

What Is Positive Mental Health?

Positive mental health is the state of well-being when we're striving to make the most out of life – doing the best we can with what we've got. It helps us feel satisfied with, and enjoy, life. The level of our positive mental health depends on the degree to which we're developing our potential; coping with the normal stressors of life; building strong, positive relationships; and contributing to our community. Positive mental health is crucial to our overall health and wellbeing and that of the entire community.

What Determines Positive Mental Health?

Positive mental health is shaped by our life circumstances as well as by the life events and experiences we have throughout our lives. Our life circumstances include our personal condition (e.g. genetic endowment, age, developed abilities, learning, gender, marital status, employment, financial state, etc.) and the condition of the settings where we live, learn, work, and play. Our life circumstances, life events and life experiences are influenced by a complex interaction of social, emotional, economic, educational, spiritual, ecological and cultural factors as well as by chance. The level or degree of our mental wellbeing can be increased or decreased by the quality of our life circumstances and the life events or experiences we have.

How Is Positive Mental Health Achieved Over The Life Course?

First of all, we need a positive start in life. Then we need to keep nurturing our mental wellbeing throughout all the stages and ages of life. We can increase our positive mental health by making positive changes to those determinants that can actually be changed (and that we have some control over). The following **key action strategies** are a practical framework for taking action on those determinants for all life course stages:

- creating supportive environments in our homes, schools, workplaces and neighbourhoods
- Increasing protective factors in life conditions to strengthen resiliency of individuals and communities

What Are The Life Course Stages and Ages?

There are no universally accepted definitions of the life course age groupings. The following framework offers one way of categorizing the stages which acknowledges the links of transitioning from stage to stage:

Early Years – conception to 5 years

School Years – 5 to 18 years

Young Adults – 18 to 35 years

Midlife Adults – 35 to 60 years

Older Adults – 60 to 80 years

Elderly – 80+ years

What Are Protective Factors?

Protective factors are circumstances (conditions and characteristics) that increase the likelihood of creating and maintaining wellbeing and developing resilience. They can protect against and lessen the negative effects of difficult or stressful situations/life experiences. They vary somewhat depending on age/stage of life but there are some that are common throughout life.

What Is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability of an individual or group to function well despite adversity or difficulties resulting from personal and/or environmental circumstances. Resilience can be developed.

What Are Some General Protective Factors For Everyone?¹

Individual	Community	Workplace	Societal/Structural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling safe • Self-determination • Resilience and problem solving skills • Feeling in control • Confiding relationships • Access to social networks • Financial security • Meaningful activity and roles • Creativity • Spirituality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable and supportive environment • Participation and influence: local democracy • Cultural life • Opportunities for lifelong learning • Social capital: networks, supports and resources • Tolerance and trust • Amenities and services • Hopefulness • Opportunity for arts and creative activities • Access to faith groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling safe, not bullied or harassed • Decision-making latitude • Job control • Reasonable adjustment • Social support - vertical and horizontal • Effort reward balance • Opportunities for development and learning • Respect for diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic conditions: income, financial security • Participation and influence • Tolerance and trust • Absence of discrimination • Respect for diversity • Economic stability • Absence of marked social and economic inequalities • Tolerance and respect for diversity

What Are Some Specific Protective Factors For Children & Youth?²

<p>Individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy temperament • Adequate physical activity, nutrition and rest • Attachment to family • Above-average intelligence • School achievement • Problem-solving skills • Internal locus of control/self-regulation • Social competence • Social skills • Good coping style • Optimism • Sense of purpose • Moral beliefs • Positive values • Positive self-affirmation • Religious affiliation • History of competence and success <p>Life Events and Situations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement with significant other • Availability of opportunities at critical turning points or major life transitions • Economic security • Good physical health 	<p>Family</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive, caring parents • Family harmony • Secure and stable family • Small family • Responsibility within the family • More than two years between siblings • Supportive relationships with an adult • Strong family norms, morality <p>School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of belonging • Positive school climate • Pro-social peer group • Required responsibility and helpfulness • Opportunities for some success and recognition of achievement • Social norms against violence <p>Community and culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of connectedness • Attachment to, and networks within the community • Participation in church or other group • Strong cultural identity and ethnic pride • Access to support services • Community cultural norms against violence
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¹ (source: Equal Minds, National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being, Scotland, 2005)

² Best practice guidelines for mental health promotion programs: Children & Youth, 2009, CAMH. Adapted from *Department of Health and Aged Care*. (2000). *Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health—A Monograph*. [Canberra, Australia: Author](#).

What Is Mental Capital?

Mental capital is the totality of a person's cognitive and emotional resources. It includes their cognitive ability, flexibility and efficiency of learning; their emotional intelligence (e.g. empathy and social skills) and resilience in the face of stress. The extent of a person's mental capital reflects his/her basic endowment (genes and early biological programming), and the experiences and education which takes place throughout the life course. This determines how well an individual is able to contribute effectively to society and also to experience a high personal quality of life.³

Are There Simple Things We Can Do Every Day To Build Positive Mental Health?

Yes. There are 5 Daily Actions anyone can easily do every day to build positive mental health and increase mental capital:

- 1. Connect...**
with family, friends, co-workers, neighbours, parishioners, strangers. Take time to develop or maintain positive relationships with others in your community every day. Give and accept support. Seek help if you need it.
- 2. Give...**
Do something nice for a friend or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile, wave, or say 'hi'. Volunteer. Accept and acknowledge kindness from others.
- 3. Keep Learning...**
Try something new or rediscover an old interest. Take a course. Fix a bike or a car or a faucet. Learn to play an instrument. Develop communication skills and learn conflict resolution techniques. Keep a budget. Practice relaxation methods.
- 4. Take Notice...**
Be mindful of the world around you. Catch sight of the beautiful or unusual. Savor the moment. Be aware of your feelings and thoughts and how you respond to others. Recognize things that stress you out and what helps you to relax. Figure out what really matters to you, what you find fulfilling, what you are passionate about and what you really enjoy doing.
- 5. Be Active...**
Walk, run, cycle, garden, dance, play a game. Discover something active that you enjoy and that renews your energy. Remember to also eat well and get enough rest.

Downloadable Positive Mental Health Resources Available At

<http://www.rqhealth.ca/mental-health-and-addictions/mental-health-promotion>

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³ Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008). Final Project Report. The Government Office for Science, London