

## What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is something we all need. It is a feeling of well-being, happiness, the ability to cope with life's challenges, to accept others and most of all, to have a positive attitude towards oneself.

Mentally healthy people trust others and enjoy being part of a group as well as being on their own. For them, life is meaningful. However, there is no line that neatly divides the mentally healthy from the unhealthy. There are many degrees of mental health. No single characteristics can be taken as evidence of good mental health and nobody has all the traits of good mental health all the time.

## What Makes A Family Mentally Healthy?

- Family members who respect one another
- Family members who spend quality time together e.g. at meals, watching TV, playing games.
- Family members who take time to listen to one another,
- Family members who can talk about their problems, hopes and fears with one another.
- The family who can respect the need for individual time and activities
- Family members who are cohesive, fair and tolerant.
- Family members who understand one another's social needs and enjoy a positive social life.
- The family who has a balanced sense of protectiveness towards its members.

## Tips For Improving Your Family's Mental Health

- Accept that NO family is perfect - do not compare your family with an imaginary ideal. When there are problems, start working on ways to solve them.
- Be honest - learn to say how you feel without hurting others.
- Praise one another for good things instead of blaming for the bad.
- Respect each other's right privacy.
- Be sensitive to one another's needs, feelings and rights.
- Divide household tasks and chores so that everyone feels satisfied and appreciated.
- Do not abuse one another physically, sexually or verbally.
- Have realistic expectations of one another.
- Be loyal and faithful to one another.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help

**Why Value Good Family Mental Health?** Families and kinship are the single most important aspects of a healthy society. Healthy individuals who contribute towards a healthy society come from healthy families.

## Bringing Up Mentally Healthy Children

Children are our source of joy and pain. Still, bringing up children is one of the greatest challenges in life.

Parenting is about loving and caring for your children. It should also be consistent and unconditional. These qualities will give your children a sense of security and belonging.

Love and faithfulness between spouses is equally important. This gives your children the opportunity to see the warmth and tenderness in your marital relationship. This will set an atmosphere which encourages the same kind of affection in the hearts and minds of your children.

## Tips To Parents To Bring Up Mentally Healthy Children:

1. **DISCIPLINE CONSTRUCTIVELY** Constructive discipline gives children clear direction by setting and adhering to standards of behavior.
2. **SPEND TIME TOGETHER** Spending quality time with your children is one of the most precious gifts you can give in raising them for their all around development. Spend time playing, communicating, in family activities, outings and holidays. Quality time spent earns great rewards in love, stability and family togetherness.
3. **TEACH RIGHT FROM WRONG** Teaching your children basic values and manners will help them get along better in society. Assign them chores and other responsibilities at home. Talk to them about treating others with kindness, respect and honesty. Above all, set a personal example yourself.
4. **DEVELOP MUTUAL RESPECT** Parents should insist that all family members treat each other with respect. This means you should be willing to apologize to your children when you are wrong, show an active interest in their activities and avoid favoritism. In return, you should expect respectful behavior from your children.
5. **FOSTER INDEPENDENCE** One of the most difficult aspects of bringing up children is letting go. By gradually allowing them freedom and control over their own lives, you will gain their affection and respect.
6. **OFFER GUIDANCE** Children will welcome your guidance when they have problems, provided it is offered and not forced. Offer valuable gifts like your opinions, feelings and experience.
7. **LISTENING** Parents should listen to their children from their earliest years. This means giving individual attention and putting aside one's own thoughts and beliefs in trying to understand the child's point of view.
8. **TEND TO PERSONAL AND MARITAL NEEDS** Finally, a vital aspect of bringing up children: personal adjustment. To relate well to children, adults must be comfortable with themselves. By treating yourself well, you will avoid the feeling of being mistreated or over-burdened when times are rough.

There are two lasting gifts we can give our children. One is roots; the other is wings. If you can give your children the foundation of love and the freedom to soar, you will have provided the best upbringing they could ever hope to have.

