

## FACILITATION GUIDE

# Module 1: What is mental health and why is it an important issue?

Mental health is an important workplace issue. Just like physical health, it needs to be managed well in order to reduce the risk of ill-health and suffering. Having a workforce that has a sense of wellbeing can lead to better performance, better results for the organisation and better outcomes for all<sup>1</sup>.

Mental health is also important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through to adulthood. Our mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It is about how we think, feel and act as we deal with life's ups and downs. Being mentally healthy is not necessarily about being free from problems. Everyone feels worried, anxious, sad, or stressed at various times in their lives; this is perfectly normal. However, sometimes these thoughts and feelings do not go away and are severe enough to interfere with daily life. In New Zealand every year, one in five of us experiences some form of psychological distress or develops a diagnosable mental disorder. These numbers are increasing and will continue to do so with the pace and pressures of modern life.

If we view mental health as a continuum<sup>2</sup>, a person can have a mental health problem or concern without having a diagnosable mental illness. There may be early signs, however, that all is not well. In instances where a mental illness is diagnosed, a person's thoughts,

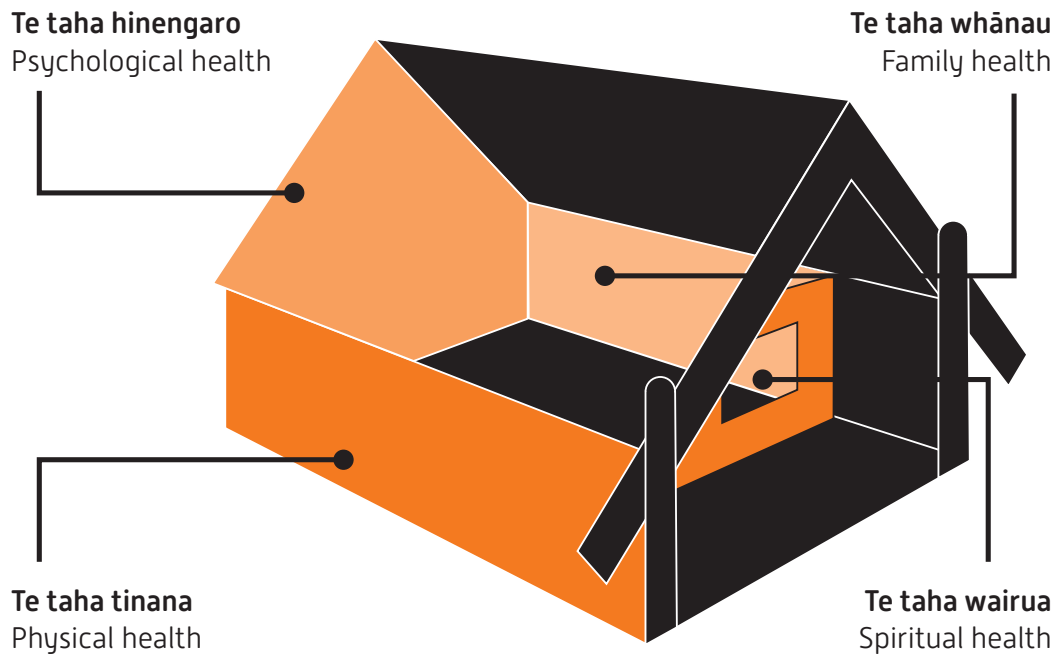
emotions, and/or behaviours are more adversely affected, and if untreated their functioning will be impaired, resulting in a general loss of quality of life. With the right treatment and support, those suffering from a mental illness can function more effectively and/or make a full recovery.

Another useful way of looking at mental health and health in general is the concept of 'Te Whare Tapa Whā'<sup>3</sup>. Each of the four sides of the whare represents the four dimensions of health; psychological or mental health, physical health, whānau or familial health and spiritual health. Because each of the four dimensions are interlinked, should one or more of the four dimensions be functioning poorly, our health suffers.

1 Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand [2016]. *Working Well: A workplace guide to mental health*. [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf)

2 Keyes, C. L. M. [2002]. The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Behavior Research*, 43, 207-222.

3 Durie, M., Elder, H., Tapsell, R., Lawrence, M., & Bennett, S. [2018]. *Māea te Toi Ora: Māori Health Transformations*. Huia Publishers. Also see [www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha](http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-whare-tapa-wha)



Te Whare Tapa Whā model of health

## EXERCISES

In many organisations, mental health is seen as a liability that is associated with difficult to manage behaviours, distressing situations for managers and staff, and feelings of not knowing how to address it<sup>4</sup>. However, there is a much broader approach to mental health. Many international health leadership bodies, such as the World Health Organization, describe mental health as a state of wellbeing which allows us to work, live and interact with others to our full potential<sup>5</sup>. With this in mind, the exercises below aim to help you understand or 'demystify' mental health and demonstrate why it is just as important as physical health<sup>6</sup>.

## VIDEO CLIPS

Below are useful video clips on how to discuss mental health issues in a positive way:

***What is mental health:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0zJGDokyWQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0zJGDokyWQ)

***What's stopping us from talking about mental health at work:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkcytC89dYA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkcytC89dYA)

***Those unintentional barriers:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dv6tZuKtz-E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dv6tZuKtz-E)

***Creating culture:***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=dknUfJzwy4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dknUfJzwy4)

<sup>4</sup> Mental Health Foundation [2012] Five Ways to Wellbeing at Work Toolkit. [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/5-ways-toolkit/Five-Ways-to-Wellbeing-at-Worknew.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/5-ways-toolkit/Five-Ways-to-Wellbeing-at-Worknew.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organisation [2014]. Mental health: a state of well-being. [www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/)

<sup>6</sup> Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand [2016]. Working Well: A workplace guide to mental health. [www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Our-Work/Open-Minds/Working-Well-guide.pdf)



## EXERCISE 1: SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLBEING

Mental health, like physical health, exists on a continuum. It is a dynamic, changing state that can deteriorate or improve depending on life circumstances. Therefore, mental health concerns, if identified and treated early, have the potential to be temporary, reversible and manageable.

