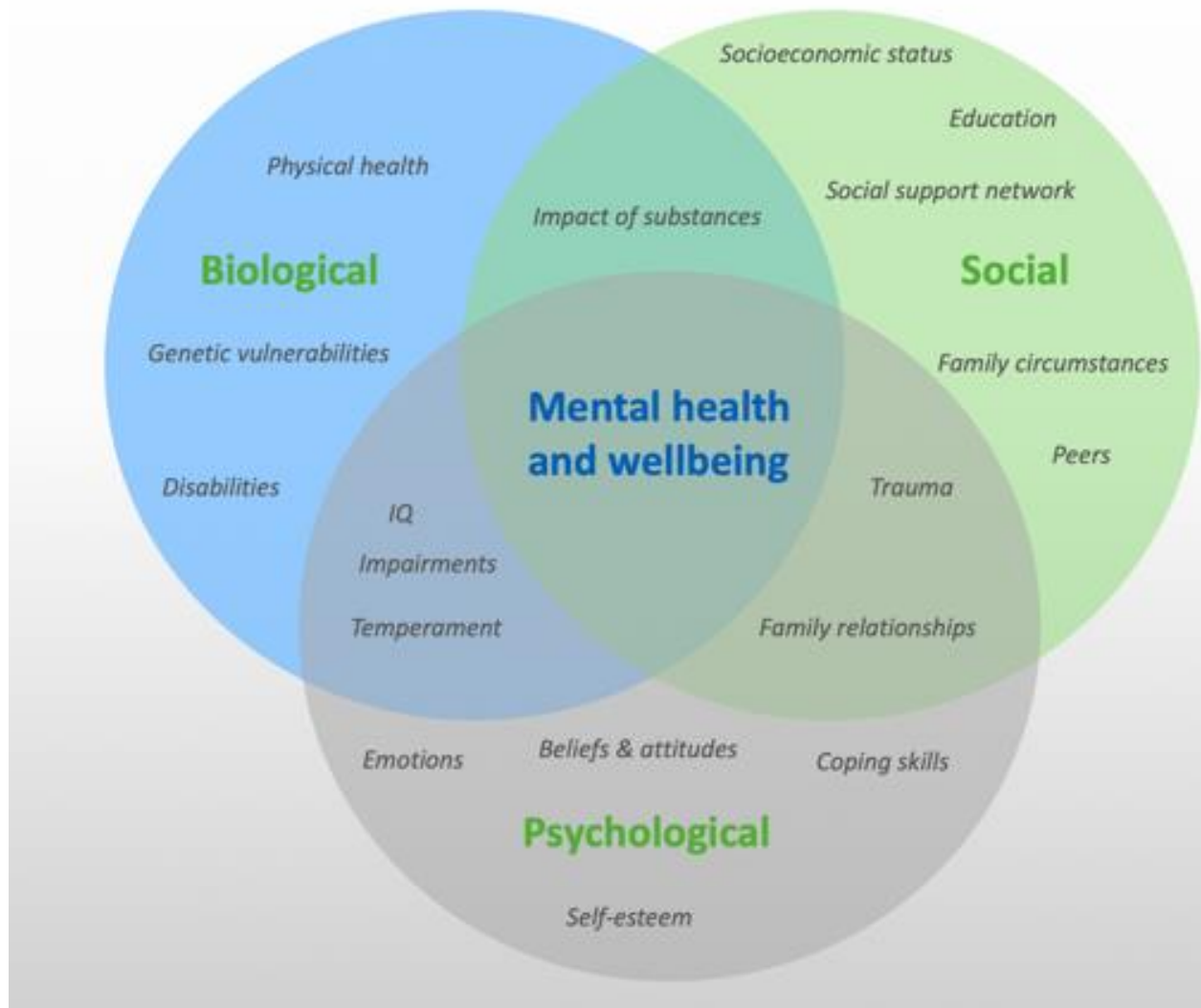


READ the useful key messages about the Mental Health & Psychosocial Support

What is mental health?



- ✓ Mental health is a state of well-being, and not just the absence of mental disorder or addictive behaviors (drugs, alcohol, gaming, depending on others).
- ✓ Mental health is about the interrelation between psychological (self, mind, emotions), physical (body, health), social (family, community, colleagues) and environmental (where you live, society) aspects.
- ✓ In order to feel well, everyone should take care of all these aspects.

Four elements of WHO definition for the Mental Health:

- State of physical, mental, and social well-being
- State in which an individual realizes his/her own potential
- When an individual can cope with normal stressors of life (resilience)
- When an individual can work productively and fruitfully

Having good mental health is not only being free of mental illness. It implies understanding own potential, having positive social interactions, being socially and economically productive and being able to handle regular life stressors.

Psychological Distress



- ✓ Anyone, irrespective of age (young or old), gender (man or woman, boy or girl), and social class (rich or poor) may experience psychological distress, it is normal in a stressful life
- ✓ Psychological distress can be observed sometimes, but can also be difficult to recognize.

Sometimes, when the person suffers some of these symptoms in an excessive disproportionate manner and for long period of time (compared to stress reactions expected in similar situations) it could mean that the person is suffering from a mental health disorder.

