

Defining mental health:

A range of perspectives:

- ◆ Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2001)
- ◆ Mental health is the embodiment of social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. It provides the individual with the ability necessary for active living, to achieve goals and to interact with one another in ways that are respectful and just (VicHealth, 1999)
- ◆ Mental health refers not just to the physical wellbeing of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. This is a whole-of-life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life (National Aboriginal Health Strategic Working Party, 1989)

A note on culture and language:

- ◆ What we understand by 'positive mental health' is influenced by our values, assumptions, the nature of society and our role within it
- ◆ Different perspectives and language can enrich our understanding

What is 'mental health promotion'?

- ◆ All actions aimed specifically at enhancing and strengthening positive mental health and quality of life (but many activities enhance positive mental health as a 'spin-off' benefit)
- ◆ Not promotion in the 'marketing' sense, but promotion in the sense of fostering, empowering and 'educating for' positive social and emotional wellbeing

What is 'mental health promotion'? (cont'd)

Another way of defining it:

- ◆ A planned approach based on our knowledge and understanding of what increases the likelihood of people having good mental health

The key 'formal' mental health messages:

- ◆ Positive mental health is a **resource for everyday life** that enables individuals to manage their lives successfully – it's more than the absence of illness
- ◆ **Normalising/de-stigmatising** – our mental health fluctuates over time, just as our physical health does. It's a normal experience of life. Treat people with a 'mental illness' the same as anyone else
- ◆ **Seeking help** – kids don't have to cope alone; if feeling anxious, upset, unsafe etc. talk to a trusted relative, teacher or friend

Other appropriate mental health messages for young people:

- ◆ Self-care is important – reduce stress, get adequate sleep and exercise. Take steps to change the things that you can
- ◆ Listen to your feelings and allow yourself to express them – don't keep them bottled up inside
- ◆ If you notice friends who are struggling, help them to get help
- ◆ Positive self-talk – what you say to yourself determines the feelings you have about yourself

Other appropriate mental health messages for young people: (cont'd)

- ◆ Develop a good social support network – be the kind of friend you would like to have
- ◆ Be kind to yourself when you make mistakes
- ◆ Face your fears one at a time, slowly
- ◆ **If life gives you lemons, make lemonade!**

Informally, the relationship is the message:

- ◆ It's about the quality of relationship – it's more about how we connect and the values we model than what we do; it's about how we do what we do that's transformative (Morrow & Styles, 1995)
- ◆ The metaphor of the Gardener:
The importance of providing a nurturing environment, one that responds to each individual
- ◆ The 'transaction of hope':
Instilling a sense of hope for the future – that whatever challenges the young person faces, they can get through it with support from others