

CACHE Level 2

Certificate in Awareness of Mental Health Problems

EATING DISORDERS

DEMENTIA

MENTAL HEALTH LEGISLATION

SCHIZOPHRENIA

PHOBIAS

STRESS

Workbook 1

Section 1: Understanding mental health

In this section you will develop an understanding of what is meant by mental health and mental ill health, and learn about the importance of mental health. You will find out about factors that can lead to mental ill health. You will also look at the law relating to mental health and mental health care.

The continuum of mental health

Please read the following as it will help you to answer questions 1a and 1b.

Before looking at the context of mental health it is essential to spend some time exploring the basic concept of mental health – what exactly does it mean to be ‘mentally healthy’? Once you understand this, it will help you understand what it means to be ‘mentally unhealthy’ and the distress that people with mental health problems may experience.

Knowledge Activity 1: In the space below make a note of what ‘good mental health’ means to you.



Mental health is quite difficult to define and the World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledges that there is no ‘official’ definition of the term. The WHO defines mental health as:

‘A state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.’

A person’s mental health issues, types of problems and the impact these have upon their life, family and friends are individual and specific to them. In other words, no two mental health problems will be experienced or managed in the same way.

The importance of mental health is demonstrated by its inclusion in the WHO’s definition of health as contained in its constitution:

‘Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.’

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The term mental health refers to the ability to function and deal with daily life and everything it presents. An example of good mental health would be a person who has a positive sense of who they are, has the ability to cope with pressure and the readiness to deal with life on a daily basis. If they are mentally healthy they can make a positive contribution to the community, the workplace and their family.

Positive mental health is therefore more than simply the absence of mental disorders. It also includes some of the following factors:

- **Being able to cope with the demands of everyday life** – a person's resilience; their ability to cope with stress, setbacks and difficult situations.
- **Being able to function in society** – being able to sustain relationships and participate in wider society.
- **Having a healthy perception** – having the ability to make sense of everyday events and the world around us.
- **Having healthy emotional health** – having the ability to experience, understand and express emotions and feelings.
- **Healthy thinking (cognition)** – a person's ability to think clearly, solve problems and make sound decisions.

Now we have looked at mental health, we will move on and look at 'mental ill health'.

Fact

In Britain, about a quarter of the population will experience some kind of mental health problem in the course of a year.



The term 'mental ill health' is generally used to refer to a group of conditions that affect a person's ability to think, interact with others and cope with the demands of everyday life. This can lead to significant changes in the person's thinking, feelings or behaviour. The term 'mental ill health' covers a wide range of conditions, from the worries and grief we all experience as part of everyday life, to severe depression or completely losing touch with everyday reality. Mental ill health can affect anyone, of any background, at any time of their life and may also have an impact on the people around them, such as family and friends.



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Key components of mental well-being

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 2.

Having good mental health is important to everyone and there are certain key components that affect and influence our mental well-being. Some health and social care professionals refer to these as 'protective factors'. These key components can help to protect our mental health well-being.

The key components that can affect mental well-being include:

Genetic inheritance – in a similar way to a person's physical health being linked to genes, it is also believed that mental health may be linked. For example, it is thought that through their genes, some people may be more susceptible to conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression. However, it has been widely debated and disputed as to whether certain conditions can actually be inherited or whether some people are simply more susceptible to some mental health problems.

Childhood experiences – a person's upbringing and early experiences can affect their later mental health. Positive family environments can build the foundations for good mental health throughout a person's life.

Social support and networks – the support from a person's social networks can have a positive effect upon their mental well-being and can help a person to deal with the effects of negative life events or experiences. For example, when a person is feeling vulnerable, family and friends can help to provide a sense of strength and security through the support they provide. If a person is feeling isolated, their local community can provide a source of stimulation, interaction and support.

Life events – these are the events and experiences that happen to a person throughout their lives and can play an enormous role in a person's sense of well-being. They can influence the way that people react to problems, issues or other events later on in life. Positive experiences of childhood, education, relationships and work life can all shape a person's approach to life.

Own individual ability to cope – mental health has a lot to do with our 'resilience' and ability to cope with the pressures of everyday life. In order to be able to remain mentally healthy, a person needs to be able to deal with day-to-day events in a capable manner. They need to have coping strategies which they can use when faced with problems and to be able to interact well with others using past experiences to make decisions. An individual's ability to cope will depend upon their resilience to previous experiences and life events, but also the support systems around them, such as having family and friends.

