

# Maintaining Positive Mental Health

Tutor's Handbook



# Maintaining Positive Mental Health

## Introduction

This short handbook will provide some additional information to you about what positive mental health is, how it links to emotional health and well-being and how you can maintain your own positive mental health. This handbook will also be useful to you in promoting positive mental health with members of your local health network. Later in this handbook, we will also explain why it is important to maintain positive mental health.

When we have a pain in our leg or a sore tooth or an upset stomach, we seek medical attention so that we get better. However, not being able to maintain positive mental health is not seen in the same light. If you are stressed and you find yourself crying often, if you are distancing yourself from social situations, if you feel that you are sleeping too much because you can't motivate yourself to get up out of bed on a regular basis, these represent poor mental health and you should be able to seek help from family, friends and medical professionals so that you can get better – just like you would if you injured your foot.

The message of this resource is to communicate to people that it's okay to not be okay, and that there are a range of small things they can do every day, to feel a bit

better all of the time, and there is always medical support for any issues faced.

## Mental Health and Emotional Health

Emotional health is an important part of our general health, but it is linked to our mental health in particular. People who are emotionally healthy are in control of their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. They are able to face the challenges life throws at them. They can put problems into perspective and recover from setbacks. They feel good about themselves and have healthy relationships with others. Being emotionally healthy does not mean being happy all the time. It means that you are aware of your emotions and can deal with them, whether positive or negative.

Emotionally healthy people also feel stress, anger and sadness; but they know how to handle their negative feelings. They also feel confident within themselves to know when to seek help from their doctor, counsellor or other medical professional. Having balanced emotions can help to add balance to your mental health.

When we think of negative mental health we think of racing-thoughts, feelings of helplessness like everything is spiralling out of control, anxiety and depression, social withdrawal, etc. Racing-thoughts can be caused by panic because you

cannot keep your emotions in check. Those feeling of helplessness, loneliness, these are emotional responses we have. We convince ourselves through negative thinking that our situation is much worse than it is in reality.

As such, being able to maintain control of our emotions and keep a level head can help us to adopt behaviours and outlooks that will promote positive mental health.

## Getting Started

We know that having positive mental health is good for us. It's good for our physical well-being, good for our relationships, our personal development, etc. When we have positive mental health, we can thrive. But if you feel that you are suffering with negative mental health, how do you ever get started making changes that will improve your health? The answer is to start small. Get out of bed every day, get dressed, and try to make a small change that will improve your sense of mental wellbeing. We have compiled a list of common things that people do to maintain positive mental health. Take some time to read through this list and make these recommendations to members of your local health network. When discussing this with your group, be sure to ask group members what they do to maintain positive mental health!

- Be aware of your emotions:

Notice what makes you feel sad, frustrated or angry in your life. Try to solve or change those things

- Express your feelings appropriately:

Let people who are close to you know when something bothers you. Maintaining feelings of sadness or anger inside you adds tension. It can cause problems in your relationships and at work or at school.

- Think before you act:

Emotions can be powerful. Give yourself time to think and be calm before saying or doing something you might regret.

- Manage stress.

Try to change the situations that cause you stress. Learn relaxation methods to cope with stress. These could include deep breathing, meditation and exercise.

- Find the balance.

Find a healthy balance between work and play and between activity and rest. Take some time for the things you like. Focus on the positive things in your life.

- Take care of your physical health:

Your physical health can affect your emotional health. Exercise regularly, eat healthy foods and get enough sleep. Do not abuse drugs or alcohol.

- Connect with others:

We are social creatures. We need positive connections with other people. Gather to eat, join a group and greet unknown people.

- Stay positive:

Focus on the good things in your life. Forgive yourself for making mistakes and forgive others. Spend time with healthy and positive people.

- Find purpose and meaning:

Find out what is important to you in life and focus on that. It could be your job, your family, volunteering, providing care or something else. Spend time doing what is meaningful to you.

## Why is it Important?

People may be reluctant to try any of these activities or coping mechanisms and it is understandable why. People can get stuck in a rut or they can convince themselves so completely that they are actually fine, and so there is no need to change anything about their routine. But investing time in maintaining positive mental health is very important. Here are some of the long-term benefits of maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle:

- Reduced stress and improved mood
- Boost in energy level over time
- Improved cardiovascular health
- Sustainable weight loss
- Increased physical strength

These health benefits not only maintain your mental and physical health, but they also work to prevent illnesses, some of which can be very serious. While it may seem like a challenge, making the effort to

maintain your mental and physical health has many benefits in the long run.

## How to use this Resource with your Local Health Group?

This handbook presents some introductory information on the topic of emotional health and how it is linked to positive mental health, some tips for maintaining positive mental health and some information on why it's important.

It is worthwhile to review this handbook before your session with the group so that you are supported to facilitate a discussion about mental health. Be mindful however, as this is a topic which relates to the physical, psychological and emotional well-being on members of your group, if a group member presents with serious mental health concerns, please support them to seek professional medical support and do not try to tackle the issues raised in the group.

To accompany this handbook, you will also find a short PowerPoint presentation that can be used with your local health network to introduce some techniques for maintaining positive mental health and an explanation of why it is important to do so. Use this resource to start a conversation in the group about how to maintain positive mental health and ask for examples of what each group member does to maintain their own mental well-being.

## Group Activity

Once you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group members, you can start a group discussion about what group members do to maintain their own mental well-being.

Once all group members have shared some examples of what they do, ask them to work in small groups to think of the members of their community and what activities they could try to organise to promote the mental health of all community members. Local events like starting a parent and toddler group for new parents, or social events like starting a book club or knitting group or maybe something more active like setting up a walking group to encourage positive mental health of residents of all ages – these are some simple ideas but they can go a long way to improving the mental well-being of local community members.

Once all groups have completed their brainstorm, they can share and swap ideas with the whole group. You can facilitate this discussion and take note of the most popular ideas. When all ideas are exhausted, re-visit the ideas you have noted down and evaluate if the group is interested in developing this local initiative further. You and the group may choose to develop and implement this activity with the support of your local group, based on what

you have learned in the Lay Family Health Advisor training.

ON CALL



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Lay Community Health Advisors



UŠTANOVA ZA  
OSBAZOVANJE  
ODRASLIH | ADULT  
EDUCATION  
INSTITUTION



AKLUB

INNEO

fip  
Future In  
Perspective



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