

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING – WHAT IS IT AND WHAT CAN WE DO?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. When we are mentally healthy we can **'cope with the normal stresses of life, and work productively and fruitfully'*.

In this cheat sheet, we will learn more about the mental health continuum and what we can do to help ourselves be mentally healthy.

**World Health Organisation*



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING – WHAT IS IT?

We ALL have mental health, just as we all have physical health. The state of our mental health fluctuates, depending on external and internal factors, and how much we look after our mental wellbeing.

If we experience low mental wellbeing for some time, we are more likely to experience a mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression.

THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM

If we are **mentally healthy**, we are able to:

- Enjoy positive relationships with others and engage with the world around us
- Understand, experience and accept that we have a wide range of emotions
- Cope with change and uncertainty
- Problem solve and be solution-focused
- Have healthy self-confidence, self-esteem and self-respect

If our **mental health and wellbeing is wobbling**, we may:

- Have temporary or mild to moderate difficulties, such as struggling to sleep, or losing our appetite
- Be struggling to successfully manage the stresses in our life or put them into perspective

If we have a **mental health problem or disorder**, we may:

- Withdraw and become more socially isolated
- Notice more extreme physical behaviours, such as becoming easily angered or depressed, being exhausted, having increased aches and pains, turning to drugs or alcohol.
- Find ourselves performing badly, struggling to concentrate or, in contrast, becoming a workaholic.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF ON THE CONTINUUM

By understanding that we can be at different stages of the mental health continuum, at different times in our lives, we can actively help ourselves.

If we are mentally and physically healthy, it's good to recognise the things that are helping us to be well in mind and body. Then we can make sure that we sustain these behaviours and, if possible, do more of them. It might be that we set ourselves a target to eat even more healthily, drink in moderation and exercise more regularly.

If we are wobbling, it may help to look at each of the stresses in our life and what we can do to reduce these, so that they don't have such a negative impact. This could involve chatting to family members to share the load of caring for an elderly relative. Or it may be speaking to our line manager or head teacher, to ask for help with prioritising our workload.

If we have a mental health problem or disorder, it will help to identify trusted people that we can chat to. This may be close friends, family members, health professionals, the Employee Assistance Programme or a voluntary organisation such as the Samaritans, on 116 223. It can also help to know the techniques that work for us, such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), mindfulness or meditation.