

# What is Positive Mental Health?

## Tutor's Handbook



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## Introduction to Mental Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not only the absence of diseases or illnesses". Despite this, when we think of health, we often focus on our physical health – if we have any physical illnesses, injuries or diseases. However, we rarely give time to consider our mental health. Health not only refers to what happens in our bodies; it also refers to the health of our mind and our emotions. As our mental health affects our moods, our outlook, our self-image our relationships our aspirations in life, in many ways having good mental health can be more important than having good physical health.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Mental health does not have any one specific definition, so how we understand and appreciate our own mental health will differ from person to person. However, all definitions have certain terms in common, so we understand that in order to define positive mental health, we need to include the following terms: balance

between emotions, psychological and social well-being; positive outlook; positive feelings about others; ability to meet demands of daily life.

## Factors that Influence Mental Health

According to Marie Jahoda, a renowned psychologist, to understand and take care of our mental health, we must understand 6 factors which we will explain below.

### 1. Attitudes toward yourself:

This refers to how we see ourselves inwardly knowing our skills and in turn knowing our weaknesses.

### 2. Growth and self-actualization:

This really refers to what we do with our lives. This includes my personal aspirations, my goals in life, both personally and professionally, and my ability to invest in my personal development.

### 3. Integration:

This refers to how we introduce changes to our lives and how we cope when new experiences are introduced, whether negative or positive.

### 4. Autonomy:

It is how we relate to everything that surrounds us and how our decisions not only affect us but also affect others. This makes us responsible for our actions and makes us consider the possible consequences of them.

#### 5. Perception of reality:

This encompasses the ability we have to perceive reality in the most objective way possible omitting internal judgments that arise in the mind.

#### 6. Domain of the environment:

This concept speaks of success and adaptation. Two concepts that can be interrelated because one way to achieve success is to adapt as it is a process to obtain the objective (success, in this case)

### Tips for Positive Mental Health

Now that we know a bit more about what positive mental health is and the factors that influence it, it is time to present some useful tips for how you can grow and maintain your own positive mental health. It is worthwhile reviewing these tips and sharing them with your local health network at your next group session:

#### 1. Accept yourself:

We are all different. We are all unique. But there are certain societal pressures out there that make us believe we are not worthy. It is important to try to ignore these and to focus on the good things about yourself. And remember, it is impossible to please everybody so just please yourself!

#### 2. Eat Healthy:

The age old saying – “we are what we eat”. This goes for both physical and mental health. In the same way as eating greasy

food will clog your arteries, it can also clog your mind. A good diet will keep your mind sharp, as well as your body healthy.

#### 3. Exercise!

Keeping fit improves your mood and happiness. When you exercise, feel good chemicals called endorphins are released in the brain. Unfortunately, endorphins are not released before exercise, so we have to make the mental effort to do it!

#### 4. Get Enough Sleep, but not too much!

It is so important to get the right amount of sleep. Not getting enough sleep leads to fatigue. This can then lead to trouble concentrating which is troublesome if you are trying to maintain positive mental health. Equally getting too much sleep is also bad for your physical and mental health. Sleeping too much can promote lethargy, lack of motivation, anxiety, depression, etc. So, it is important to balance the amount of sleep you get on a regular basis.

#### 5. Take a break:

Having time for yourself allows you to de-stress from everything that is going on at the moment. Taking a break can mean a wide variety of things (i.e. going for a run, meditating, sitting down and reading, sleeping, going somewhere for the weekend, etc.). Find what works for you.

#### 6. Make time for family and friends:

Those who have better relationships with their friends, family and people in their community tend to be healthier and happier. Having a strong support system

of people who genuinely care about you is also helpful in overcoming adversities during difficult times.

7. Accept help when you need it:

We are all only human, therefore we are not able to do everything on our own. So, when you feel like you need help, be sure to ask for it. Accepting help will lessen levels of anxiety and stress as well, which is important for maintaining positive mental health.

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

This handbook presents some introductory information on the topic of positive mental health. This topic will be explored in more depth in other resources in the toolbox. As such, the aim of this resource is to act as an introduction for your group to what mental health is, what factors influence it and what you can do to improve and maintain positive mental health. 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 the topic of positive mental health and to provide the tips that they can follow to maintain their own health. Use this resource to start a conversation in the group about how to maintain positive mental health.

### Group Activity

Once you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group members, you can start a group discussion about positive mental health and how to maintain it. Begin by asking the group to share what they interpret by the term 'positive mental health'. Once all group members share their views, try to work together as a group to come up with one single definition of the term so that everyone has a similar understanding.

As a follow-up discussion, ask your local network members to share some advice to each other for what they do to maintain their own positive mental health. Group members should leave this session with a positive outlook and ideas for activities and coping mechanisms that they can use when they feel that their mental health is under pressure.



# ON CALL

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