

Mental Health and Well-Being

It is said that heaven and hell are not a place but the state of our mind. It is our mental condition, our productive or unproductive moods that control these states.

Mental well-being is driven by various aspects such as mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social well-being of an individual. It is strongly connected to various other factors like medical health, level of activity, thought process - our internal dialogue, the quality of relationships we enjoy, our mindset towards these relations, our attitude towards learning and its practice – towards growth, our state of awareness and gratitude, contribution towards self, others, and the environment; a purposeful life and acceptance of what is.

Each in many ways interconnected with the others. It is about balance, excellence, and a semblance of some control. When we review the list above there is an opportunity to contribute in each, this essentially indicates that we have the potential to control or at least influence our mental well-being. Those who experience overall wellness, and also realise their own potential, are able to cope with normal stressors of life, work fruitfully and make productive contributions to their community.

One thing that has helped me stay anchored and has provided balance and direction for my thoughts has been my association with the Bhagavat Gita. I was fortunate to have received a copy as a gift from my elder brother's classmate in 1988 when I was about to take my first leap of faith at the age of seventeen, having decided to join the Merchant Navy as a cadet. The practical lessons in the Bhagavat Gita, considered a corporate manual by many, is full of day-to-day reflections of how to remain anchored in midst of chaos. The dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna debating over the righteousness of situations and the pros and cons of life and relationships have given me deep insights into the simplicity of detached action, the importance of core values and accepting 'what is' to help the mind in situations of turmoil.

Often what affects our mental well-being are situations that are beyond our control. It can be the loss of a beloved, feelings of being redundant, loss of direction, economic loss, or loss of health and age. A common response to any of the above is an excess of emotions, either held internally – withdrawal, a feeling of helplessness, hopelessness and/or expressed externally – irritation, anger. A lot depends on our resilience and response to these situations. What is important to note is that the onset is rarely sudden and there are many early warning signs.

Person eating too much or too little, isolation-pulling away from people and usual activities, lack of energy, constant mood swings and verbal aggression seriously affecting their relationships with their family and friends. When we understand this and work to manage our emotions, we feel confident in ourselves, and can build and sustain healthy relationships, have a sense of purpose in life and feel creatively productive in our work.

Mental well-being, they say is important even for our mental health, as they are interdependent. Prolonged periods of not experiencing mental well-being can lead to developing mental health issues like anxiety or depression. Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act. It also determines how we deal with stress, relate to others, and make healthy productive choices at every stage of life, from childhood through adulthood.

By pushing our feelings under the blanket, we only accumulate garbage that can cause a rebound in life later. It is important to accept and validate our feelings. They are a measure of what we are experiencing. We are neither exaggerating nor being dramatic. Accepting and talking about our feelings, make them less overwhelming, upsetting, or scary. But we need to remember that Mental Well-being cannot be or rather, should not be viewed in isolation.

There are three major components that contribute to mental:

1. Cognitive Health - being the ability to clearly think, learn and remember. It is an important part of performing day to day activities.
2. Emotional Health - is about how we think and feel, it is about our sense of well-being our ability to cope with challenges.
3. Behavioural Health - is defined as the connection between behaviours, health and well-being of the body, mind, and spirit. In simple terms it refers to the relationship between our daily habits and their effect on our physical and mental health.

Our behaviours can influence our thoughts, so too our thoughts can influence our behaviours. Balance in all the three components constitute a happy and healthy life. To work towards bringing this balance we must understand that one does not need to live with this as a lifelong issue.

Anybody can have ups and downs, there is nothing shameful about it, we can consciously work on it by seeking emotional, professional, and social support. They are paramount to healing.

A few things that one can do to achieve this are:

- Regularly socialising with friends and family. This can build a feeling of belongingness and acceptance. Having strong relationships helps strengthen our self-esteem and our self-confidence.
- A healthy physical body with proper exercise and nutritious food, increases the flow of energy in our bodies helping alleviate stress.
- Stress can also be reduced by breaking up tasks into smaller achievable goals.
- Picking up a new skill or hobby can work wonders for mental well-being.
- Daily practise of mindfulness through meditation and breath work, can help us remain calm and experience deep tranquillity.
- Besides this just doing things differently, maintaining a work-life balance, adding fun and laughter to our daily life can go a long way to uplift our mental well-being and keep us mentally healthy.
- Last but not the least, it might help to find your own 'North Star' as I found mine in the Bhagwat Gita. This could be anything from a place you can go to for reflection; an activity or practice that creates flow; an individual or a group that act as a Mentor, Coach or Guide; a spiritual practice or your religion.

Let us remember that mental health and well-being is a human experience, it is a journey, a process, not a destination and creating a healthy productive mindset is an investment in our overall well-being.

Deepak Kotak

aUt sUr Interventions & Transformations

M: +91 9820580984

E1: coachkotak@autsur.com

E2: coachkotak@gmail.com

W: www.autsur.com

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