



How and Why Does Emotional Wellness Relate to Mental Health?

Maintaining a generally positive outlook and learning to express and manage emotions can help people grow and adapt through life's challenges and enjoy healthy, supportive relationships. When individuals with mental health conditions achieve and maintain emotional wellness, it's easier to recognize opportunities for stability even among situations that may seem like conflicts, such as in relationships where conflict can lead to growth.¹

What is Emotional Wellness?

Emotional wellness involves the ability to express feelings, enjoy life, adjust to emotional challenges, and cope with stress and traumatic life experiences. Emotional stability helps an individual to recognize conflict as being potentially healthy and enhances self-acceptance and contentment.²

Emotional Wellness: Self-Reflection and Connection with Others

Self-awareness and self-reflection

Self-reflection means taking time to look inward at the feelings experienced and considering why those emotions are there—as well as what impact they might have. This is something to practice not only when people “feel bad” (or are experiencing undesirable emotions) but also when people “feel good” (or are experiencing desirable emotions). Depending on the person and situation, self-reflection may be practiced during, after, or even before—in preparation for—an emotional reaction.

By practicing self-awareness and self-reflection, emotional reactions can teach people a lot about themselves, including how to better cope with feelings. When people can understand their reactions to certain events, they can become empowered.

Relationships and connection with others

Studies show that being part of a social network can influence emotional well-being in a few ways:

- Learning from and being influenced by members of an individual's social network
- Connecting with others may increase positive emotional states, such as a sense of purpose, belonging, and safety
- Being part of larger social support systems, such as community organizations, can improve access to a wider range of social supports³

Trust is essential as it allows a person to feel safe enough to express and process their feelings.

It is important to keep in mind that practices like self-reflection and connection with others will be different for each individual served.

The Practice of Managing Emotions and Adapting to Change

Mind-body practices

One of the many benefits of mind-body practices, like breath work and meditation, is an increase in mindfulness or awareness of one's surroundings and self. Some effective methods for enhancing emotional wellness include positive self-talk and replacing negative thoughts and habits with positive ones.

A simple rule for practicing positive self-talk is to avoid saying anything to or about yourself that you would not say to or about someone else. When thinking negative thoughts, it can be helpful to think of a positive thought, helping to train the mind and generate positive emotions.^{4,5} For example, instead of "I can't do it," one could think, "I don't know how to do this yet, but I can learn!" This is an example of a tip a provider can offer to promote emotional wellness.

Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

Providers can assist individuals with mental health conditions, encouraging them to practice four interrelated abilities that are part of emotional intelligence. These strategies can help promote growth and overall well-being through management of difficult emotions:⁶

- Perceiving emotions
- Using emotion to facilitate thought
- Understanding emotions
- Managing emotions

Self-regulation and co-regulation (with the support of others)

Emotional regulation refers to a person’s ability to regulate their emotions—or, more specifically, an ability to notice a feeling, consider it, and adjust an emotional reaction or behavior while it is being experienced to realize particular goals or outcomes.⁷ It does not mean ignoring or not dealing with challenging emotions; though, it may mean taking a few deep breaths at a specific moment and picking the feelings up later on for further processing.

Effective emotional self-regulation benefits mental health. Moreover, “the inability to effectively regulate emotions poses serious risks to a person’s mental health and...enhancing effective emotion regulation skills is a promising way of fostering or restoring mental health.”⁸

Co-regulation can be used to describe two (or more) people managing emotions together or a form of interpersonal emotional regulation. Examples of this that have been widely researched include infant-parent relationships and intimate partner relationships, where each person in the relationship balances emotional stability. One potential benefit of co-regulation is that it may reduce the impact of accumulated stress on the body for the people in connection with each other.”⁹

Self-compassion

Studies on fostering self-compassion to support self-regulation show that “interventions aimed at increasing self-compassion [in young adults] may help promote positive health behaviors.”¹⁰ A positive attitude and confidence in one’s abilities to manage their health are valuable aspects of self-regulation to promote healthier intentions and behaviors. These findings demonstrate that, with more opportunities to practice and grow self-compassion, individuals with mental health conditions are more likely to engage in self-care practices, set healthier intentions, and develop healthier habits for improving emotional wellness.

Connecting Emotional and Physical Wellness

Importance of diet, exercise, and sleep

Emotional wellness is closely related to physical wellness. “Positive physical health habits can help decrease stress, lower risk of disease, and increase energy.”¹¹ Evidence suggests that physical activity can be used as part of the treatment protocol for 26 diseases, including psychiatric disorders like depression and schizophrenia.¹² Working with individuals with serious mental illness to support healthy physical habits, like proper nutrition and hydration, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep can enhance emotional wellness while simultaneously improving physical health.¹³



Remember: the wellness approach to recovery offers a holistic framework in which people are viewed as whole human beings.¹⁴ Whether working toward effective prevention efforts, treatment planning, or service delivery, keep the Eight Dimensions of Wellness and the value of emotional wellness in mind when serving individuals with mental health conditions.

Relevant Resources

[Emotional Wellness Toolkit](#) | National Institutes of Health

[Wellness Institute Publications](#) | Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey

[Creating a Healthier Life Handbook](#) | Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

[Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) | SAMHSA

[Live Your Life Well](#) | Mental Health America

[Helpful vs Harmful: Ways to Manage Emotions](#) | Mental Health America

[Coping with Traumatic Events](#) | National Institute of Mental Health Information Resource Center

[Relaxation Response](#) | Herbert Benson, MD

[Resources on Stress Management](#) | American Heart Association

[Stress and Health: The New “Apple a Day” Prescription](#) | SAMHSA-Health Resources and Services Administration Center for Integrated Health Solutions

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Endnotes

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