



Scholars
Program



TOP 10 TIPS

ON MENTAL HEALTH
AND WELLNESS FOR
NEW PARTNERS



01 NORMALISE MENTAL HEALTH

Normalise mental health within your institutions and communities; recognise that we are all striving towards positive mental health, and that mental health challenges can affect us all. Try using words or phrases that support this idea such as 'wellness'. The more we talk about mental health and wellness, the more we break down the stigma and negative perceptions around it, and start to promote understanding and acceptance. We can help promote the idea that sometimes 'it is okay not to be okay' and let students know where they can find different types of help.

A. DEFINING MENTAL HEALTH

I. MENTAL HEALTH

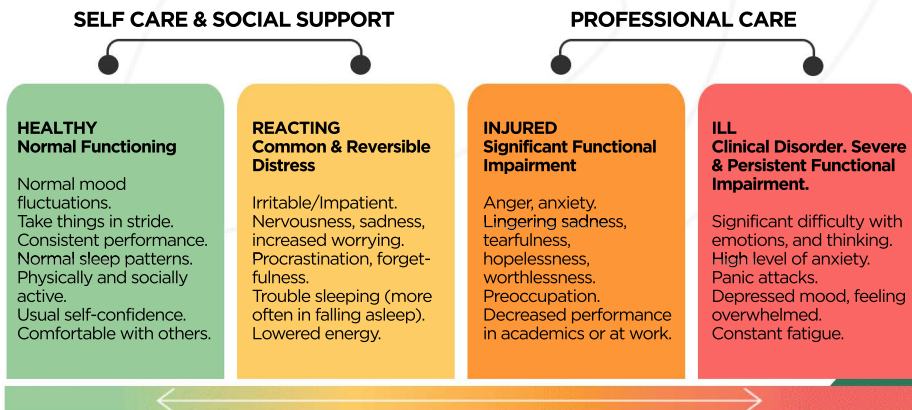
Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (World Health Organization).

II. WHEN WE SPEAK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

When we speak about mental health we are not always speaking about pathology or chronic illness. Poor mental health can also result from everyday occurrences like feeling stressed about an exam, breaking up with a significant other, or feeling isolated on campus.

III. THE MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM MODEL

The mental health continuum model proposes that an individual can be dealing with challenges that lead to poor mental health but not chronic illness. Self-care and social support can be helpful for those who feel healthy but may experience low distress from time to time, while professional care can be helpful for those who may experience higher levels of distress/chronic illness.



Every staff member and every department can contribute to the wellbeing of students. Some examples of how other departments outside of the counselling centre can contribute:



a. The program or institution ensures that there is no delay in the Scholar's stipend as this can really impact their mental health status and sense of security.



b. Instructors and academic departments can ensure that classrooms are set up to accommodate students with disabilities. A lack of accessible classrooms hinders the student's ability to attend classes, further ostracising this student population.



c. Consider providing training for all staff to raise awareness around mental health and wellness, and learn how they can best identify and support students in distress, working closely with the wellness team on campus.

We all have a part to play! We recommend emphasising the importance of approaching all students with respect, dignity and valuing their privacy and confidentiality as these are all components of fostering a healthy environment. Addressing mental health challenges, and promoting wellbeing has a very positive, and tangible impact for universities – more students will stay in their studies, more students will graduate, and get better grades, and more students will be well adapted for the transitions they face upon graduation and finding their next steps. Mental health is worth investing in! Consider how you can work closely with university administration to support wellness programs on your campus.

Consider focusing support on different transition points such as starting university, moving to different years, internships, as well as upon graduation – this can often be the hardest transition of all. Highlight the importance of pre-university orientation with a focus on the following areas:



A. ACADEMICS: Consider organising writing workshops, educating about plagiarism and subject specific support. This becomes especially helpful for students who are refugees and displaced students, disabled students and students from different educational systems who may have had gaps in their educational journeys.



