

# MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

## *The individual approach*

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*The philosophy* – Mental health promotion is based on a paradigm of trust in everything we really are – beyond our fears, doubts, judgments, sufferings and diseases – and everything we are capable of, individually and collectively, to be in good mental health. It recognizes and supports individual resourcefulness and resilience as well as our common desire to be and to give the best of ourselves.

Mental health promotion was first defined within a population health or public health approach. Population mental health promotion (PMHP) principles and actions focus on the development of research, policy and community projects and practices that reinforce and support people's mental health.<sup>2</sup> In the last 20 years, strategies and plans of action to promote populations' mental health have multiplied everywhere in the world.<sup>3</sup> The World Health Organization sees mental health promotion as essential to global health and prosperity.

This being said, the purpose of this short document is to describe the individual approach to mental health promotion (IMHP). It consists in personal guidance to support individuals in their decisions and actions to strengthen their mental health and well-being.

*The fundamental principles* - IMHP fundamental principles are inspired by PMHP principles and they apply to everyone without exception.

1. Who we really are is immense and already present in each one of us and beyond the beliefs we entertain about ourselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Joubert, N. (2009) Population Mental Health Promotion: What is it? What can it become? *Canadian Institute for Health Information*, Ottawa, On: CIHI.

<sup>3</sup> Lahtinen, E., Joubert, N., Raeburn, J. & Jenkins, R. (2005) Strategies for Promoting the Mental Health of Populations. In H. Herman, S. Saxena and R. Moodie (eds), *Promoting Mental Health – Concepts, Emerging Evidence, Practice*, chapter 17, pp.226-242. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Joubert, N. & Raeburn, J. (1998) Mental Health Promotion: People, Power and Passion, *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, Inaugural Issue, 15-22.

2. Our fears, doubts and judgments interfere with who we really are. They prevent us from being able to be and see who we really are and make us sick, psychologically and physically.
3. We are not condemned to live with our fears, doubts and judgments. We can decide to see ourselves differently by not identifying with these views and ultimately free ourselves of thoughts and beliefs that disturb, oppress and limit us. This is where our power is!
4. We can see and express more and more the greatness, goodness and beauty that is in each one of us as we let go of our fears and judgments on ourselves and others. This is the way to experience who we really are and have good health.

*The 3-step approach* – IMHP 3-step approach looks closely at the thoughts and beliefs we use to build our understanding of who we think we are (self-concept), as well as our perceptions of others and the world. In turn, these perceptions determine how we react and behave towards others and in our various life circumstances.

The IMHP approach includes learning material and practical<sup>4</sup> tools to enable us to (1) be aware of the fears, doubts and judgements we are carrying and how these operate to make us sick; (2) decide to see ourselves differently by letting go of the beliefs of fear, doubts and judgments on ourselves and others that interfere with our inner greatness, goodness and beauty; and (3) practice and experience our power to see ourselves differently by using the daily opportunities offered by life and others to react and behave differently.

*The outcomes* – The IMHP approach shows quick results once we realize we can see ourselves differently and transform our lives. The impact is liberating because it reverses our old belief of being helpless and imprisoned by our fears, suffering and diseases. However, this new awareness comes with a clearer sense of responsibility towards our personal choices that most of us will resist for a while. We have a strong tendency to see ourselves as victims and to blame others and the world for whatever happens to us. Nonetheless, it

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<sup>4</sup> IMHP learning support material and practice (Joubert, 2012)

is just a matter of time before we all realize how costly victimization is and to decide to let it go.

The progress and transformation we hope for depends mainly on our determination, patience, gentleness and vigilance with which we apply IMHP principles and practice in our day-to-day life. The more we let go of our fears, doubts and judgments about ourselves and others, the more we change our life experiences and the better our mental health and well-being are.

Finally, the IMHP daily practice can be facilitated by various sources of support such as professional guidance and a community of practice and mutual aid. Activities that are conducive to inner peace like outdoors, artistic endeavours, physical activities, relaxation and meditation can also be helpful.

