

# 4a. Wellbeing - Ways of Considering Mental Well-being

## **Mental health as a product of internal and external factors:**

### **Internal factors:**

- Internal factors are influences that originate inside or within a person. These can be organised as biological and psychological factors.
- Biological factors involve physiologically based or determined influences, often not under our control.
- Psychological factors involve all those influences associated with mental processes such as our thoughts, ways of thinking, beliefs, attitudes and more.

### **External factors:**

- External factors are influences that originate outside a person.
- These can include school- and work-related factors, the range and quality of our interpersonal relationships, the amount and type of support available from others when needed, exposure to stressors and more.

## **Biopsychosocial model:**

- In contemporary psychology, internal and external factors tend to be organised within a framework called the biopsychosocial model.
- The biopsychosocial model is a way of describing and explaining how biological, psychological and social factors combine and interact to influence a person's mental health.
- The model is based on the idea that mental health is best understood by considering specific factors from within each domain (areas) and how these factors may combine and interact to influence our wellbeing.

- **The biopsychosocial model is a holistic model about how psychological, biological and social factors combine and interact.** Holistic view of mental health — the individual is considered as a ‘whole person’ functioning in their unique environment.

## **Typical characteristics of a mentally healthy person:**

### **1. High level of functioning:**

Level of functioning tends to correspond with how well or adaptively a person is meeting the challenges of living across a range of domains or areas such as the following:

- interpersonal relationships e.g. ability to interact with and get along with other people
- school and work/occupational settings e.g. productive and achieving goals
- leisure/recreational activities e.g. participation in extracurricular activities at school
- daily living skills e.g. participation in self-care and independent living activities such as personal hygiene, dressing, eating, remembering to take any prescribed medications and others
- cognitive skills e.g. learning and applying knowledge, understanding and communicating, logical and clear thinking, planning and decision-making
- emotions e.g. self-regulation of a range of emotions, dealing with positive and negative emotions, keeping daily worries, hassles and other stressors under control.
- The behaviour of someone with a high level of functioning is primarily adaptive.
- Adaptive behaviour involves actions that enable a person to effectively carry out their usual everyday tasks.
- Maladaptive behaviour interferes with the person’s ability to carry out their usual activities in an effective way.
- Maladaptive behaviour is commonly associated with a low level of functioning

## **2. High levels of social and emotional wellbeing:**

Social wellbeing:

- A person with a high level of social wellbeing is likely to be willing and able to:
  - develop and maintain healthy relationships with family and friends
  - socially interact with others in appropriate ways
  - respect and understand other individuals
  - respect the cultural identities of others
  - competently resolve conflicts with others
  - effectively manage unhealthy relationships
  - spend time with loved ones
  - feel self-confident alone or with others (AIHW, 2012; NIHCE, 2009).

Emotional wellbeing:

- A person with a high level of emotional wellbeing is likely to be willing and able to:
  - develop awareness and understanding of their own emotions
  - regulate their emotions and exercise control when appropriate
  - express a range of emotions in a suitable manner
  - identify emotions in others and empathise
  - accept mistakes or setbacks and learn from them
  - make decisions with a minimum of worry, stress or anxiety
  - manage their stress reactions using appropriate coping skills
  - take responsibility for their actions

## **3. Resilience to life stressors:**

- Resilience is the ability to cope with and adapt well to life stressors and restore positive functioning.
- Some people have more or less resilience than others. In particular, people who are mentally healthy are commonly described as 'resilient' because they

tend to have a high level of resilience, whereas people who are mentally unwell tend to have a low level of resilience and may therefore be described as 'not resilient'.

- Research studies have found that resilience is not an unusual or extraordinary characteristic.
- Our resilience is the product of a range of personal skills and is significantly influenced by external factors, particularly our social connections and access to social support.