B. NON-ACADEMIC: Consider organising workshops with topics like mental health, building healthy relationships, budgeting and professionalism. Guidance for young people who often are discovering newly found freedom and choice is a critical component to setting the pace for student success.



C. COHORT BONDING: Consider creating intentional spaces to build comradery among students.



D. MENTORSHIP: Consider involving students in higher years as mentors for students just starting university.

04 “NOTHING DONE FOR US, WITHOUT US”

This is what we hear from students time and time again. When designing and implementing programmes, workshops, or other activities, make the time and effort to include students in the planning process to ensure the activities best meet the needs of the students, and are more likely to be a success! Identify with them the difficult periods during the student journey and the possible responses that could be put in place as a preventative measure and response to students experiencing crisis. Mastercard Foundation scholars have also told us that where possible, it is better to plan projects and programmes for ALL students, and not exclusively for scholarship students. This helps the scholars to feel integrated and included in the wider community.

05 TRY TO CONSIDER THE DIFFERENT NEEDS AND STRENGTHS OF STUDENTS

When designing programmes, consider the needs of specific groups like men, women, those with disabilities, those from a refugee background, young parents, those from the LGBTQ+ community, and those who are studying abroad, or studying online. All students face unique challenges and have unique strengths. You don't necessarily need to have specific programmes for different groups, but perhaps aim to have a range of support services and activities to achieve a wide range of participation and engagement.

06 EXPLORE PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

With so many students, it is likely that there are not enough counsellors to address all the mental health challenges and needs on campus. If you don't have one already, consider exploring options for a peer counselling or buddy system, or other student-led initiatives, where students can raise awareness of mental health, listen to others, as well as signpost those who might need further support. This is also a great way to reduce fear and stigma around asking for help, and create a sense of community. It is also essential that a structure of supervision is built around these programmes and a dedicated wellness team meets frequently with peer supporters to provide guidance.

07 DON'T FORGET THE WELLNESS OF YOUR STAFF MEMBERS

A healthy strong staff team can support students and each other much more effectively. Mental health and wellness support for staff can help better manager stress, reduce burnout, increase productivity and overall job satisfaction. Each institution will find what works for them; staff away days, sports membership, monthly wellness days, or an organisational culture of closing work at a certain time to allow for work/life balance, are some examples that other universities have implemented.

08 THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS OF GETTING HELP

When someone is struggling with their mental health, talk therapy or counselling is one strategy that can help. It is also important to remember that there are many different ways of getting 'help' and different things can work for different people. When designing programmes and activities, try to highlight a range of wellbeing activities and sources of support that might also include physical activity, spirituality, music and the arts, community and cultural spaces. Consider culturally sensitive and Afrocentric approaches to mental health to enhance the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of programmes.

09

PROVIDE CONFIDENTIAL SPACES FOR COUNSELLORS TO MEET WITH STUDENTS

Allocating private and confidential spaces for counsellors to meet with students is essential to the work that they do. While healing and wellness can occur in different kinds of settings, providing confidential spaces for counsellors to meet with students is critically important for several reasons:



a. It encourages open communication by promoting trust, honesty and reducing stigma often associated with seeking mental health support, making it easier for students to approach counsellors.



b. It protects privacy and confidentiality, and prevents eavesdropping and accidental disclosures



c. It encourages utilisation of services and supports student wellbeing and retention.



d. It promotes emotional safety. Knowing that they are in a secure, confidential space helps students feel emotionally safe, which is vital for the healing process and for addressing sensitive or traumatic issues.

10

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

Every country, context, and organisation is different but there are many universities in the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program network who have set up great wellness programmes and are willing to share their experiences and offer advice and ideas. Given Solid Minds' role as the mental health technical partner for the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program, we have had the privilege of building relationships with many of these institutions and would be happy to make connections if/when needed.





Solid Minds is a mental health clinic based in Kigali, Rwanda and works in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program to promote mental health and wellness for scholars, and their universities. Please reach out to us for more information:

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