

WORKSHOP 3

MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION 101

Objectives

Following this workshop, the youth will be able to:

- Explain the difference between mental health and mental illness.
- Define good mental health as a resource that involves the social, emotional and psychological aspects of wellbeing.
- Understand that there are various approaches to addressing mental health and illness, including **mental health promotion**.
- Describe an **upstream** approach to mental health promotion.

Overview

Mental health and mental illness are distinct but interconnected concepts; however, in everyday discussions, these terms are often used interchangeably. It is important to understand the differences and gain awareness of the tools and resources available to support and respond to each. Mental health promotion is an approach that can be used to help build and strengthen positive mental health and address issues of equity for individuals and their communities. While the language of “promotion” makes it sound like an awareness campaign, it is actually a strengths-based and science-driven orientation to supporting wellbeing of those with and without mental illnesses.

Total time

2 hours

Facilitator Prep

- Prepare community agreement in a shareable format.
- Review and summarize AWE evaluation results to share using a modality of your choice.

Welcome

Ask each member of the group to describe their current emotional state using weather terms (e.g., calm, stormy, still, foggy, sunny, clear, windy, etc.).

Connect & Open

Review AWE survey summary and anonymous compliments from last session.

Look Back

Review that in the last workshop, the group created a community agreement and watched a video that contributed to the idea that our everyday contexts shape mental health and wellbeing.

Look Forward

Explain that today's session covers the differences between mental health and mental illness, and introduces the topic of mental health promotion and upstream intervention. This will support a more comprehensive understanding of the various factors that support wellbeing.

Negotiate today's break schedule with the group.

Gauging Knowledge

1. Inform the group that this workshop's Connect & Open will focus on understanding and sharing thoughts and opinions about mental health.
2. Ask the youth to post what comes to mind when they hear the term "mental health."
3. Identify themes. You may find themes related to mental health challenges or illnesses, such as depression, anxiety or trauma. It is also common for groups to comment on coping strategies targeted at individuals with these experiences, such as counselling or other treatment forms. Draw particular attention to the contributions that signal strengths-based understandings of mental health, such as the importance of friendships and connection, access to greenspace, safe communities and meaningful employment.
4. Conclude by letting the group know that the work they do together in Agenda Gap will help to expand their understandings of mental health, and will support them in making connections between mental health and the broader communities we live in.

Frame

Play the theme video, *Let's Promote Mental Health*.

Explain that this video explores the separate but interconnected concepts of mental health and mental illness, as well as what it means to promote mental health.

Invite brief reflections on the theme video.



Activity 1: What is Mental Health? (20 minutes)

Aim

This activity introduces the differences between mental health and mental illness, as well as approaches to addressing each. It also provides a definition of mental health as a resource for life.

Steps

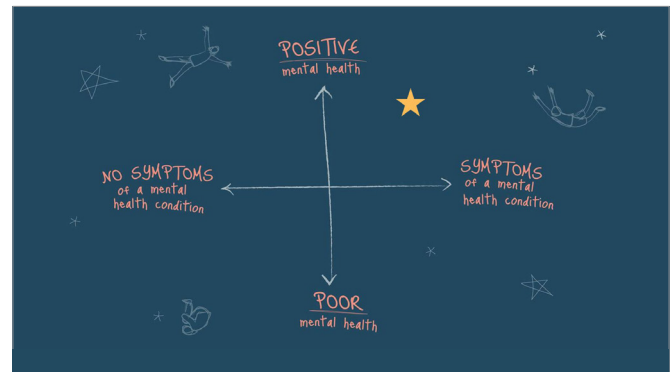
1. Share the “What is Mental Health” slide and review the following:

- a. Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. We all have mental health, and it fluctuates over time and in response to different experiences and circumstances. Good mental health is a resource that allows us to live full and purposeful lives and to cope effectively with the ups and downs that come our way.
- b. Mental illness refers to a range of conditions and their related symptoms, diagnosed by a medical professional. The most common diagnoses in our population are anxiety and depression. Each year, approximately one in five Canadians lives with a diagnosed mental illness. Experiences range in intensity but interfere with everyday functioning.
- c. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as, “A state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes [their] own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to [their] community.”

