Self Monitoring with the Mental Health Continuum Tool

NSCAD Peer Mentors 2021

Why it's important to **self-monitor**

- Being self-aware in this way is huge for development of effective self-care routines
- It's easier to practice self-care when you know what's going on with you/your mood
- It can help you know when to ask for help, and what type of help you need (A friend? A therapist? Emergency services?)

What is the Mental Health Continuum Tool?

Developed by the Canadian Armed Forces, this useful tool describes four main states of mental health a person could be experiencing.

It is a continuum, which means that **a person can move back and forth along the scale** and can also land somewhere between the four main areas at any given time..



What is the Mental Health Continuum Tool?

Another important thing to remember about the continuum, is that EVERYONE is on this continuum somewhere. This tool is not unique to people living with a mental illness, it is a tool for everyone.

People who do not have a mental illness can still experience being in the orange and red zones.

Likewise it is also possible to have a physical or mental illness and still be in the green zone.

Everyone experiences fluctuations in their mental wellness.

Taking a closer look:

Self-Care & Social Support		Professional Care	
Healthy	Reacting	Injured	HI
Normal mood fluctuations. Takes things in stride. Completing normal activities well. Normal sleep patterns intact. Physically well with a normal amount of energy. Normal activity level and socializing with friends.	Irritable, nervous, increased worrying. Procrastination, forgetfulness. Trouble sleeping or difficulty relaxing. Reporting muscle aches, headaches. Tired. Not seeking out friends/supports as much. Mild disruption	Anger, anxiety, tearfulness, feeling hopeless, feeling worthless. Not going to class or passing in assignments. Poor concentration. Sleep is disturbed by intrusive thoughts or nightmares. Finding it hard to fall or stay asleep. Avoiding or withdrawing from friends/supports. Moderate disruption	Having a hard time regulating emotions – angry outbursts, anxiety/panic attacks, crying thoughts of self- harm or suicide with intent/plan. Disturbances in thinking/disturbed contact with reality Not going to school or work. Constant fatigue. Problems falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much. Withdrawing from friends/supports. Severe disruption
Canadian Department of National Defense and the US Marine Corps' Department of Psychiatry, 2016)			

Healthy - Green

What does it mean?

"we all experience the **daily annoyances** such missing the bus, feeling cranky and tired because of staying up late to study, or having a disagreement with a friend or partner."

What can we do?

Self-Care / Social Support

"We cope with these issues by using the **coping mechanisms** that we have developed throughout our life to keep ourselves healthy and in the green.

We know that through taking a different bus, grabbing a nap when we are tired, and talking with the friend we argued with, we will return to our happy and healthy baseline."

Reacting - Yellow

What does it mean?

"Sometimes the challenges you face are more taxing: studying for midterm exams, your mood hasn't been the best the past few weeks, or you are living alone for the first time and are feeling homesick. These challenges are reflected in our **mood**, **behavior**, **sleep**, **physical health**, **and our socialization**. This occurs when a person moves from the green zone to the yellow."

What can we do?

Self-Care / Social Support

"Through self-care, coping mechanisms, and seeking informal supports most of the time a person can get through these challenges and move back to the green zone."

Injured - Orange

What does it mean?

"Sometimes the challenges we face overwhelm our coping mechanisms and the supports that we have."

Some signs include:

- Anger, anxiety, tearfulness, feeling hopeless, feeling worthless.
- Not going to class or passing in assignments.
- Poor concentration.
- Sleep is disturbed by intrusive thoughts or nightmares.
- Finding it hard to fall or stay asleep.
- Avoiding or withdrawing from friends/supports.
- Moderate disruption

What can we do?

Professional Care

Here we will have greater difficulty managing our symptoms on our own.

This would be a time when it could be helpful to make an appointment with NSCAD's counsellor, Robert (Or another professional).

Professional care becomes more necessary and relevant with an increase in disruption and distress, as we experience as we move to the right of the continuum.

III - Red

What does it mean?

- Having a hard time regulating emotions angry outbursts, anxiety/panic attacks, crying, thoughts of self harm or suicide with intent/plan.
- Disturbances in thinking/disturbed contact with reality.
- Not going to school or work.
- Constant fatigue.
- Problems falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much.
- Withdrawing from friends/supports.
- Severe disruption

What can we do?

Professional Care

Here we find even greater difficulty managing our symptoms on our own.

If you do not already have a therapist or doctor to speak to, making an appointment with NSCAD's counsellor is a good first step, and you can receive a referral to see someone in your area.

If you are experiencing an emergency or crisis situation in Nova Scotia, it's good to have the Mental Health Crisis Team number on hand. (Wherever you are, look up the number to call in your area if you are in crisis!)

