

# Conversation 1: Mental Health Concerns in the Context of Faith

**\*\* Green font is action for the facilitator\*\***

Conversation 1: What is mental health?

**Print Handout 1:** Mental Health Continuum

**Print Handout 2:** Mental Health Model

Time: 90-120 minutes

## **Preparation for the group:**

- **Decide** on a date and time
- **Reserve a venue** for the group for at least 2.5 hours (for set up and take down)
- **Advertise** the discussion group in your church using the invitation **template**
- **Review** the **facilitators video** ahead of time
- **Read over** the material and be prepared ahead of time
- **Practice** the conversation outline a few times
- **Make sure you have enough copies** of the handouts for each member
- **Take a sign-up sheet and pen** with you
- **Arrive early** and set up chairs in a circle before everyone arrives
- **Warmly greet** everyone when they arrive

## Starting the session:

(6 minutes)

### Gather the group together.

Introduce yourself and the title of the group: What is mental health?

"I am so glad that you decided to be here today. Let's introduce ourselves to each other"

### Ask everyone to share their name with a warm up activity/Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Use the letter of your first name to tell us something about you (Sharon is sharing; Saba likes silliness; Kevin is Kind; Hugh is Happy)

*Thank you.*

*I am grateful that each of you are here. Let us first turn to the Scriptures and hear how the author of Psalm 130 cries out for comfort to God.*

(2 minutes)

### Start with a prayer

*Psalm 130*

<sup>1</sup> *Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord;*

<sup>2</sup> *Lord, hear my voice.*

*Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.*

<sup>3</sup> *If you, Lord, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?*

<sup>4</sup> *But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.*

<sup>5</sup> *I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.*

<sup>6</sup> *I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

<sup>7</sup> *Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love  
and with him is full redemption.*

<sup>8</sup> *He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.*

## Introduce the topic (2 minutes)

Using what you learned from the facilitators video,

- **set up:** ensure safety and confidentiality.
- **articulate, acknowledge:** this topic is complex and sensitive and sometimes private and therefore can be hard to share
- **explain:** There are 2 distinct topics we are talking about and exploring today.
  1. Mental Health
  2. Mental Illness

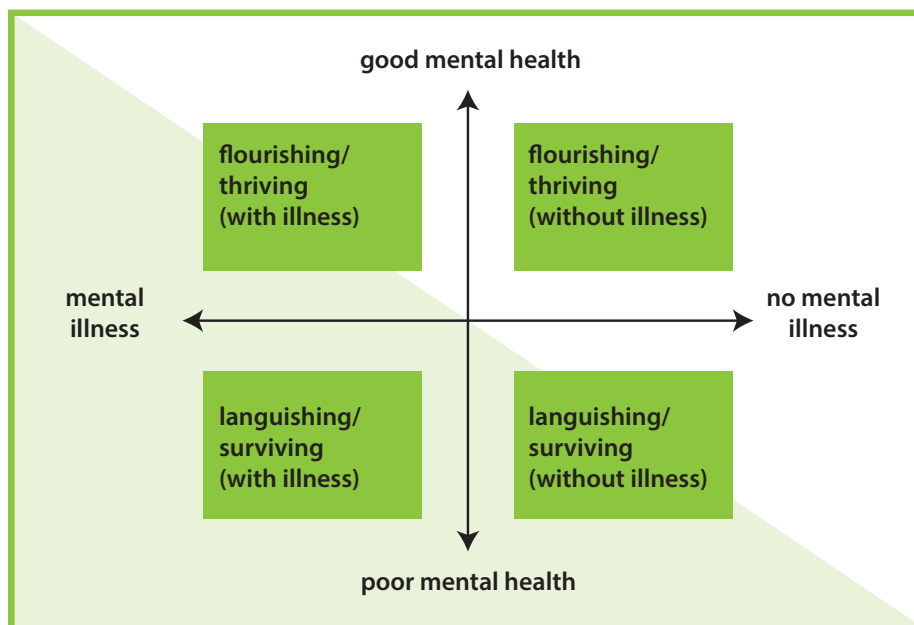
## 1. Mental Health

We are exploring health here.