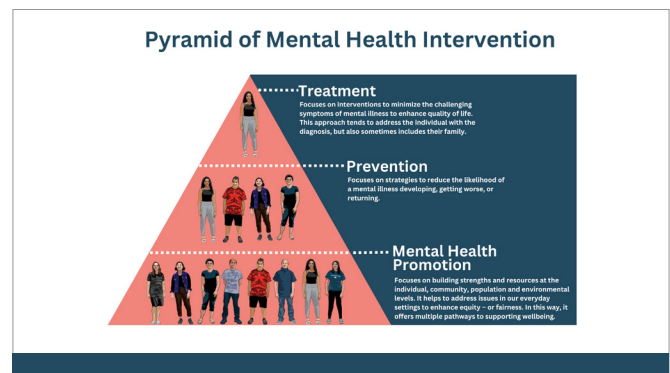
2. Share the “Defining Mental Health” slide.
3. Ask the group to share their reactions to these definitions and what, if anything, stands out for them. Ask them to reflect on whether they have ever thought about their mental health as a resource. Note that the definitions draw a distinction between mental health and mental illness.



4. Share the “Four Quadrants of Mental Health” slide. Note that this conceptualization of mental health shows how mental health and mental illness exist on separate but interconnected continua. Importantly, people can simultaneously experience mental health and mental illness. Good mental health involves social, emotional and psychological aspects of wellbeing, and can exist alongside the presence or absence of mental illness(es). For example, the image on the slide includes a star that represents where a person with good mental health and a diagnosed mental illness would be plotted according to this model. Explain that because mental health and mental illness are distinct, there are different approaches to responding to each.



5. Share the “Pyramid of Mental Health Intervention” slide and review:



- Mental health promotion: Focuses on building strengths and resources at the individual, community, population and environmental levels. It helps to address issues in our everyday settings to enhance equity or fairness, which means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must adjust to correct imbalances. In this way, it offers multiple pathways to supporting wellbeing.
- Prevention: Focuses on strategies to reduce the likelihood of a mental illness developing, getting worse or returning.
- Treatment: Focuses on interventions to minimize the challenging symptoms of mental illness to enhance quality of life. This approach tends to address the individual with the diagnosis, but also sometimes includes their family.

6. Note that the approaches outlined in the top two tiers of the pyramid focus predominantly on addressing mental illnesses (or related “risk”) for individuals, though some types of prevention target broader groups of people. The bottom tier, mental health promotion, casts the widest net. It works to create the conditions for good mental health for everyone, including those with diagnosed mental illness(es).

7. Engage the group in a short trivia game to review key approaches to addressing mental health. Ask the youth to name the tier on the triangle that the following examples of mental health programs or solutions would belong:
- a. A school-based program where everyone learns mindfulness techniques to manage stress (*mental health promotion*)
 - b. A counselling program or service (*treatment*)
 - c. Medication prescribed to address symptoms of a diagnosed mental illness (*treatment*)
 - d. A policy that ensures all students have access to physical education programming (*mental health promotion*)
 - e. A stress-management program offered to students who are experiencing challenges at home or in the community that are causing feelings of stress and worry (*prevention*)
 - f. A social skills group to connect youth who are experiencing challenging emotions and behaviours (*prevention*)

Facilitator Tips

- Create opportunities for discussion as this activity is information heavy. During this activity, youth may share personal stories about mental illness or poor mental health. Remind the group about maintaining confidentiality and respecting each other's lived experiences.



