

Chapter 3: Promoting Mental Health

Introduction



3.1 Introduction

Optimum health cannot be achieved without having **positive mental health**, defined as: (1) being comfortable with yourself, (2) feeling good about relationships with others, and (3) being able to cope with the demands of life.

Low self-esteem, poor relations with others, inability to cope with the problems and challenges of day-to-day living, and difficulty to distinguish fantasy, imagination and reality are characteristics of mental illness.

Promoting
Mental Health:
Information
and Skills



3.2 Promoting Mental Health: Information and Skills

Exploring the Self

Socrates said “know yourself”. This is an essential step in being comfortable with, and accepting yourself: a complex entity that includes ideal self, public self and private self.

- **Personality:** a blend of physical, mental, and social traits unique to the individual. Heredity, environment, culture and self-concept influence personality. (Culture: a blend of the influence of the people in your home, city, and nation. In many ways you act and think like them).
- **Self-concept:** All your beliefs about yourself coming from self-appraisal of your strengths and weaknesses. Others’ opinions about you may matter but become less important as you mature.
- **Ideal self:** your conscience. Much of it is influenced by your parents and their values.
- **Public self:** is the reputation for which you strive. You act and speak in ways calculated to influence people to form a certain opinion of you.
- **Private self:** is the actual you. It may or may not be what you think you ought to be (ideal self), or what you want others to think of you (public self).

Ideal self, public self, and private self influence personality and self-concept. Similar ideal, public, and private selves contribute to a healthy personality.

Maslow's
Hierarchy of
Needs



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The psychologist **Abraham Maslow** identified a **hierarchy of needs** necessary for promoting physical and mental health, see Figure 3.1. He believed that needs at the **lower levels** must be met before those at **higher levels** could be attained. At the most basic level is **physiological needs – food, water, sleep- that sustain life**. Superimposed are the needs for: (1) **safety/security**, first provided by the family, (2) **love/affection**; the example of your family shows you how to receive and give love, you can then form healthful relations with others, (3) **self-esteem** that develops as you learn more skills that make you independent, and (4) **self-actualization**, the highest level, when you make full use of your abilities, developing your talents and fulfilling your potential.

Self-actualization is a lifetime process of always doing your best. Only a few people manage to develop all their talents to their fullest.

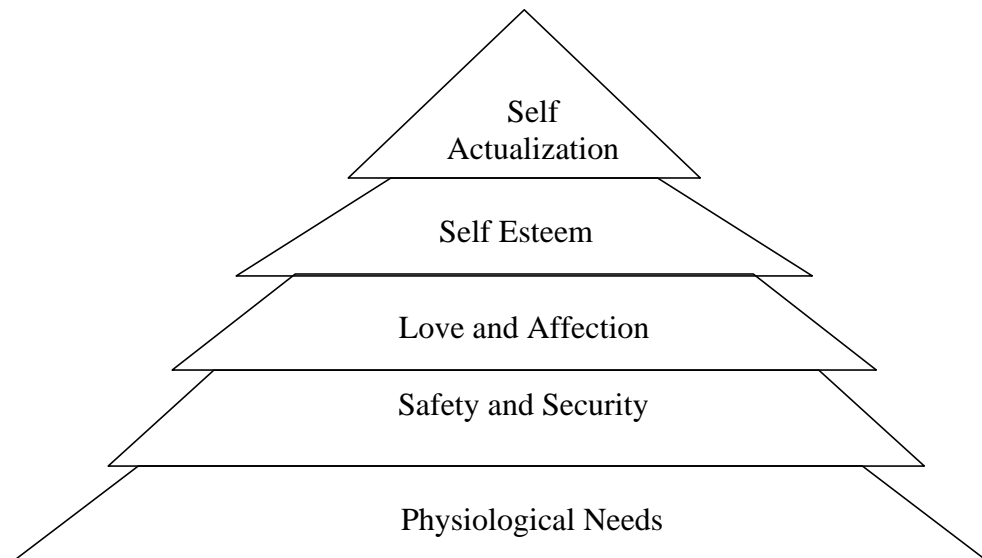


Figure 3.1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Developing a
Philosophy of
Life

Developing a Philosophy of Life

Your philosophy of life reflects your values and your attitude towards life and its purpose. It **influences your thoughts, goals, decisions and actions**. Thoughts generate emotions or feelings. Emotions affect performance. Examining your philosophy of life is an important aspect in knowing yourself.

