

HOW IS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH?

We all have mental health. However, nearly two thirds of us have experienced poor mental health at some point in our lifetime and just 13% of us are living with high levels of positive mental health. (mentalhealth.org) These figures are slightly worse for women and young adults. Some studies suggest our mental health overall is deteriorating.

How about you? Are you thriving or just surviving? What is good mental health anyway?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes 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." There are problems with this definition. Some mentally unhealthy people experience a state of well-being while they do hurtful or illegal things. Also, a mentally healthy person might experience great anxiety or depression if they lose a job or their house burns down.

People in good mental health are often sad, unwell, angry or unhappy. This is part of a fully lived life for human beings. In spite of this, mental health is often described as a purely positive affect, marked by feelings of happiness and sense of mastery over the environment. That is not realistic.

Perhaps a better way to think about mental health is the following:

1. *"A flexible state of internal equilibrium which enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with the values of society."* In other words, you emotionally roll with what life throws at you and handle it most of the time. You also do it in ways that fit with the society in which you live.
2. *"Basic cognitive and social skills; ability to recognize, express and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others."* This means you have the basic ability to think, problem solve and interact with others well. You express how you feel in a balanced way. You respect and empathize with the feelings of the people around you.
3. *"Flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles."* When disaster or a serious stress strikes you usually rise to the occasion, develop plans and revise them as needed to resolve the situation. Even though you may feel distress you are able to call on inner strength in order to reach a healthy outcome. You maintain your daily roles at work, within the family, and socially as you move through the experiences

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you are working through. You don't crumble.

4. *"Harmonious relationship between body and mind. A state of internal equilibrium."* Our mind/brain, our body, and our environment are intertwined. Our experience of being in the world cannot be separated from how our body feels in the environments where we spend our time. If you hate your job and are forced to sit in a cubicle all day this will have a deleterious effect on your mental well-being. If you are being bullied at school for how you look you may develop body dysphoria and self-harm. To be accepting of ourselves physically and mentally is an essential aspect of good mental health and helps us cope and make changes.

How is your mental health? At ACS, Inc. it is the very core of the work we do to enable you to say "My mental well-being is okay. No! It is good". If you need assistance to reach that goal it is just a phone call away.

Next month: What is mental illness?