Two examples of mental health disorders are shown below (extracted from WHO mhGAP intervention guide) – ***note that only a professional can make a diagnosis:***

- » Multiple persistent physical symptoms with no clear cause
- » Low energy, fatigue, sleep problems
- » Persistent sadness or depressed mood, anxiety
- » Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that are normally pleasurable
- » Marked behavioural changes; neglecting usual responsibilities related to work, school, domestic or social activities
- » Agitated, aggressive behavior, decreased or increased activity
- » Fixed false beliefs not shared by others in the person's culture
- » Hearing voices or seeing things that are not there
- » Lack of realization that one is having mental health problems

DEPRESSION

PSYCHOSES

Causes of Mental Health Disorders:

- ✓ Biological causes: changes in brain cells activity and neurotransmitters (the chemical compounds that transmit messages from one cell to another in the brain. Such as Serotonin, Norepinephrine and Dopamine). These changes are driven by genetic and environmental factors (stress, unhealthy lifestyle, medical illness, smoking, alcohol, addictive substances... etc.).
- ✓ Psychosocial causes: social isolation, traumatic experiences, learned helplessness (losing hope after repeated exposure to a stressful situation).

Usually, it is a combination of the above-mentioned factors that overwhelms the psychological immunity (resilience) and causes a mental health disorder. No single factor is enough by itself. That's why we have different types of treatments (psychotherapies, medication therapies, brain stimulation treatments... etc.). **Only a professional can choose one or more types of treatments specific to every individual's needs.**

Stigma related to Psychological Distress

- ✓ They are many factors in life that can cause psychological distress and impact our daily functioning. It is useful to be aware of them, especially for parents and teachers.
- ✓ To prevent and treat psychological distress, it is important to address as much as possible both causes and consequences.
- ✓ Social stigma is an important factor of suffering, which can also restrict access to community support and professional services.

Referral Pathways



Don't hesitate to talk about sensitive topics. Your health worker is there to listen without judgement

- Find out how to access your local health services
- Ask your health worker for more information to help make decisions about your health
- Be aware of your rights to privacy and confidentiality
- Speak to a trusted adult if you experience discrimination or disrespect
- Provide feedback to your health centre on how it can improve services for you and your friends

- ✓ **Early identification** of psychological distress is important to help support the individual as soon as possible and before symptoms increase and affect a person's daily functioning.
- ✓ Psychological distress and mental health disorders can be treated; offering the suffering individuals and their family member's **appropriate guidance and timely supports** can greatly reduce the negative consequences.
- ✓ Majority of psychological distress and psychosocial issues **can be prevented and supported** at community level; with the help of friends, neighbors and families; followed-up with appropriate psychosocial counselling; without necessarily using psychotropic medicines.
- ✓ Moderate to severe psychological distress need immediate **referral to professional mental health services** available at INGOs, PHCCs, clinics and hospital levels.
- ✓ Doctors, nurses, midwives, case workers and social workers at PHCs, clinics and community level can listen and refer to appropriate services.

Self-care strategies and basic helping skills



- ✓ **Managing stress** is important: keeping routines, breathing exercises, sleeping regularly, following a healthy balanced diet, exercising, playing with friends, praying and doing fun activities can help us manage stress.
- ✓ **Social network and support** is important: expressing and sharing feelings and talking with someone you trust helps us feel better and make good decisions.

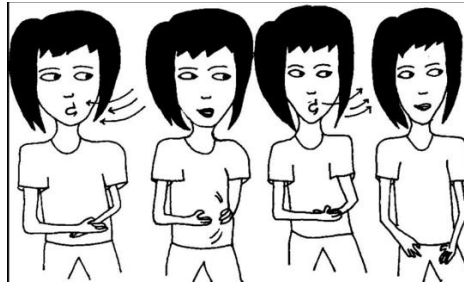
Practice stress management

Stress is: It is an automatic biological and psychological reaction when confronted to an exceptional event, positive or negative. It is a useful adaptive reaction that enables the body to defend itself (acceleration of heart beat, muscular tension, discharge of adrenaline flow, of sugar in the blood). It is also a cognitive and behavior reaction (increases the level of vigilance, focuses attention, increases the memory and reasoning capacities, and encourages action). The reaction of stress is immediate, short-term and without any psychological after-effects. If stress is too intense, too prolonged or repeated at short intervals, it exhausts the body's energetic reserves and automatic reactions of agitation or panic escape can happen.

Do the slow breathing exercise **and any other one** that you know.



Slow breathing exercise
(Source : WHO PM+ manual)



“Before YOU start, relax your body a little bit. Shake out your arms and legs and let them go floppy and loose. Roll your shoulders back and gently move your head from side to side.

Now, placing your hands on your belly, imagine you have a balloon in your stomach, and when you breathe in you are going to blow that balloon up, so your stomach will expand. And when you breathe out, the air in the balloon will also go out, so your stomach will flatten. Watch me first. I am going to exhale first to get all the air out of my stomach. (Demonstrate breathing from the stomach – try and exaggerate the pushing out and in of your stomach. Do this for at least five breaths.) Okay, so now you try to breathe from your stomach with me. Remember, we start by breathing out until all the air is out, then breathe in. If you can, try and breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Great! Now the second step is to slow the rate of your breathing down. So we are going to take three seconds to breathe in and three seconds to breathe out. I will count for you. Okay, so breathe in, one, two, three. And breathe out, one, two, three. Now when you practice on your own, don't be too concerned about trying to keep exactly to three seconds. Just try your best to slow your breathing down, remembering that when you are stressed you will breathe fast. Okay, so you try on your own for the next few minutes.