**Ask the group:** What is mental health? (10 minutes)

- Brainstorm words associated with mental HEALTH
- Important to focus on health words like: contentment, joy, good relationships, clarity of thought, creativity, making decisions well, identity as a child of God, motivated, having enough energy; thankfulness at the goodness of God, heart full of praise to God.

**Distribute handout #1** and **Introduce** the mental health continuum: languishing and flourishing model (3 minutes)



**Bring to the attention of the group:**

- Anyone can Thrive or Flourish - whether they live with a mental illness or not,
- Anyone can Languish - just surviving with or without a mental illness, any form of suffering.

### **Bring to the attention of the group:**

- That mental health IS NOT the absence of a mental illness
- That mental health IS NOT static, it is on a continuum - we ebb and flow, up and down, based on the different times in our lives

### **Bring to the attention of the group:**

Whether we have a mental illness or not we can languish... and flourish.

### **Tell the group:** (2 minutes)

Silently, think of a time when you were languishing, just bring it to mind. The participants don't need to share this.

**Give one or two examples:** end of a job, physical illness, loss of a relationship, death of a loved one, a blue season.

### **Now ask:** What helped you move from languishing to flourishing? (10-15 minutes)

If the group has a hard time coming up with answers you can give these examples to get the conversation going:

- two-way mutual friendships (including both giving and receiving as a healthy part of it)
- eating healthy
- prayer

Now to help the group transition from the first topic, Mental Health, to the second topic, Mental Illness, **use a transition statement:** Sometimes moving from languishing to flourishing is more challenging because of a mental illness.

## **2. Mental Illness**

We are exploring illness here.

**Ask the group:** What is mental illness?

**Ask the group to share** 1-2 words that comes to mind...

- e.g. depression, see a psychiatrist, brain disease...

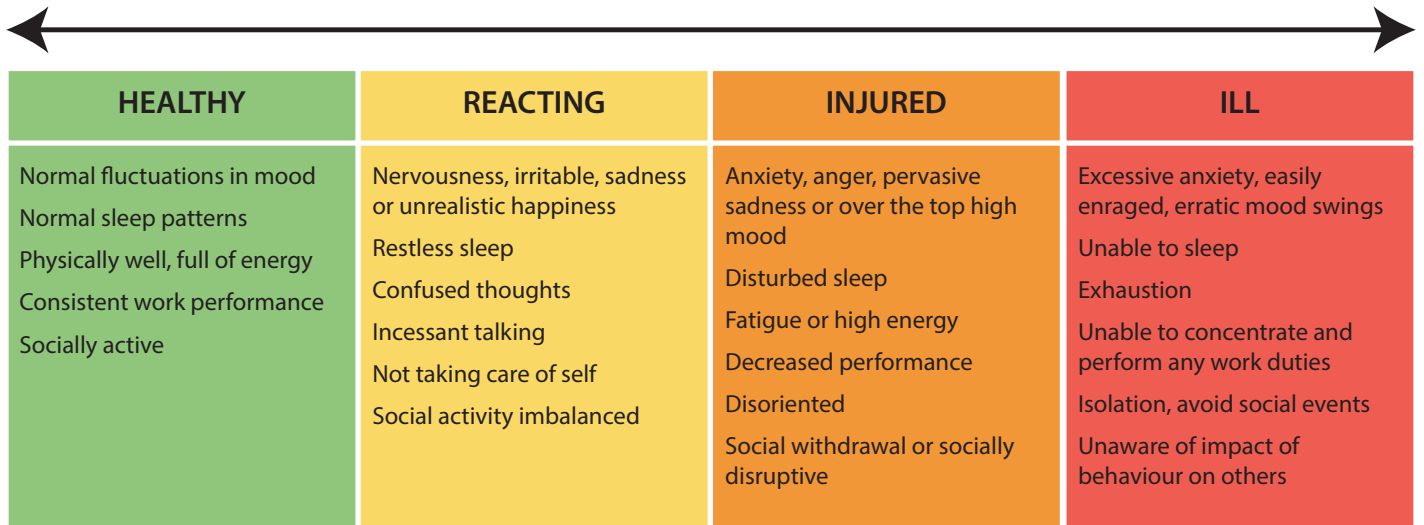
**Ask one person to read** the definition of mental illness from the handout

