



LANGUAGE MATTERS

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING THE RIGHT WORDS WHEN WE'RE TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Increasing awareness of mental health and mental illness is rising across Canada. However, awareness without mental health literacy does not lead to improved mental health and better access to mental health care for those who need it. *Knowing about something is not the same as knowing something.* Part of improving mental health literacy is making sure we are using the right words to describe the various components of mental health and mental illness.

WE ALL HAVE MENTAL HEALTH

We all have mental health and there are four separate but related components that help us understand and act on it.

1. No distress, problem or disorder
2. Mental distress
3. Mental health problem
4. Mental disorder / illness

Mental Distress

Refers to the common, expected, and normal response to the stresses of everyday life. Mental distress is normal, expected, and happens to everyone. It is necessary for adaptation and building resilience.

Examples include:

- Writing an examination
- Having an argument with a friend or family member
- Failing at a task

Mental Health Problem

Refers to the reactions we have to huge life challenges that may task our ability to adapt. Mental health problems may be substantial and prolonged but they are not mental disorders and they do not require medical treatment

Examples include:

- Dealing with the death of a loved one
- Loss of a relationship, such as divorce
- Moving to a new country

Mental Disorder/ Illness

Refers to clinically diagnosed illnesses. Mental illnesses require evidence-based treatments provided by properly trained health care providers.

Examples include:

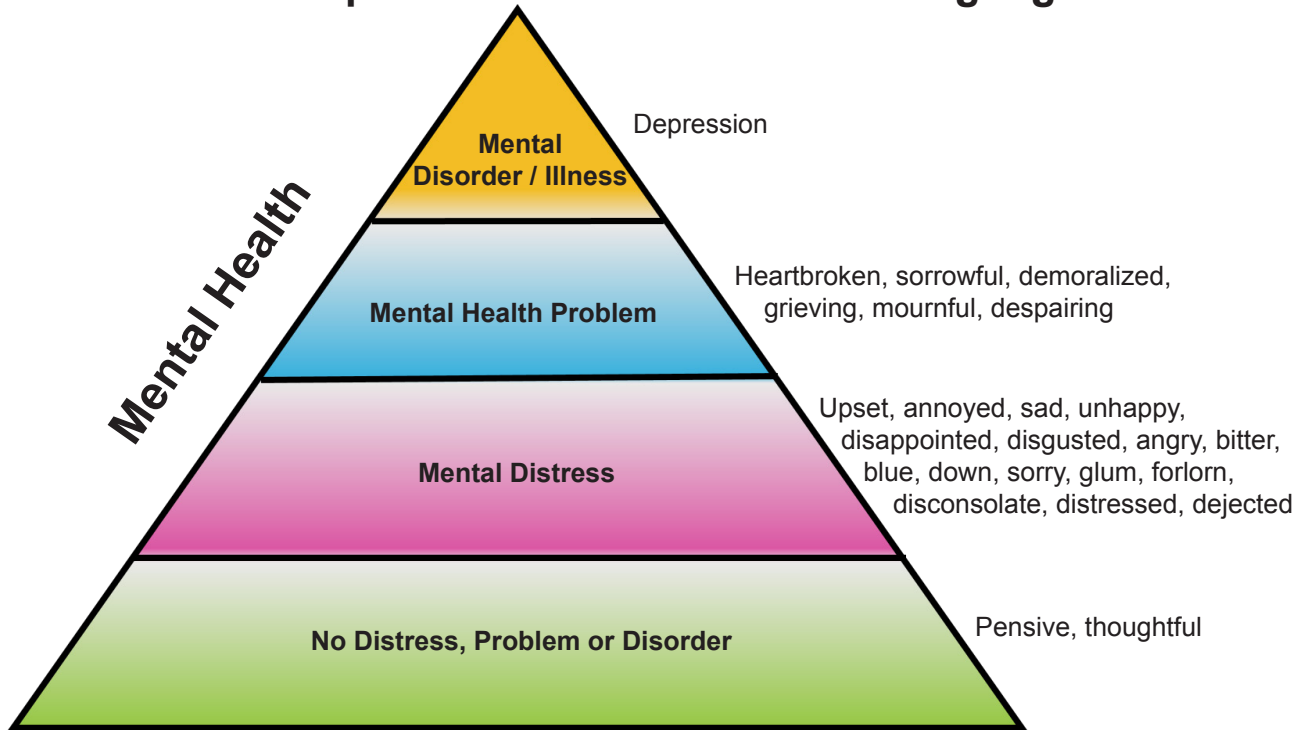
- Major Depressive Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder



THE IMPORTANCE OF USING THESE TERMS CORRECTLY

These categories are not mutually exclusive. A person can experience mental distress, a mental health problem, and a mental illness at the same time. A person can also have good mental health and a mental health problem at the same time, just as a person can have good physical health and an illness at the same time.

The Inter-Relationship of Mental Health States: Language Matters



Understanding the differences between these components is crucial to getting the right kind of help if needed, to avoid seeking treatment when it is not needed and to be clear about the language we use to tell others how we are feeling.

When we do not use words that appropriately describe how we are feeling we run the risk of making light of major concerns. For example, by thinking someone with Depression is simply feeling unhappy or dramatizing minor concerns, or by thinking someone who is having a bad day has Depression.

LET'S MAKE SURE WE ARE SAYING WHAT WE MEAN AND MEANING WHAT WE SAY!

- Depression is not the same as having a bad day.
- OCD is not the same as being organized.
- ADHD is not the same thing as being hyperactive.
- Anxiety Disorder is not the same as feeling stressed before an exam.
- PTSD is not the same thing as feeling upset.
- Schizophrenia is not a split personality.
- Panic Disorder is not the same thing as feeling afraid.
- Bipolar Disorder is not the same as being moody.