Expressing
Emotions

Expressing Emotions

Emotions are feelings arising in **response to life situations**. **Happy feelings**, e.g., being loved, **have a holistic effect** on your lifestyle and situations that produce them contribute to optimum health. Some situations may result in feelings of loss or rejection and generate

negative emotions, e.g., hurt, anxiety, anger, guilt, and depression. Healthful ways to deal with and express these emotions contribute to optimum health.

Feeling hurt/distressed/harmed: do not bottle your feeling up. Identify the source of the hurt and express your feelings.

Anxiety or worry about an anticipated or imagined situation. Pretending you are not anxious is risk behavior. Try to identify the source of the anxiety and deal with it if possible. Exercise has a beneficial effect.

Anger: if not expressed in healthful ways, harmful mental and physiological changes occur. It is best to talk about your feelings with the person who has caused the anger. This should be done privately as soon as you are calm.

Guilt: the feeling of having done something wrong or being at fault. Denial may intensify the feelings of guilt. It is best to admit you are wrong, to apologize and accept responsibility for your actions

Depression: the feeling of being sad, unhappy, discouraged is a leading mental disorder.

Defense Mechanisms

Defense
Mechanisms

A **defense mechanism** is a behavior that is used consciously or unconsciously to cope with uncomfortable situations or emotions. It may help you solve a problem when you willfully suppress/delay expressing your emotions to allow you time to think. Defense mechanisms may also be used to avoid solving problems, e.g., displacement, i.e., transferring emotions from the original source to another object.

It is helpful to evaluate your use of defense mechanisms. There may be risks in their frequent use.

Time Perspectives

Time
Perspectives

A time perspective **is the time orientation of your thoughts.** *Do you think mainly about the past, the present or the future?* A balanced time perspective emphasizes individual responsibility in achieving positive mental health by making you (1) **learn from past mistakes** rather than worry about them so as to hinder performance; a past-time perspective, (2) **enjoy the pleasures of day-to-day living and work** to accomplish goals rather than needlessly delaying important decisions or not thinking through your actions; a present-time perspective, (3) **set goals and become actualized**, rather than seeking only pleasures and ignoring responsibility to yourself and others; a future-time perspective.

Focus on Life
Management
Skills

Focus on Life Management Skills

- **Develop a positive self-concept** by developing strengths, recognizing limitations and understanding your feelings.
- **Make your ideal self, public self and private self** consistent with each other.
- **Take steps** to satisfy your basic needs.
- **Be aware when you are using defense mechanisms**, try to identify what you are trying to avoid.
- **Develop a philosophy of life** that influences your thoughts, emotions, and body's performance in healthful ways.
- **Express love, hurt, anxiety, anger, guilt, and depression** in healthful ways.
- **Balance your time perspective** to include your past, present, and future.

Mental
Disorders

3.3. Mental Disorders

Levels of
Mental Health

Levels of Mental Health

Mental health status is a **combination of the healthful and risk behaviors you select**. It may fluctuate from day to day and can be rated on a scale from **0** -e.g., **when suicide is considered** because coping with life is overwhelming – to **100**, (optimum mental health). Closer to the **0** end of the scale are persons with **mental disorders**. They do not feel comfortable with themselves. They do not have satisfactory relationships. They are unable to express emotions or handle problems. Some may be able to function in society; others are not and have to be hospitalized.

Causes of
Mental Health
Disorders

Causes of Mental Disorders

People respond in **different ways to environmental stress** (i.e., the **physical and mental** demands associated with your environment) and to **life crises** (experiences that cause a high level of mental stress). These differences may be due to **environmental and hereditary factors**. *The family is most important. It teaches children how to express emotions and cope with problems and influences self-concept and behavior pattern.* Some mental disorders tend to run in families. A *hereditary predisposition may still require environmental factors to materialize* (polygenic inheritance). **Brain damage can cause organic mental disorders**. This may be due to illnesses, e.g., **brain tumor, hypothyroidism**, or to **chemical abuse, e.g., alcohol and marijuana**.

