit [amiquebec.org/bipolar](http://amiquebec.org/bipolar). □

*–Gabrielle Lesage*

*Our Bipolar support group is for family, friends, and people living with bipolar. Visit [amiquebec.org/support](http://amiquebec.org/support) for dates.*

*Visit [amiquebec.org/sources](http://amiquebec.org/sources) for references*

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*AMI-Québec extends sympathy to the bereaved and appreciation to all donors for their generosity. If you wish to honour someone with a donation, please phone 514-486-1448 or visit [amiquebec.org/donate](http://amiquebec.org/donate).*

# amiquébec

Agir contre la maladie mentale  
Action on mental illness

AMI-Québec, a grassroots not-for-profit organization, is committed to helping carers\* manage the effects of mental illness through support, education, guidance and advocacy. By promoting understanding, we work to dispel the stigma still surrounding mental illness, thereby helping to create communities that offer new hope for meaningful lives.

\*Carers (*proches aidants*) are those in the circle of care, including family members and other significant people, who provide unpaid support to a person in need.

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## SHARE & CARE

Share&Care is published quarterly.

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Articles and comments are invited. Anonymity will be respected if requested. Guest articles reflect the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of AMI-Québec.  
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### Psychiatry... continued from page 5

There are yet others who feel that pharmaceutical companies have too much influence over what doctors prescribe.

On the other hand, some people feel that medication has been effective in treating their mental health disorder. These individuals feel that medication has alleviated their symptoms and improved their quality of life, despite their side-effects. While some people support the use of medication, many also feel that it is important to combine medication and other non-pharmacological therapies and treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy or meditation.

### Conclusion

Receiving treatment for a mental health disorder is a highly personal experience. Each person will experience diagnosis and treatment in a unique way—what works for one person may not work for another, and it is important to be respectful of other people’s journeys. Likewise, not all psychiatrists are the same, and it is crucial to find a professional who is a good fit. You should feel comfortable with your psychiatrist and their treatment approach. Above all else, keep learning about your disorder and asking important questions to find the right treatment for your needs. □

–Gabrielle Lesage

Visit [amiquebec.org/sources](http://amiquebec.org/sources) for references

This issue of *Share&Care* has been made possible by a grant from the Otsuka-Lundbeck Alliance.



## YOUR SUPPORT SUSTAINS OUR FREE PROGRAMS

Although AMI receives some government funding, we need to raise more than half of our operating budget each year.

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