## Understanding Mental Illness

Mental illness is often misunderstood. For centuries, it has been seen as either possession by evil spirits, a moral weakness or punishment from a higher being. Those suffering from mental illness are commonly perceived to be restless, violent and unpredictable.

### THIS IS FAR FROM THE TRUTH

There are many forms of mental illness that differ in severity, duration and degree. It is a disturbance of the mind which can affect thinking, feeling and behavior that may interfere with normal functioning, and thus make daily life difficult. Most mental illness can be treated so that a reasonable state of health can be enjoyed. Like physical illness, mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of. **IT IS NOT ANYONE'S FAULT.**

### SYMPTOMS

Mental illness is identified by symptoms. These include anxiety, depression, intense fear, thought disturbances, paranoia, delusions (false beliefs), hallucinations and unusual elation.

### CAUSES

It is unclear what causes mental disturbances. It is often preceded by emotional stress and difficulty coping with conflict or adjusting to adverse events. Other factors are biochemical imbalance, deterioration of brain cells (especially in elderly people) and alcohol or drug abuse.

### TYPES

1. **MINOR MENTAL ILLNESS (NEUROSIS)** Best understood as exaggerated emotional responses that the sufferer is aware of, yet unable to control. Very often related to stress.

## 2. MAJOR MENTAL ILLNESS (PSYCHOSES)

- a. Organic Psychoses – In the organic psychoses, there is a demonstrable physical or structural injury to the brain or central nervous system such as head injury, brain tumor, syphilis and brain hemorrhage due to strokes and alcoholism.
- b. Functional Psychoses – in the functional psychoses, doctors do not know yet the exact cause. The cause may be in the patient's early emotional experiences, his physical make-up or his environment. Most likely, it is a combination of all these factors that is responsible.

Different types of mental illness are distinguished by their symptoms. Some of the more usual types are:

### **SCHIZOPHRENIA**

A schizophrenia episode occurs at any age, although people in the 16-33 age group tend to be most at risk. Genetic inheritance, childhood experience, personality type and biochemical abnormality have been cited as possible factors. Some of the symptoms include fear, withdrawal, mood fluctuations, loss of energy and self neglect.

### **DEPRESSION**

Depressive disorders occur among all ages, races, and cultures. Some causes of depression include: family environment, life events, biological factors, serious loss or stress – i.e. a divorce, death of a loved one, retirement. People suffering from depression experience both physical and emotional symptoms, including excessive fatigue, disturbed sleep, appetite and weight loss, difficulty in concentrating, a failing memory and diminishing sexual interest.

### **MANIC DEPRESSION**

A person with manic depression has extreme and unpredictable mood changes. The cause is unknown but studies have shown that it could be inherited. Stress may be another cause, for e.g. finding a new job or death of a relative. These symptoms include: talkativeness, big spending, risk-taking behavior and sleeplessness, alternating with symptoms of depression.

### **ANXIETY**

Anxiety is one of the more common reactions to mental stress. 10% to 15% of people are affected by some form of anxiety disorder. Long term problems like living in a crowded house can be stressful and even happy events – getting married or switching to new jobs – can cause anxiety. Anxious people feel tense most of the time, having problems with sleeping, are dry in the mouth and are unable to relax.

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*THIS ARTICLE IS CONTRIBUTED BY MMHA*

## **About MMHA**



Malaysian Mental Health Association is a non-government organization (NGO) MMHA established in 1967 by a group of mental health professionals from University Hospital and concerned local community leaders. MMHA was officially registered under the Societies Act 1966 on 30th July 1968. It is managed by a team of full time staff, and a Management Committee that is elected every two years.

The people behind the association were a group of psychiatrists, psychologists, medical social workers, nurses and occupational therapists involved in the management of the people with mental disorders. They felt the need for a non-governmental organization to provide supportive services to psychiatric patients who had recovered or were recovering from their acute phase of the illness. The present membership of MMHA includes people from all walks of life.

**For more information, visit Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.my](http://www.mentalhealth.org.my)**