



Frameworks and Theories

The Mental Health Continuum

What is the Mental Health Continuum?

The mental health continuum is the range of wellbeing that exists having mental health and mental illness at the two extreme ends. Depending on the circumstances of any individual at any time, they may find themselves at one point of the continuum and shift position as their situation improves or deteriorates.

What is helpful is the fact that there are four options, which eliminates having to distinguish different feelings that are not necessary comfortable to share aloud. It is easier to just say that today; I am “reacting” and have this being understood correctly. Many people struggle to share some of the painful things they are experiencing because they can evoke extreme feelings of sadness or shame which can leave people feeling vulnerable, especially in the school environment so this framework gives people a safer and easier way to be heard and understood.

Another important thing about the Mental Health Continuum is that there is a place for everyone on it, regardless of the state of mental health or mental illness. This reduces any stigma significantly because everyone fits in. As the diagram indicates, there is a back and forth motion that signifies change. This means that anyone who is “healthy” can have times in their life when they are “reacting” and those who are “injured” have the ability to be “healthy”.

A significant event such as the Covid-19 pandemic and all that it entails, means there is an argument that we are all currently “reacting” to this. When an individual is “reacting”, practising positive Mental Wellbeing self-help and social support techniques and activities regularly, will help them along the continuum towards being healthy again.

There are distinct markers within the mental health continuum:

Healthy

People who are at this point are generally satisfied and happy in their lives. They are emotionally well balanced, stable, and cope with the normal stresses of life and the challenges that every day brings, such as exams. They are able to contribute to their community. Many people practice good self-care and social support such as healthy sleep patterns, regular exercise.

Reacting

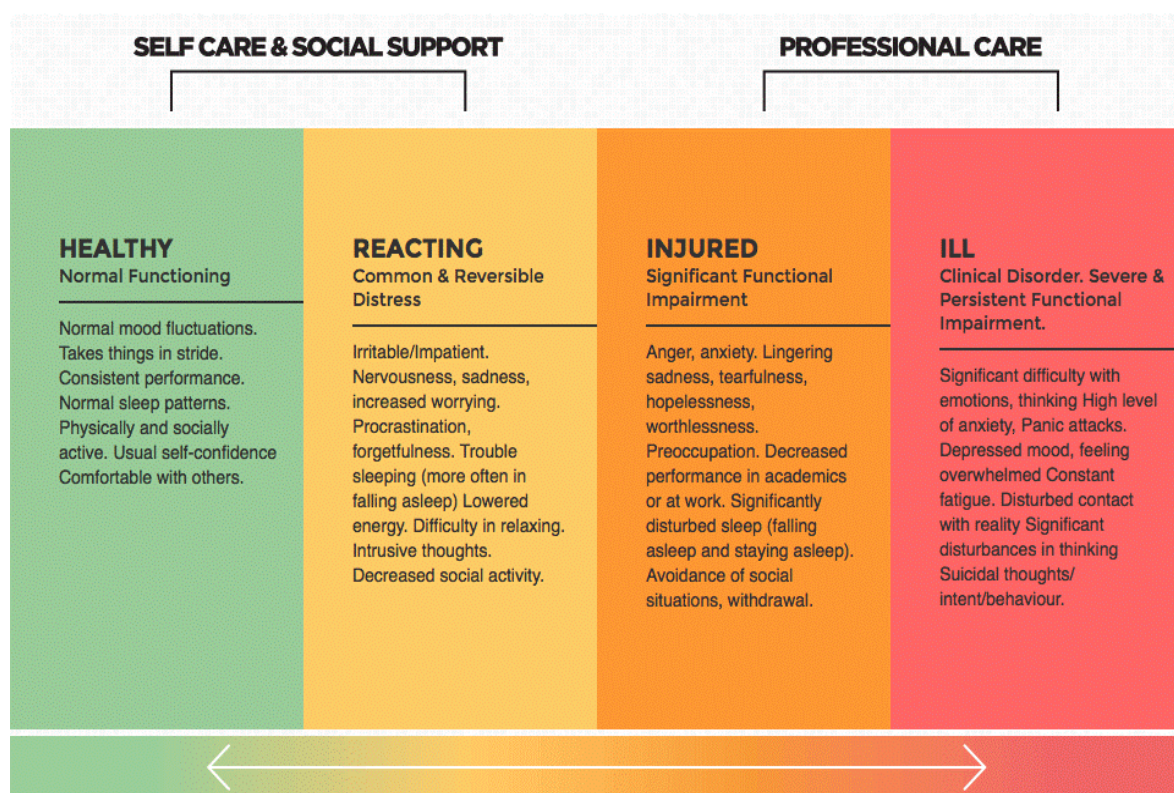
People who are at this point may show some distress and inability to cope when faced with a significant event such as a bereavement, but are capable of performing daily life functions.

Injured

People who are at this point may show distress and inability to cope over a longer period of time and are not easily alleviated by an individual's typical coping strategies. This in turn starts to have an impact on performing daily life functions.

Ill

This is the end of the continuum, and as the name suggests, people falling under this category are unable to cope with stress and exhibit significant changes in their thoughts, behaviours, and actions. Their symptoms can be significant and prolonged and needs the support of professionals.



We frequently remind our student population that the school views physical and mental health on a continuum. You can alleviate a headache with water and paracetamol just as you can alleviate anxiety by talking through concerns with a member of staff. There are times

when we may need to visit the GP, hospital or other professional with physical health concerns and usually would feel confident to make that decision. We need to take the same approach with our mental health.

