

Mental Health Foundations

What Everyone Should Know



Reflection Guide

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What Is Mental Health?

Mental health is the state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being that influences how individuals think, feel, behave, and cope with life's stresses (cdc.com), how we relate to others and make choices.

How Are You REALLY Feeling?

Mental health is not always obvious. Sometimes we say “I’m fine” even when we are overwhelmed, anxious, disconnected, exhausted, or carrying too much.

What emotions or stressors have been showing up for you recently?

Mental Health is not just a crisis

- Mental health is not only about diagnoses or breakdowns
- It can look like irritability, exhaustion, withdrawal, or constant busyness
- People often normalize stress until it becomes overwhelming
- Emotional struggles usually build over time
- Small changes in mood, habits, energy, or behavior can be important signals
- Many people dismiss their own needs because “it’s not that bad”

How is mental health generally viewed in your family or community?

Stress Responses

People respond to stress differently.

Fight

Trying to regain control through action, intensity, or defensiveness

- Tight jaw
- Controlling behavior
- Crying in anger
- Desire to hit/attack
- Irritable
- Raising voice
- Becoming defensive
- Arguing more

Flight

Trying to escape stress, discomfort, or emotional overwhelm

- Staying constantly busy
- Avoiding difficult conversations
- Overcommitting
- Difficulty sitting still
- Anxiety/restlessness
- Distracting yourself

Freeze

Feeling mentally or emotionally stuck

- Shutting down
- Feeling numb
- Brain fog
- Wanting to isolate
- Procrastination
- Difficulty making decisions
- Delayed responses to texts/emails

Fawn

Staying emotionally safe by keeping others happy

- People pleasing
- Over-apologizing
- Avoiding conflict
- Fear of disappointing people
- Needing approval/reassurance
- Overextending yourself

Which stress response do you notice most often in yourself?



Coping vs Healing

Coping	Healing
Staying busy	Rest
Overworking	Boundaries
Scrolling social media	Self-reflection
Avoiding emotions	Processing emotions
Shopping / distractions	Healthy support systems

Something can help temporarily and still not address the deeper issue.

What coping habits do you rely on most when stressed?

High Functioning Doesn't Always Mean Healthy

Some people continue achieving, helping others, and showing up while quietly feeling overwhelmed, emotionally exhausted, or disconnected.

- Functioning is not always the same as thriving
- Being productive does not always mean emotionally well
- Some coping patterns are socially praised

What signs tell you that you may need rest, support, or emotional care?

Mental Health & Emotional Safety

People respond differently when they feel emotionally safe. Emotional safety impacts communication, stress responses, vulnerability, and connection.

- **Safe:** Asking for help, expressing emotions honestly, resting more easily
- **Unsafe:** Overthinking, shutting down, avoiding vulnerability, hyper-independence



What helps you feel emotionally safe and supported?

Grief Doesn't Always Look Emotional

Grief is not only connected to death. People may grieve life changes, burnout, disappointment, relationship shifts, or loss of stability.

- Not everyone who is grieving is crying
- Grief may look like numbness, busyness, exhaustion, or withdrawal
- Grief often changes behavior before people recognize it emotionally

What changes or losses have impacted you recently?

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness helps us notice patterns, emotional shifts, stress responses, and coping behaviors before they become breaking points.

“You cannot care for what you are unwilling to notice.”

What is one thing you want to become more aware of in your own life?

Closing Reflection

Mental health is not one-size-fits-all. Awareness creates the opportunity for change.

What is one thing from tonight that changed how you think about mental health?



Key Takeaways

- Mental health is not just about crisis or diagnosis
- Stress changes how people think, feel, and respond
- Coping and healing are not always the same thing
- High functioning does not always mean emotionally healthy
- People experience mental health differently
- Self-awareness helps us recognize what is happening beneath the surface

National Mental Health Resources

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988

Free, confidential 24/7 support

Crisis Text Line

Text HOME to 741741

Text-based crisis counseling

SAMHSA Helpline

1-800-662-4357

Treatment referrals & information

NAMI Helpline

1-800-950-6264

Navigating mental health resources

Disaster Distress Helpline

1-800-985-5990

Support during traumatic events

Veterans Crisis Line

988, then press 1

Specialized veteran support

[FindSupport.gov](https://findsupport.gov) | [MentalHealth.gov](https://mentalhealth.gov) | mhanational.org