Moreover, there's no 'one size fits all' approach to workplace mental health and wellbeing. Every workplace is unique, so it is important to develop a programme that suits your organisation and the resources that are available. Below are some exercises with the aim of starting a conversation.

**AIM:** The Mental Health Foundation<sup>7</sup> notes that the essential elements to creating a positive emotional climate are:

- > **Positive emotional climate:** Cultivating and expressing positive emotions
- > **Education and awareness:** Educating employees and managers on mental health and wellbeing
- > **Effective communication:** Communication based on trust, respect and civility and not tolerating bullying or harassment
- > **Collaborative teamwork:** Working well together to share knowledge and achieve goals
- > **Diversity and inclusion:** Engaging the strengths of a diverse workforce.

The aim of the exercise is to 'break the ice' and start a conversation around mental wellbeing. In particular, this exercise aims to explore:

1. What are the key ingredients that make a good day
2. How do we create and maintain a good working environment.

It also gets the participants to start thinking about what support mechanisms there are for mental health and wellbeing in their organisations and more importantly what improvements can be made.

**TASK:** In groups invite the participants to discuss the questions below. Get the participants to write out their answers and report back.

1. List the things that make your work and workplace enjoyable.
2. What can be done to create a better working environment?
3. If someone at work has a problem related to either their work or family life, who would they go to for help?
4. What is working well in the organisation in terms of supporting colleagues who are experiencing health issues, including mental health? And what could be improved?

**TIME:** 30 minutes.

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7 Ibid

## EXERCISE 2: MYTHS AROUND MENTAL HEALTH

**AIM:** As common as mental illness is, there are still persistent myths about it which can create prejudice and a barrier to seeking help. The aim of this exercise is to dispel some of the myths around mental health and to start a conversation about what it is and why it is an important issue. It is also designed to break down some of the barriers around talking about mental wellbeing.

**TASK:** In pairs see if the participants can answer the following questions.

**TIME:** 5-10 minutes to answer the questions, 15 minutes to discuss the answers.

True or false?	Answer
Mental health problems are rare. <b>FALSE</b>	Mental health problems affect one in five people in any one year. Even if you don't have a mental health problem, it's likely your friend, a family member or work colleague will be affected.
People with mental health problems are violent. <b>FALSE</b>	People with mental health problems are much more likely to be the victim of violence. The violence myth makes it harder for people to talk openly about mental health problems. It can also make friends reluctant to stay in touch.
People can't recover from mental illness. <b>FALSE</b>	Many people can and do recover from mental illnesses. Alongside professional help, the support of friends and family and getting back to work are all important in helping people recover.
On average, people with severe mental illness die 10 years younger. <b>TRUE</b>	The physical health needs of people with mental illnesses are often dismissed due to discrimination, causing higher rates of death from heart attacks, diabetes and cancer for people with a severe mental illness.
The stigma and discrimination around mental illness can be more difficult than the illness itself. <b>TRUE</b>	In a recent Mental Health Foundation (NZ) survey, 58% of people said that the stigma and discrimination is equally as damaging, or harder to deal with, than the illness itself. 87% of people with a mental illness have experienced discrimination.
There is not much you can do to help someone experiencing mental health problems. <b>FALSE</b>	If someone you know is experiencing a mental health problem, just staying in touch can really help. For many people, it is the small things that people do that can make a difference, like visiting or phoning, or going for a coffee.
People can't work if they have a mental illness. <b>FALSE</b>	With one in five people affected by a mental illness, you probably work with someone with a mental health problem. Many successful people, including MPs, sports stars and business leaders, have been open about difficulties with their mental health.
If you use a mental health service, there is a one in three chance that you will lose contact with friends. <b>TRUE</b>	Sometimes friends feel like they don't know enough to be able to help or they feel uncomfortable. But you don't need to be an expert on mental illness to be a friend. It's often the everyday things, like a phone call or text that make a difference.



## EXERCISE 3: WHY IS MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH TREATED DIFFERENTLY?

More often than not we fail to give mental ill health the same priority as physical ill health. There are a number of factors that can contribute to mental health problems, including biological factors, such as genes or brain chemistry and life experiences, such as trauma or abuse. As a result mental disorders are often only recognised after they become severe and consequently harder to treat. The question is: why is this the case?

**AIM:** By comparing mental health with physical health, the aim of this exercise is to raise the level of awareness around mental health while at the same time reducing the stigma surrounding mental ill health. That is, to create an environment where talking about mental health issues becomes “normalised”.

**TASK:** Invite individuals to answer the following questions only if they feel comfortable about participating. Ask the following questions sequentially.

**TIME:** 10-15 minutes to answer and discuss the answers.

### 1. Raise your hand if:

- > You went to a dentist’s appointment in the last year.
- > You went to a doctor’s appointment in the past year.
- > You took any medication for a physical illness over the past year.
- > You were absent from work due to physical ill-health.

### 2. Raise your hand if you feel comfortable to answer the following questions:

- > You saw a mental health professional over the past year.
- > You took any psychiatric medications over the past year.
- > You were absent from work due to mental ill-health, such as a ‘stress leave’ day.

### 3. Discussion questions:

- > Why is mental ill health harder to talk about than physical ill health?
- > What can we do to make it easier to talk about mental ill health?