

The Building Blocks of Mental Health Promotion

INDIVIDUALS

Fulfilment & contribution

Promote mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, personal growth, purpose & civic contribution.

Psychological skills

Foster mental health literacy, social and emotional competence, self-care and resilience & encourage help-giving and help-seeking for stress, psychological distress or suicidal ideation.

Healthy behaviours

Encourage regular physical activity, high quality diet, good sleep hygiene.

FAMILIES

Supports and connections

Promote secure attachment, positive parenting, social support, social participation and a sense of belonging.

COMMUNITIES

Safety

Ensure freedom from child abuse, gendered violence, racism and discrimination.

ORGANISATIONS

Material Basics

Ensure equitable access to food, adequate income, education, work, stable housing, and holistic healthcare.

GOVERNMENTS

The Environment & Culture

Protect the environment and support people to speak their language and practice their culture.

What is mental health promotion?

Mental health promotion is the ‘mental health’ component of health promotion. It is “the process of enabling people to increase control over their mental health and its determinants, and thereby improve their mental health.”

Mental health promotion focuses on helping people to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to promote and protect their own mental wellbeing, while simultaneously working to create positive changes in our shared social environments that benefit us all. It focuses on three main outcomes:

- promoting high levels of mental wellbeing
- preventing the onset of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety
- building mental health literacy to promote self-care, destigmatise mental health conditions and encourage help-seeking and help-giving.

Mental health promotion is different from, but complementary to mental healthcare. It focuses on influencing underlying root causes rather than managing specific conditions. It targets whole groups and communities and is undertaken in a range of settings such as online, the home, schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, rather than just through health services.

What are the building blocks of mental health promotion?

Our mental health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of biological, psychological, social, and economic risk and protective factors. While some of these factors are unique to each person, such as their genetic profile, most risk and protective factors exist in the environments in which we are born, grow, study, work, play and live.

The building blocks graphic is a visual aid that describes some of the key targets of mental health promotion activities.

The lower blocks focus on the programs and social policies that are needed to address the social determinants of mental health. The middle blocks highlight the actions families, organisations and communities can take to create mental health promoting home, school, workplace, and community environments. The top blocks outline the personal health behaviours and psychological skills that enable individuals to manage the challenges of life, reach their full potential, and contribute to society.

While each building block is important, the graphic acknowledges that it is difficult to experience self-actualisation, or even practice self-care, if people are unsafe or they are faced with social or economic disadvantage. It is therefore vital to implement strategies at every level, while noting that interventions on the lower levels provide the foundation for those on the higher levels.

Ultimately, the building blocks model aims to highlight the many and varied influences on our mental wellbeing and the range of changes that are required to promote, protect, and support the mental health and wellbeing of the whole community.