

## Mental Well-Being: What is Public Health

Benton County's Public Health Department participates in the CAMHI Anti-Stigma committee, which is sub-committee of the COMMUNITY Adult Mental Health Initiative.

This committee works on strategies to fight the stigma associated with mental illness; works on ways to promote mental wellness and educate people on mental health. With the first week of April celebrating National Public Health week, our group thought it would be nice to talk about mental health and well-being through a public health perspective. The language used in this article was developed by the MN Department of Health and adapted for this article.



What Activities are included in a **Public Health** approach to **Mental Health**?

- **PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING:** Expanding awareness and urgency about what creates mental well-being and resilience (the capability to recover from difficulties), and the various opportunities to impact them.
- **HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES:** Cross sector policies that promote mental well-being and resilience.
- **COMMUNITY CAPACITY:** Building community capacity of the cultural or geographic community to share stories, identify common interests, identify most relevant needs and implement actions to create mental well-being and resilience. Thriving communities are those where individuals are empowered and lead change, especially those most impacted by trauma and negative social conditions. Building community capacity is a continuous process of expanding leadership, coming together in dialogue to identify shared concerns and solutions, learning together and evaluating the their results.

We also focus on **Enhancing Protective systems.**

- **COMMUNITY (Culture, Environment):** Community protective system includes many; such as culture and faith, which provide meaning, guiding values, and a sense of belonging. This also includes nurturing environments and systems (e.g. schools, child care, libraries, etc.) that operate in communities and provide important positive social

bonds, relationships, skills, and meaningful support. Communities support social connections, which facilitates practical links to opportunity (economic, housing, political, etc.).

- **RELATIONSHIPS:** Relationships with trusted, safe and competent people are a critical source of resilience. Relationships and social connectedness provide a sense of belonging, develop our interests, awareness, and skills. Attachment to parents and family members are often the first important relationships we form. Teachers, friends, and other community connections, formal and informal are also common influences. Relationships are valuable throughout life, and provide different benefits based on our stage of development. There are numerous structures and policies that support opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and relationships.
- **SKILLS:** Individual competencies that help such as having a sense of hope, self-efficacy, purpose, self-regulation, and problem solving skills. Opportunities to develop talents, interests, and to have a meaningful role (e.g. in a classroom, household, or team) support these social and emotional skills. Toxic stress can impact these skills. There are many parenting skills programs available; parenting skills are critical because of the important role parents play in the development of the next generation.



**What does mental health promotion look like in our community?**

Here are a few examples:

- Programs that help young people develop problem-solving and coping skills, either in school or in community-based organizations, such as peer leadership activities, suicide prevention programs, and life skills programs. (40 Developmental Assets trainings)
- Mentoring programs and activities that help a young person connect with a caring adult. (Big Brothers Big Sisters)

- Home visiting programs in which nurses or other professionals work directly with families to support parents, provide education about child development and promote parent-child interaction.
- Any activities that promote exercise, sleep, and good nutrition. (Statewide Health Improvement Partnership-SHIP and Women, Infant & Children-WIC)
- Projects that encourage help-seeking and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. (Anti-stigma Committee, CommUNITY Adult Mental Health Initiative)
- Initiatives that encourage gratitude and mindfulness like the Bounce Back project.
- Creating spaces for communities to gather, build relationships and identify common needs.
- Community dialogues about historical trauma and culture.
- Work to change policies to reduce incarceration, substance abuse, or other adverse childhood experiences.

