

## KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

- Understanding the terms Mental Health, Mental Distress or Mental Illness.
- The pyramid has four different states. Everyone falls somewhere on the pyramid with more people on the bottom and less at the top.
- In the base level, we have no have no distress, or problems. Everything is going well, and we are generally enjoying ourselves. We may be spending time with friends, attending school or even sleeping.
- The next level up, we have Mental Distress, which refers to the everyday problems that we encounter. These are things that irritate us, things we are worried about, or problems that come our way. During Mental Distress, our brain sends us a signal, which is called the stress response. Stress response is the basis of resilience and adaptation and once we successfully solve the problem the stress response usually goes away because we have developed the skills we needed to adapt.
- The third level up is a Mental Health Problem. Mental Health Problems are serious events such as a parent dying, having a divorce in your family, or moving to a new country. These are difficult times when it is important to reach out to others for help. Mental Health Problems may require the support of friends, family, counseling, or just time.
- The top level of the pyramid is a Mental Disorder or Mental Illness, which includes clinical diagnoses such as clinical depression, clinical anxiety or bipolar disorder. A Mental Disorder is very different than a Mental Health Problem. This is a perturbation of usual brain functioning and evidence-based medical and therapeutic treatment by specially trained professionals is needed.
- The pyramid is not a continuum: Mental Distress does not necessarily lead to a Mental Health Problem or to a Mental Illness. In fact, we can even be at each level of the pyramid at the same time.
- All of these levels, or components of the pyramid, are part of our overall mental health. We need to make sure that we don't define 'good mental health' as never having bad mood. Good mental health includes a wide variety of emotional states and a person with a mental illness does not lose their mental health.

## MORE INFORMATION:

- Teen Mental Health Curriculum Guide
- Teen Mental Health
- Anxiety Canada
- Kelty Mental Health Managing Stress
- Self-Care 101
- Every Day Mental Health Practices

### References:

Alberta Government. (2017). *Alberta Education Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools.*

## STUDENT LEARNING

Students who experience positive mental health are resilient and better able to learn, achieve success, and build healthy relationships (Alberta Government, 2017). Resilience refers to the capacity of individuals to cope successfully with stress-related situations, overcome adversity and adapt positively to change. Students are not born resilient; they build resiliency by learning and practicing social-emotional skills such as self-regulation, problem solving and healthy decision-making strategies.

It is important that students understand the difference between mental distress (a positive stress-related challenge) and more serious concerns. Feeling anxious about an upcoming text is not the same as an anxiety disorder. The video includes content/questions/images to empower students to understand these differences by developing mental health literacy.

## TEACHER CLASSROOM CONVERSATION GUIDE

Students will be able to explain the terms mental health, mental distress or mental illness, give examples of situations within each level of the pyramid, explain the stress response and how it assists you in dealing with stress and explain how a person could be in various levels of the pyramid at the same time.

## MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY

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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What is the pyramid?
- Give some examples of situations or problems at each level of the pyramid.
- What is a Stress Response and how does it assist you in dealing with your stress?
- How is a Mental Disorder or Mental Illness different from a Mental Health problem?
- Explain how a person could be in various levels of the pyramid at the same time.

## CONCLUSION

We have discussed:

- Mental Health, Mental Illness and Mental Disorder in relation to the 4 levels of the pyramid
- Examples of each level of the pyramid
- The Stress Response and how it can assist with dealing with a stressful situation
- A Mental Disorder and Mental Health problem are different
- It is possible to be within different levels of the pyramid at one time



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