If you are struggling to cope with your emotions or situations in your life, and want more information about mental health and other resources available within Gloucestershire, then use the [‘On Your Mind Gloucestershire’](#) website as a starting point to find out where you can get extra help.

If you have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder you might be looking for information on your diagnosis, treatment options and where to go for support. The [‘Mind’](#) website has information pages about the different types of mental health problems and will help you learn more.

You can find more information on the Anna Freud website: <https://www.annafreud.org/>

Landscapes of the Mind

According to the neuroscientist, Jaak Panksepp, emotional systems are ancient, evolutionary mechanisms embedded deep within your body, mind and soul and there are 7 that human’s experience. When these are working effectively, it leads to positive mental health and wellbeing. When some of these systems are not working or have been shut down for various reasons, such as a traumatic event or prolonged stress, this can lead to symptoms of distress and poor mental health and wellbeing.



Our Seven Primal Emotions

- **SEEKING** – Enthusiastic
- **CARE** – Tender and loving
- **PLAY** – Joyous
- **RAGE** – Anger
- **FEAR** – Anxious
- **PANIC/GRIEF** – Lonely and sad
- **LUST** – Sexual excitement

J. Panksepp & L. Bevin
The Archaeology of Mind, 2012.

Use the 'Quality of Life: Landscapes of the mind' Questionnaire to see how your 7 emotional systems are doing.

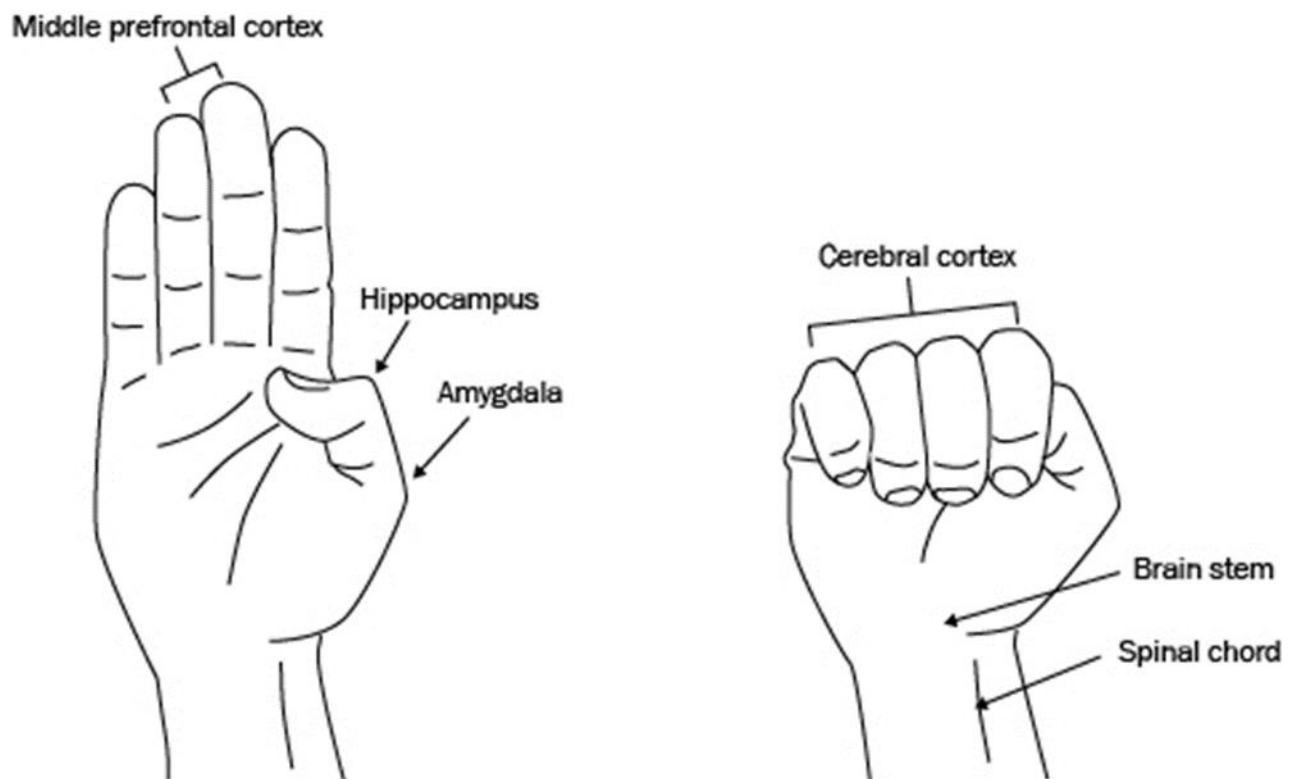
<http://barnwoodpark.ovw9.devwebsite.co.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=121>

DAN SIEGAL'S HAND MODEL OF THE TRIUNE BRAIN

What is the brain hand model?

In Dan Siegel's metaphor – The Hand Model of the Brain the **closed fist** represents the **regulated brain** as can be seen in the image below:

When we make our most effective decisions - the amygdala, pre frontal cortex and brain stem must be connected.



Hand model courtesy of Dan Siegel



In order to regulate and make rational and sensible decisions, the brain must be regulated and calm. Any situation that triggers the “Fight, Flight, Freeze” response leads to a “flipped lid”. When you “flip your lid” it means that **your feelings get so big that you lose control of your ability to think and act clearly**. You may start:

- kicking, screaming, pushing, throwing things **FIGHT**
- fidgeting, acting restless, trying to run away from a situation **FLIGHT**
- feeling numb, unable to move, find it hard to speak **FREEZE**