

Mental Health Promotion and Well-being

Chapter 1. Mental Health and Well-being

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The search for a healthy lifestyle is a current challenge in modern societies, that allows a large individual longevity, based on their quality of life and well-being. In this sense, raising awareness of the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits should combine physical, mental and social health, which are determinants for maintaining a healthy lifestyle and well-being. The biological, psychological and social benefits of a healthy lifestyle are significant in the quality of life and health of the population, constituting themselves as essential pillars in mental health promotion.

In this module you will learn more about what is a mental health, what is the importance of mental health promotion and what are the implications for the health and well-being. In addition, we will explore topics related to emotions, the impact of stress and the role of stress management and self-care, the importance of positive social interactions and physical activity as promoters of mental health and well-being at university.

1. What is Mental Health?

What do we talk about, when we talk about mental health?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) **mental health** or **psychological well-being** is a basic human right and an integral part of our general health and well-being. This is the meaning of the expression "*There is no health without mental health*".

A commonly used definition of mental health is "... a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (WHO, 2022). Thus, mental health is a lot more than the absence of illness: it is an intrinsic part of our individual and collective health and well-being. Mental health makes up an integral part of an individual's capacity to lead a fulfilling life, including the ability to create and maintain relationships, to study, work and to make day-to-day decisions about educational, employment, housing or other choices.

Unlike models of medical care focused on diseases, such as the Biomedical Model, Engel's Biopsychosocial Model aims to understand the human being in all its dimensions – biological, psychological and social – emphasizing the promotion of health and quality of life, thus enabling a new way of approaching mental health (Gatchel et al., 2007). The diagram below shows an example of this model (Figure 1).

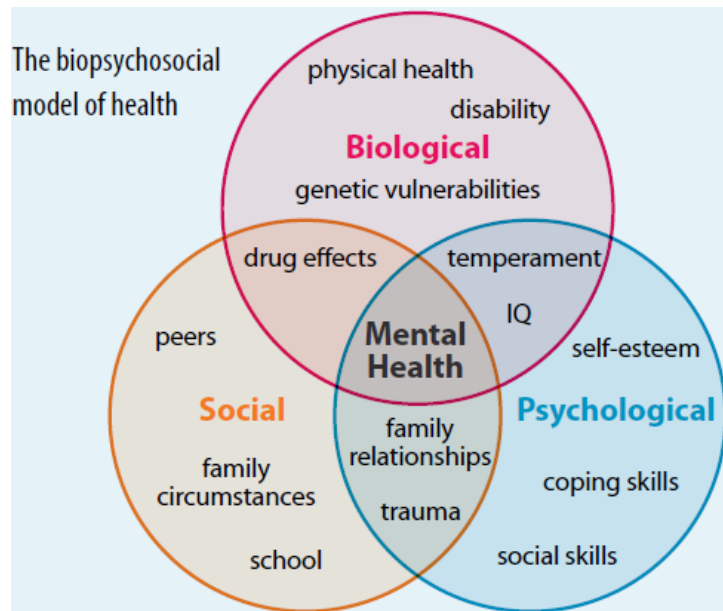


Figure 1. Diagram of the Biopsychosocial Model

For a person to be mental healthy, it is necessary to find a balance in the various areas that constitute the person. Thus, when considering mental health we are talking about:

- Feeling good about ourselves and our relationships with others;
- Ability to adapt to new life circumstances/changes;
- Ability to deal positively with adversity;
- Overcoming crises and resolving affective losses and emotional conflicts;
- Be able to recognize limits and signs of discomfort;
- Have a critical sense of reality, but also humour and creativity;
- Establish satisfactory relationships with other community members;
- Be confident and not fear the future;
- Having life projects and, above all, discovering a meaning for life.



Mental health is the foundation of general well-being. It is an elementary aspect of quality of life. It promotes training, work and the participation of individuals in society and, therefore, the level of mental health and well-being of the population is a key component for the development and success of knowledge-based societies.