

4b. Mental health - Continuum, Stress Phobia & Anxiety

Mentally healthy means:

- being in a generally positive state of mental wellbeing,
- having the ability to cope with and manage life's challenges,
- working productively,
- striving to fulfil one's goals and potential,
- and having a sense of connection to others and the community in general

Mental health problem:

- A mental health problem adversely affects the way a person thinks, feels and/or behaves, but typically to a lesser extent and of a shorter duration than a mental disorder. Experiencing a mental health problem is sometimes referred to as a 'rough patch', a 'low point' or 'the blues'.
- Examples of mental health problems include the sadness and despair associated with loss or grief, and symptoms associated with stress.

Mental health disorder:

- A mental disorder, also called mental illness, is a mental health state that involves a combination of thoughts, feelings and/or behaviours which are usually associated with significant personal distress and impair the ability to function effectively in everyday life.
- The term is most commonly used in relation to a clinically diagnosable disorder involving mental health, such as schizophrenia, major depressive disorder (commonly called depression) or an anxiety disorder.

Characteristics of a mental disorder:

- The disorder occurs within the individual and results from dysfunction within the individual
- There is clinically diagnosable dysfunction in thoughts, feelings and/or behaviour e.g. low levels of functioning, social and emotional wellbeing
- Causes significant personal distress or disability in functioning in everyday life
- Actions and reactions are atypical ('not typical') of the person and inappropriate within their culture
- The disorder is not a result of a personal conflict with society (APA, 2013).

Stress: A state of physiological and psychological arousal produced by internal and external stressors that are perceived by the individual as challenging or exceeding their ability or resources to cope.

- Considered a normal part of life.

Anxiety: a state of arousal involving feelings of apprehension, worry or uneasiness that something is wrong or something unpleasant is about to happen.

- An adaptive response (similar to FFF response) that can be useful in the short-term but if severe, exaggerated or long-term can be counterproductive and disabling.

Phobia: Characterised by excessive or unreasonable fear of a particular object or situation. The fear response tends to be out of proportion to the actual danger posed.

- There is also a compelling desire to avoid the object or situation.
- Where fear response outweighs the risk

Comparing stress, anxiety and phobia:

Stress	Anxiety	Phobia
Can be experienced in response to a wide range of stimuli	Can be in experienced in response to a wide range of stimuli	Typically only experienced in response to a specific stimuli
Accompanied by physiological changes; may involve fight-flight-freeze	Accompanied by physiological changes; may involve fight-flight-freeze	Accompanied by physiological changes; may involve fight-flight-freeze
May be associated with avoidance of certain objects or situations	May be associated with avoidance of certain objects or situations	May be associated with avoidance of certain objects or situations
Source/cause of a stress response is usually known (e.g. a specific stressor)	Source/cause of an anxiety response is not always apparent	Source/cause of a phobic response is usually known (e.g. feared object or situation)
Influenced by biological, psychological and social factors	Influenced by biological, psychological and social factors	Influenced by biological, psychological and social factors
Considered 'normal' to experience stress in certain situations and everyone experiences it at some time	Considered 'normal' to experience anxiety in certain situations and everyone experiences it at some time	Not considered 'normal'

Potential contributory factor to mental health disorder	Potential contributory factor to mental health disorder	A diagnosable mental disorder
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