Types of Mental Health Disorders	Types of Mental Disorders
Anxiety Disorders	<p>1-Anxiety Disorders: Mental disorders characterized by the manifestations of fear (e.g., apprehension, shakiness, sweating, palpitations, sinking feelings in the stomach, urinary urgency/frequency). Unlike fear, the cause of the danger is not known or recognized. Everybody experiences some anxiety in day-to-day living. Only if persistent or recurrent, one needs to be concerned. Some types of anxiety are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phobias: irrational/exaggerated fears of a thing, e.g., cats, heights, or a social/environmental situation, e.g., public speaking, using public toilets. • Obsessive/compulsive disorder: recurrent thoughts or feelings (obsession), or repetitive actions (compulsion) that are known – by most patients- to be irrational. • General anxiety disorder: the patient feels anxious, tense, fearful and upset most of the time without apparent reasons.
Dissociative Disorders	<p>2-Dissociative Disorders: abrupt but temporary loss of memory or identity or feelings of detachment due to psychological factors. Multiple personality disorder in which the patient shifts from one personality to another without being aware is a rare variant.</p>
Mood Disorders	<p>3-Mood Disorders: involve moods that are extreme and interfere with daily living. It is normal to experience different moods, e.g., loving/happy moods, hurt/anxious moods.</p> <p><u>Depression</u> is a feeling of hopelessness, sadness, helplessness; with loss of interest, appetite, sleep, and energy...It may follow loss of a parent in the first decade of life or a social loss during adult life, e.g., loss of a spouse. In <u>Manic-depressive disorder</u> the patient alternates between periods of depression when he may be suicidal and periods of high mood when he may be very happy or agitated and angry and may become violent.</p>
Personality Disorders	<p>4-Personality Disorders: Adults with unusual personality, i.e., unusual patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting, that interferes with happiness and daily living have a personality disorder. Examples include: 1- avoidant personality (avoids social contacts because of low self-esteem and fear of rejection), 2-dependent (insecure and leaning on others for advice and support), 3-histrionic (constantly behaves in ways to draw attention to himself)...</p>
Schizophrenia	<p>5-Schizophrenia: a mental disorder in which there is a breakdown in logical thought processes. The patient experiences delusions (false beliefs), and hallucinations, (false sensations, e.g., hearing voices). In paranoid schizophrenia, the patient has delusions of persecution or grandeur.</p>

Somatoform Disorders **6-Somatoform Disorders:** a group of disorders in which there are symptoms of physical illness from emotional causes, the patient truly believing that he has a physical illness. Hypochondria is constant anxiety about illness. In a conversion disorder, the patient suddenly loses vision or hearing or sensation in the skin or becomes paralyzed to get a secondary gain, e.g., to avoid some responsibility.

Suicide **7-Suicide:** is not necessarily related to a mental disorder but to the experience of loss and rejection (loss of love, control, self-confidence) or the loss of health (e.g., incurable cancer). Signs that a person may be suicidal include drastic changes in personality and in sleeping and eating habits, withdrawal from family and friends, loss of interest in personal appearance and work, preoccupation with death. When you suspect that someone is suicidal you should inform others (family, friends), encourage the suicidal person to talk but do not give false reassurances that everything will be OK, be supportive, show that you care and seek professional help.

Recognizing
Mental Health
Problems

Recognizing Mental Health Problems

To stay mentally healthy, it is important to **assess your behavior regularly, recognize risk behaviors and change them. Six warning signs** suggest that it may be time to change a risk behavior: *1) Boredom with daily activities, 2) Illness/mental distress, 3) Chronic anxiety and guilt, 4) Failing performance at work, 5) Unexpected failure in personal relationships, and 6) Fear of being unmasked if your private self and public self are different.*

If you experience these warning signs, then you should seek help. This may range from talking to family or friends to consulting a mental health specialist, e.g., a psychiatrist (has a medical degree) or a psychologist (without a medical degree).

Life
Management
Skills

Life Management Skills

- **Assess** mental health status regularly.
- **Avoid environmental stresses**, e.g., high levels of noise, air pollution, poor lighting.
- **Avoid abuse** of substances that may harm the brain, e.g., alcohol, marijuana.
- **Learn to express anger in healthful ways** to avoid depression.
- **Develop a philosophy of life** that focuses on living life to the fullest.
- **Recognize the signs of suicide** and assist others in suicide prevention.
- **Recognize warning signs** that indicate it may be time to change risk behaviors.
- **Be aware of mental health** services available in your community.

Stress
Management

3.4 Stress Management

Definitions

Definitions



Stress: a nonspecific response of the body to any demand (stressor) made upon it. **Stressors may be physical**, e.g., running a race, **mental**, e.g., sitting for an exam, **or social**, e.g., asking for a date.

Eustress: positive and healthful response. You cope successfully with the stressor.

Distress: results from unsuccessful coping with, or harmful response to a stressor, e.g., you are overwhelmed by anxiety and cannot perform well. The same stressor can produce either eustress or distress depending on the person's response.

General
Adaptation
Syndrome

General Adaptation Syndrome

The response to stress is referred to as the general adaptation syndrome (GAS). It is divided into **three stages**:

1

1) **The alarm stage:** prepares the body for rapid action (fight or flight). Adrenalin is secreted and increases delivery of blood, oxygen and nutrient glucose to the muscles.