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Being healthy – having a healthy lifestyle can support a person's mental well-being. This means having adequate access to healthcare services, but also being able to balance work, personal life, diet and exercise.

Employment – being employed can promote positive feelings of self-worth, satisfaction and inclusion. Psychologically, being employed can also give a person direction in their life, enabling them to plan out their days, interact socially with others and to have financial security. This does not mean that all people in employment will be free from the risk of developing mental health problems, or that all jobs provide job satisfaction and a sense of worth. What it does mean, however, is that meaningful employment, and having a good work/home life balance is generally a protective factor for a person's mental well-being.

Financial security – being financially secure supports mental well-being. This does not necessarily mean that a person is 'rich'. A person may earn a modest amount of money, but still feel comfortable with their financial situation based on their ability to manage their outgoings. Being able to pay for goods and services and not be constantly worried about money is a protective factor in promoting mental well-being.

Adequate housing – having a secure home and adequate living accommodation is very important to maintaining a person's sense of well-being.

Trauma – traumatic events can trigger mental ill health. This may be abuse, being exposed to war or violence, or being caught up in a natural disaster, for example.

These are just some of the key components of mental well-being. They are interconnected and should not be viewed in isolation. For example, just because a person experiences a tragic life event it does not automatically mean that they will develop a mental health condition. The person may have a supportive family network to help them through difficult times. Each person is an individual with differing strengths and weaknesses, all of which can affect mental well-being.

Knowledge Activity 2: In the space below, write down the key components that you feel support your personal mental well-being.



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What puts people at risk of developing mental health problems?

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 3.

On pages 5 to 7 we looked at the factors that can protect a person's mental well-being, and we will now explore the risk factors that can make a person more prone to mental distress. Mental ill health develops over a period of time and will be dependent upon a number of risk factors that someone is exposed to. It is important to maintain a holistic stance taking into account a variety of personal and environmental factors.

Fact

Women are more likely to have been treated for a mental health problem than men and about 10% of children have a mental health problem at any one time.



Individual risk factors – every individual has their own areas of vulnerability. Individual risk factors include aspects such as low self-esteem and insecurity. A person's lifestyle choices – for example, alcohol or drug use – may also put them at risk of developing mental health problems. Equally, a person that does not have appropriate coping mechanisms or adequate levels of personal resilience to deal with life issues and problems may have an increased risk of developing mental health problems.

Risk factors associated with the family – a family history of psychiatric disorder, violence, neglect, divorce, family breakdown and unemployment increases the risk of developing mental ill health.

Social risk factors – feeling cut off from family and friends or from the local community in which a person lives can lead to feelings of isolation or rejection from society. These feelings may have detrimental effects on a person's sense of well-being.

Risk factors associated with education – an individual's school years can have a positive or negative impact on them. In terms of mental ill health, experiences of being bullied or poor academic achievement can have lasting consequences for a person later in life.

Risk factors associated with life events – negative or traumatic life experiences such as unemployment, homelessness, bereavement, sudden illness, being assaulted or abused can all contribute to mental distress for some people. Even positive life events such as getting married, having children or moving home can be stressful and this stress can impact on a person's mental well-being.

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Risk factors associated with finances – unemployment, redundancy, business failure, mounting debt or worries about the rising cost of living can all have a profound effect on a person's sense of well-being.

Community or local environmental risk factors – within some communities there may be problems associated with prejudice and discrimination, violence and crime, which can all have a negative impact on a person's sense of well-being.

Common mental health problems

Please read the following as it will help you to answer question 4.

Mental health problems range from the worries we all experience as part of everyday life to serious long-term conditions. The majority of people who experience mental health problems can get over them or learn to live with them, especially if they get help early on. Mental health problems are usually defined and classified to enable professionals to refer people for appropriate care and treatment. Some of the most commonly diagnosed forms of mental health problems include:

- depression
- anxiety
- obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- phobias
- schizophrenia
- bipolar disorder
- eating disorders

We will be looking at each of these mental health problems in more detail throughout this course.

Fact

NICE, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, publishes guidelines for best practice on individual mental disorders and on general practices for working in mental health.



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