Your unique experience of each level

When we talk about what is "normal" (in the green zone) on the continuum, it's important to remember that this is *unique to you*. No one's definition or expression of normal/healthy is the same.

In that same light, everyone will experience the shift toward yellow, orange and red in different ways. For example, many will find their sleep is greatly affected when they become more distressed (too much or too little sleep). Others will not experience any effect on their sleep patterns, but still be struggling in other ways.

	Healthy	Reacting	Injured	11
Changes in Mood	Normal mood fluctuations	🗆 Irritable		Easily enraged
	🗆 Calm	Impatient		 Excessive anxiety/panic
Chang	Confident	Nervous Sadness	Pervasive sadness	Depressed mood, numb
	Good sense of humour	Displaced sarcasm	Negative attitude	Noncompliant
Changes in Thinking and Attitude	Takes things in stride	Intrusive thoughts	 Recurrent intrusive thoughts/images 	Suicidal thoughts/intent
	Ability to concentrate and focus on tasks	 Sometimes distracted or loss of focus on tasks 	Constantly distracted or cannot focus on tasks	 Inability to concentrate, loss of memory or cognitive abilities
and	 Physically and socially active 	 Decreased activity/ socializing 	Avoidance	Withdrawal
mar	Present	Present but distracted	Skipping class	Dropping out of class
Changes in Behaviour and Performance	Performing well	Procrastination	 Decreased performance, lower grades 	Cannot complete assigments
S	Normal sleep patterns	Trouble sleeping	Restless sleep	Cannot fall/stay asleep
	Good appetite	Changes in eating patterns	Loss of appetite	No appetite
inges	Feeling energetic	Some lack of energy	Some tiredness	Constant and prolonged

The **Checklist Tool** in your PDF package is extremely helpful in

identifying where you may be on the continuum at any particular moment.

It's a handy check-in tool to refer back to often. (Above is just a snapshot of what it looks like)

How to establish your own unique continuum

It can be helpful to do a bit of reflecting on which aspects of your life show the most tell-tale signs of movement on the continuum. Identifying specific things to pay attention to can help with self monitoring. (These go in the area of the checklist that's blank for you to add your own!)

For some people it might be housework, school work, personal hygiene, drug/alcohol use, or something else altogether.

Ask yourself: What is the first thing to go when my mental wellness starts to deteriorate? What are the first signs I might notice? (It can also be helpful to ask a friend or someone you live with what things they notice--often other people notice signs that we ourselves do not!)

Some common ones could be dishes or laundry piling up, schoolwork being crammed in before a due date, showering less often, not answering phone calls from friends or family, drinking more/more often than usual.

Being aware of these indicators can help you to enact your support plan before things get worse.

Your unique continuum

Once you've identified these tell-tale areas, you can go a bit further by identifying what they look like for you in each colour.

Using laundry as an example:

Laundry gets done as soon as the bin is full, put away right away. Laundry starts to pile up higher in the bin than usual before getting done, might sit for a day before getting put away. Laundry is spilling out onto the floor, have to do several loads at once, doesn't get put away, just take out of the bin. Laundry covers the entire floor, room is stinky, doesn't get done at all, wearing dirty clothes for days.

Making a Plan

It is super important to make a plan *before* you need it; figuring out what you need to do *during* a crisis is really difficult.

That's why it is really helpful to have a few basic plans in place depending on your needs/where you are on the Mental Health Continuum.

Your plan should include both self-care activities you can use to help yourself *and* a plan for outside supports you can access.

The **Wellness Map** and **Self-Care Wheel** (included in PDF package) are tools that can assist you in this planning process.

Your Plan is *Yours*

Your plan should be catered toward your own definitions of where you fall on the continuum: Whatever brings you to the Green Zone is entirely unique to you (Remember that "normal" means "your normal", and that this will be different for everyone).

There are some pretty standard resources available, however, for times when you find yourself moving into in the Yellow, Orange or Red.



1-888-429-8167 (toll-free)

If Crisis Team is unavailable, call 911

Making your Plan...

You can use the wellness map (which looks like this image on the right) to help get started by answering questions like:

- How am I when I am feeling mentally well (green)?
- What are some things I do to help keep me feeling well?
- What are the signs when I'm not feeling so well (yellow/orange)?
- What helps me move back to the green?



Wellness Map (Included in the PDF package)

Continuum Summary/Actions to Take:

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

Re-Cap

- Self Monitoring
 - Use the Mental Health Continuum Checklist
 - (Add your own unique indicators to make the checklist your own!)
- Making a Plan (*before you need it!*)
 - Fill in the Wellness Map
 - Identify/develop various steps to take and support networks to reach out to when experiencing different levels of distress:
 - Green practice self-care, maintain contact with existing supports
 - Yellow practice self-care, reach out to friends, family, peers
 - Orange NSCAD's counselor, your therapist/doctor
 - Red Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (Halifax), Emergency Services (911), QEII Health Sciences Centre (Halifax Hospital)

Contacts to put in your phone / Action Plan

Halifax/Nova Scotia:

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team 902-429-8167 1-888-429-8167 (toll-free) If Crisis Team is unavailable, call 911.

