## The Mental Health Continuum Model

One of the reasons leaders and employees don't talk about mental health and well-being is because they don't have the appropriate language.

The Mental Health Continuum provides an easy way for laypeople to talk about their state of mental well-being.

Mental health is not a fixed state, nor is it an on or off state. It is fluid, and we slip up and down the continuum depending on the things going on around and inside us. One does not need to be clinically ill to be hurt. A non-clinical concept called **Operational Stress Injury\*** describes how our brains can be injured.

Four key factors contribute to stress injuries: **trauma, fatigue, grief, and moral conflict.** The aggregated effect of these factors - both at home and at work - determines how well we can perform.

## Mental Health Continuum Model **HEALTHY INJURED** REACTING ILL · Normal fluctuations in mood · Nervousness, irritability, · Anxiety, anger, pervasive · Excessive anxiety, easily sadness, hopelessness enraged, depressed mood sadness · Normal sleep patterns · Trouble sleeping · Restless or disturbed sleep · Unable to fall or stay asleep · Physically well, full of energy • Tired/low energy, muscle · Fatigue, aches and pains · Exhaustion, physical illness · Consistent performance tension, headaches Decreased performance. · Unable to perform duties, · Socially active Procrastination presenteeism absenteeism · Decreased social activity · Social avoidance or withdrawal Isolation, avoiding social events Actions to Take at Each Phase of the Continuum · Focus on task at hand Recognize limits · Identify and understand own · Seek consultation as needed · Break problems into · Get adequate rest, food and · Follow health care provider manageable chunks exercise · Talk with someone recommendations • Identify and nurture support · Engage in healthy coping · Seek help Regain physical and mental systems strategies health Seek social support instead of · Maintain healthy lifestyle · Identify and minimize stressors withdrawing

Adapted from the Department of National Defence

**\*Note**: MHI founder, Stéphane Grenier, was instrumental in changing the mental health culture in the Canadian Armed Forces. After coining the term "**Operational Stress Injury**" to allow the military to see mental injury in the same light as a physical wound, he founded the Operational Stress Injury Social Support program that provides help for mentally injured soldiers and veterans.



## The Mental Health Continuum Model

The colours on the continuum provide a simple way of naming what you are feeling or observing without using clinical language. This approach helps reduce stigma and makes people more comfortable and confident sharing what is going on with them.

## Important Questions to Ask Yourself

vvnat does it look like when you are stressed?
Where would those reactions fit on the continuum?
What usually precedes those responses?
Have you observed any of these behaviours in your team members?



Remember to take actions associated with the colour you find yourself in as a way to help you

move back to a healthy (green) state of mental health.