2

2) **The resistance stage:** returns the body to normal homeostasis (i.e., internal balance). The increased pulse, blood pressure and respiration rate of the alarm stage return to normal.

3

3) **The exhaustion stage:** To remain healthy, stresses must be experienced as eustress or homeostasis must be regained rapidly after experiencing distress. Prolongation of either distress or the resistance stage of GAS leads to the exhaustion stage in which the body does not function well and its resistance to disease is lowered. The hormone, cortisol, is secreted.

Holistic
Effects of
Stress

Holistic Effects of Stress

Stress has a holistic effect. A stressor in one area of health affects other areas.

Stress and mental health: Certain personality types tend to react to stress as distress. Type A personality is competitive, achievement-oriented, with an intense sense of time urgency and the necessity to accomplish much in a short time. Type B personality is more relaxed. Too much type A behavior can cause unnecessary frustration, anxiety and distress. Too much type B behavior may lead to lack of meaningful and interesting goals with consequent boredom and distress.

Stress and family and social health: common stressors include *divorce, death of a loved one, loneliness, lack of communication skills...* Talking to family or friends, becoming interested in a variety of social activities, and developing communication skills can help.

Stress and growth and development: Hormonal and body changes during puberty may cause distress, e.g., if adolescents develop sooner or later than their friends.

Stress and nutrition : Diet can affect you, especially during periods of stress. It is healthful to limit consumption of caffeine, salt, refined sugars and animal fats (source of cholesterol). Consumption of 250 – 300mg of caffeine over a 2-hour period can trigger the alarm stage of GAS (Approximate caffeine contents are 100 mg for a cup of French coffee, 50 mg for a 12-ounce cola, and 20 mg for a 1-ounce chocolate bar). Too much salt increases blood pressure and cholesterol clogs arteries. Both are risk factors for heart disease.

Stress and exercise and fitness : exercise is a good way to relieve stress. Too little exercise may result in weight gain and a flabby heart muscle.

Stress and drugs: Drugs such as tobacco, marijuana, and cocaine increase GAS effects. Alcohol and tranquilizers depress body and brain functions.

Stress and consumer and personal health: A consumer is someone who has time and money to spend. Poor money management obviously creates distress. Distress can also result from having either too little or too much to do. The former may be frustrated with boredom (learning a new skill may help), the latter have a hectic schedule and are susceptible to disorders such as high blood pressure and heart disease (setting priorities and limits on time and energy can help).

Stress and Safety and First Aid : Many accidents occur during periods of stress, especially reckless driving.

Stress and Community and Environmental Health : Pollutants in the air and water as well as loud noise create distress. The behavior of persons with whom you associate can alter the quality of the environment and reduce or increase your level of distress, e.g., if your friend is a chain smoker, drives recklessly and plays loud music, you breathe polluted air, cannot concentrate from the loud music, and are at risk of a car accident.

Stress
Management
Skills

Stress Management Skills

Stress-related and lifestyle-related illnesses and accidents are leading causes of death and disability today.

Knowing and applying stress management skills helps keep you healthy. These include:

Problem-solving: is the application of a series of steps to help one make responsible decisions. 1) **Identify** a-the cause of your stress, and b-ways to cope with it. 2) **Evaluate** each way of coping with the stress, 3) **Choose** a way which results in actions that are healthful, safe, and legal, and conform to accepted guidelines, and 4) **Evaluate** your choice. Does it relieve the stress? In case of difficulty, it may be of help to talk to family, friends, or counselors.

Diet and exercise: are two of the most healthful ways of coping with stress. Exercise begun immediately or **up to 24 hours after the onset of distress** will help reduce the harmful effects of distress.

The relaxation response: The alarm and resistance stages of GAS are mediated involuntarily by the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, respectively. Learning techniques such as meditation, progressive relaxation, autogenic training and biofeedback can initiate the relaxation response voluntarily.

Pets: can be a great asset in stress management by providing a constant, affectionate relationship.

Life
Management
Skills



Life Management Skills

- **Make a plan to manage your time** with a balance between work and play.
- **Talk over your problems with family or friends** when you experience distress.
- **Take part in a variety of social activities.**
- **Limit the amount of** caffeine, salt, refined sugar, and cholesterol in the diet.
- **Avoid** tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, alcohol, and tranquilizers.
- **Follow** a carefully planned budget.
- **Select friends** who have healthful habits.
- **Engage** in a regular exercise program.
- **Learn to use meditation**, progressive relaxation, autogenic training, or biofeedback to initiate the relaxation response