

# Understanding Mental Health

## The Foundation of Wellbeing

Mental health is more than the absence of illness; it is the bedrock of our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It shapes how we interpret the world, manage stress, and connect with the people around us.

Because it exists on a continuum, our mental health can fluctuate throughout our lives. Prioritizing it at every stage is essential for realizing our full potential and leading productive, meaningful lives.



---

## The Three Pillars of Mental Health

To understand our overall well-being, it helps to look at these three key areas:

- **Emotional Well-being:** The ability to navigate your feelings, maintain a hopeful outlook, and lean into positive emotions even during transitions.
- **Psychological Resilience:** Your "mental bounce-back" factor: the capacity to cope with the ordinary demands of life as well as significant trauma or stress.
- **Social Functioning:** The ability to build and maintain healthy, meaningful relationships and stay connected to your community.



---

## What Shapes Our Mental Health?

Mental health is not determined by a single factor; rather, it is a complex tapestry woven from several influences:

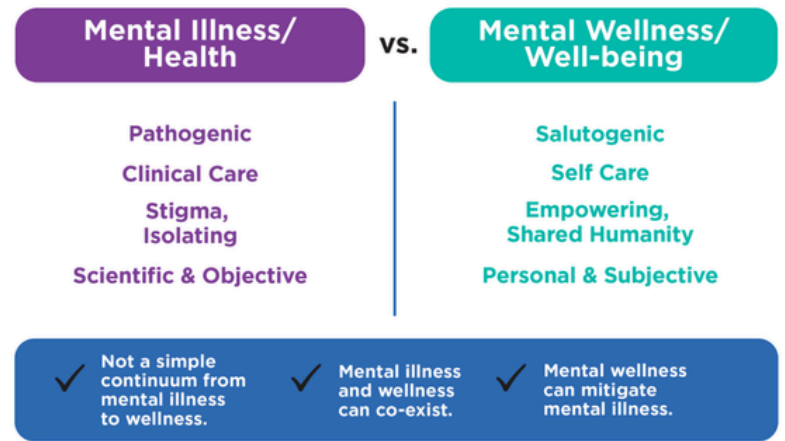
- **Biological Makeup:** This includes your unique genetic blueprint and brain chemistry.
- **Life History:** Experiences such as childhood trauma, past abuse, or periods of chronic stress can leave a lasting impact.
- **Family Legacy:** A history of mental health challenges within a family can play a role in one's own journey.
- **Daily Habits:** Lifestyle choices, including physical activity, nutrition, and substance use, directly influence your mental state.



# Mental Health vs. Mental Illness: Knowing the Difference

It is a common misconception that these terms mean the same thing. In reality:

- Everyone has mental health. Just like physical health, it can be "good," "poor," or anywhere in between, depending on the season of life.
- Mental illness refers to specific, diagnosed conditions (such as clinical depression, anxiety disorders, or bipolar disorder) that significantly impair a person's ability to function in daily life.



**Perspective Shift:** A person can live with a diagnosed mental illness and still experience periods of "good" mental health through proper support, treatment, and self-care.

## From Awareness to Action

Compassion is a verb. Here is how you can support the mental health movement:

### 1. Practice Active Listening

- Compassion starts with a check-in. Listen without judgment. You don't need to provide a "fix," often, just being present is the most powerful support you can offer.

### 2. Shift Your Perspective

- Moving from fear to understanding decreases the desire for segregation and increases the desire for community support.
- Remember: mental health challenges are a shared part of the human experience.

### 3. Support Whole-Person Care

- Recovery is most effective when we address the "whole person," including mental health challenges, physical health, and potential substance use issues.

### 4. Know the Resources

- NAMI HelpLine: For one-on-one help and information, call (800) 950-6264 or text "NAMI" to 62640
- Immediate Help: If you or a loved one is in crisis, call or text 988 (US and Canada) for 24/7 immediate support.
- NAMI CCNS: Connect with our local support groups, classes, and advocacy programs.