Definition: Mental illnesses are health problems that affect the way we think about ourselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around us. They affect our thoughts, feelings,

and behaviours. Mental illnesses can disrupt a person’s life or create challenges, but with the right supports, a person can get on their unique path to recovery and wellness (adapted from Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA] online brochure)

**Ask the group:** What do you think about this definition? (10 minutes)

**Distribute handout #2 and Introduce the mental health model...** (10 minutes)



**ACTIONS TO TAKE AT EACH PHASE OF THE CONTINUUM**

Focus on task on hand Break problems into manageable chunks Identify and nurture support systems Maintain healthy lifestyle	Recognize limits Get adequate rest, food and exercise Ask a friend to help you Engage in healthy coping strategies Identify and minimize things that cause you stress; Take a leave of absence from work if needed	Identify and understand your signs of distress Listen to others observations Talk with someone Seek help Seek social support instead of withdrawing	Seek consultation Follow health care provider recommendations Regain physical and mental health
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- The model comes from the Mental Health Commission of Canada to use in all workplaces, communities, schools etc.
- Some of the things that this model helps us with are:
  - To know when things are starting to break down for you or for someone else
  - To know when to consider it necessary for some sort of intervention for you or for someone else

**Orientating to the model:**

You will notice that:

- it starts with.. healthy on one side and illness on the other
- There are two stages in between...
- the top area tells us things we will notice
- the bottom area tells us actions to take

\* Please note: That observing **only** one of these criteria in someone or in yourself is not sufficient, usually these signs occur together.

Allow the group members time to read over the words of the model.

### **Tell the group:**

Let's take a moment to read a story about someone who started to break down and track them on the model as a way to understand the model. Remember this is one story, it is not everyone's experience of a mental challenge.

### **Get someone to read the story aloud:**

John is relatively new to the Christian faith. He attends Bible study with some regularity and attends the Sunday church service. He is a little unusual, and to be honest, people sometimes shy away from him, because when he starts talking there is no way to stop him. It's difficult to follow John's train of thought. He says he is a marine biologist. There are times when he impresses everyone with all the facts he knows about the ocean, and there are times when it's hard to believe he ever worked at a university; often he is not shaved, and his clothes look very old and worn.

Andrew feels called to befriend John – but at times he starts feeling uncomfortable around him. Andrew feels bad or guilty when he does feel uncomfortable around him. In addition, Andrew perceives that John may not have any friends, here in our church or elsewhere.

(15 minutes)

**Now tell the group** that we are going to explore the story using the model. Instruct them to refer to their handout - the diagram of the model; the written story and the questions.

Ask the following questions one at a time and allow the group to respond to each question before you move to the next question:

1. Where would you place John on the model?
2. How could you tell that things were starting to break down?
  - a. words from the story
  - b. words from the model
3. Would you consider it necessary for some sort of intervention - what kind?

a. what happened in the story?

b. what does the model say?

### **Facilitator Notes:**

John is somewhere between Reacting and Injured. Note that this is a continuum and it is not static.

## **Ending: (10 mins)**

### **Share these thoughts with the group:**

Today we have spent some time discussing mental health and mental illness. It is just a start. There are 2 more conversations we can have:

- 1) Possibilities of support within our community
- 2) Resources and services outside of our community

### **Talk about a possible date for the next discussion.**

**Collect participants contact information** for advertising next discussion topic/date/time.

**Hand around the sign up sheet.** Make sure you say that they can share their contact information on a voluntary basis if they are interested to be contacted for the next group.

**Close with some kind of a spiritual practice** that particularly creates awareness.

*We are going to close with a practice to help us surrender and receive.*

### **Palms down, palms up**

Instruct the group members to sit quietly, close their eyes and put their hand (palms down) on their laps.

**Say:** *God help me to surrender to you what I need to surrender.*

### **Pause in silence for about 30 seconds**

Now instruct them to turn their hands over (palms up)

**Say:** *God help me to receive from you all that I will need for this week for myself and those around me.*

### **Pause in silence for about 30 seconds.**

**Say:** *Amen, go in peace.*