Visit the Emergency Department IWK Health Centre (under 19) Or the QEII Health Sciences Centre (19+ yrs)

General Health Questions: 811 or visit 811.novascotia.ca

NSCAD Specific:

NSCAD Counselling (with our "on-site" counselor) Email <u>OSE@nscad.ca</u> or Call 902-494-8260 for appointments Office of Student Experience is open 9:30 am-4 pm weekdays

Nova Scotia & Ontario

Good2Talk 24/7 helpline Text or Call! Specifically for University Students https://good2talk.ca/

Useful PDF Resources from the NSCAD Wellness page (<u>nscad.ca/wellness</u>)

Mental Health First Aid Kit

Community Resources (Halifax)

Finding a Doctor (Halifax)

Direct quotations are taken from the Stay Connected Mental Health Project's "Student Mental Health Peer Support Handbook" created by Lianne Cleveland, Megan Wright, Morgan Atwater, and Allison Prosser, with revisions by Debbie Phillips, Steph Young, and Rose Walls.



Mental Health Continuum Tool Resource & Worksheet Pack

Self-Care & Social Support		Professional Care		
Healthy	Reacting	Injured	III	
Normal mood	Irritable, nervous,	Anger, anxiety,	Having a hard time	
fluctuations.	increased worrying.	tearfulness, feeling	regulating emotions –	
Takes things in stride.	Procrastination,	hopeless, feeling	angry outbursts,	
Completing normal	forgetfulness.	worthless.	anxiety/panic attacks,	
activities well.	Trouble sleeping or	Not going to class or	crying thoughts of self-	
Normal sleep patterns	difficulty relaxing.	passing in assignments.	harm or suicide with	
intact.	Reporting muscle aches,	Poor concentration.	intent/plan.	
Physically well with a	headaches. Tired.	Sleep is disturbed by	Disturbances in	
normal amount of	Not seeking out	intrusive thoughts or	thinking/disturbed	
energy.	friends/supports as	nightmares. Finding it	contact with reality.	
Normal activity level	much.	hard to fall or stay	Not going to school or	
and socializing with	Mild disruption	asleep.	work. Constant fatigue.	
friends.		Avoiding or withdrawing	Problems falling or	
		from friends/supports.	staying asleep, or	
		Moderate disruption	sleeping too much.	
			Withdrawing from	
			friends/supports.	
			Severe disruption	

(Canadian Department of National Defense and the US Marine Corps' Department of Psychiatry, 2016)

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

Module 2: Mental Health Continuum Iool

	Healthy	Reacting	Injured	Ш
poo	Normal mood fluctuations	Irritable	Angry	Easily enraged
Changes in Mood	🗆 Calm	Impatient	Anxious	 Excessive anxiety/panic
Chang	Confident	NervousSadness	Pervasive sadness	Depressed mood, numb
Changes in Thinking and Attitude	 Good sense of humour Takes things in stride 	 Displaced sarcasm Intrusive thoughts 	 Negative attitude Recurrent intrusive thoughts/images 	 Noncompliant Suicidal thoughts/intent
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Changes in Behaviour and Performance	 Present Performing well 	 Present but distracted Procrastination 	 Skipping class Decreased performance, lower grades 	 Dropping out of class Cannot complete assigments
	Normal sleep patterns	Trouble sleeping	Restless sleep	Cannot fall/stay asleep
S	Good appetite	Changes in eating patterns	Loss of appetite	No appetite
l Chang	Feeling energetic	Some lack of energy	Some tiredness	Constant and prolonged fatigue or exhaustion
Physical Changes	 Maintaining a stable weight 	Some weight gain	 Fluctuations or changes in weight 	 Extreme weight gain or loss
	Good personal hygiene	Less attention hygiene	Poor hygiene most of the time	Consistently poor hygiene
lictive 's	 Limited alcohol consumption, no binge drinking 	 Regular to frequent alcohol consumption, limited binge drinking 	 Frequent alcohol consumption, binge drinking 	 Regular to frequent binge drinking
s in Add haviour	Limited/no addictive behaviours	Some to regular addictive behaviours	 Struggle to control addictive behaviours 	Addiction
Changes in Addictive Behaviours	 No trouble/impact due to substance use 	Limited to some trouble/impact due to substance use	 Increasing trouble/ impact due to substance use 	 Significant trouble/ impact due to substance use
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My Personal Changes				



Student Mental Health Peer Support Program



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