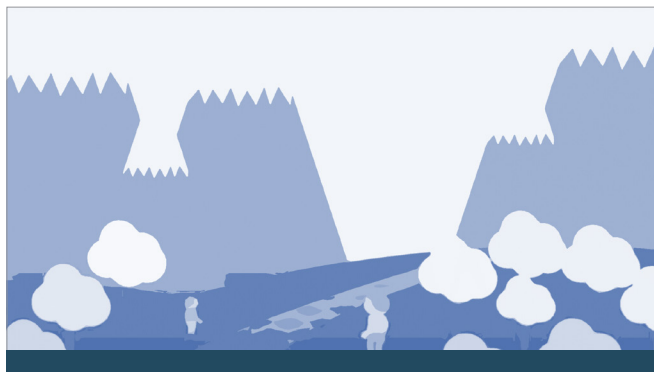
Activity 2: Mental Health Promotion (15 minutes)

Aim

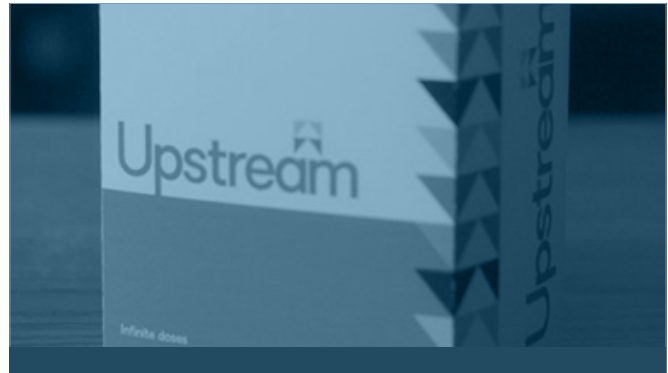
This activity introduces the concept of upstream approaches to mental health promotion through explanatory videos and guided application.

Steps

1. Share the “Mental Health Promotion” slide.
2. Review that mental health promotion offers multiple pathways to support mental health and wellbeing. It is designed to work “upstream,” meaning that it targets the root causes of mental health and illness and seeks to improve issues of equity (fairness, justice). In this way, it offers a powerful approach that can be used to strengthen mental health for individuals — with and without mental illness diagnoses — and their broader communities. Note that such an approach differs from one that is “downstream,” which involves reacting to problems once they have occurred.
3. Show the *Introduction to Upstream* video. Ask the youth to provide their impressions of the video.
4. Note that by focusing upstream, mental health promotion works by building protective factors for good mental health and improving conditions to remove or reduce the impacts of negative life circumstances (risk factors). This supports individuals and communities to reach their full wellbeing potential.
5. Ask the group to identify protective factors for their own mental health. For example, individual level factors could include good sleep, regular exercise and eating healthy foods. Community level protective factors could include supportive relationships, access to education and safe neighbourhoods.



5. Show the [*Advocating for Upstream*](#) video.
6. Invite the youth to share their impressions of the video.
7. Let the youth know that in future workshops, they will continue identifying factors affecting youth mental health, exploring their upstream origins and opportunities for action.



Facilitator Tips

- Invite questions from the group. The concepts of upstream and downstream approaches can be difficult to grasp at first; however, any issue can be examined through an upstream lens. If there is interest, consider working through another example. For instance, you could facilitate a discussion about the upstream factors that influence one's ability to eat a healthy diet or participate in exercise. Point to the upstream factors that create opportunities, or conversely, act as barriers. These may include community proximity to farms and other food production sites, social norms and policies that ensure subsidies for recreational activities. See how many upstream levers the group can identify!

Connect & Close (10 minutes)

1. Note that in our busy lives, the challenges we face tend to be top of mind and we often forget to take time to reflect on the positive experiences in our lives. This activity creates space for this. Over time, this practice contributes to our overall sense of wellbeing.
2. Ask the youth: What is one experience you had this week where you made a difference?
3. Encourage them to pay attention to the sensations in their bodies as they bring this success to mind.
4. Distribute the AWE survey and allow a few minutes for everyone to complete. If any youth doesn't want to do so immediately, ask that they complete it before the next meeting.
5. After the group finishes the survey, thank them for their participation and close the workshop.
6. After the workshop closes send a link to the AWE survey by email for those who did not complete it during the session.