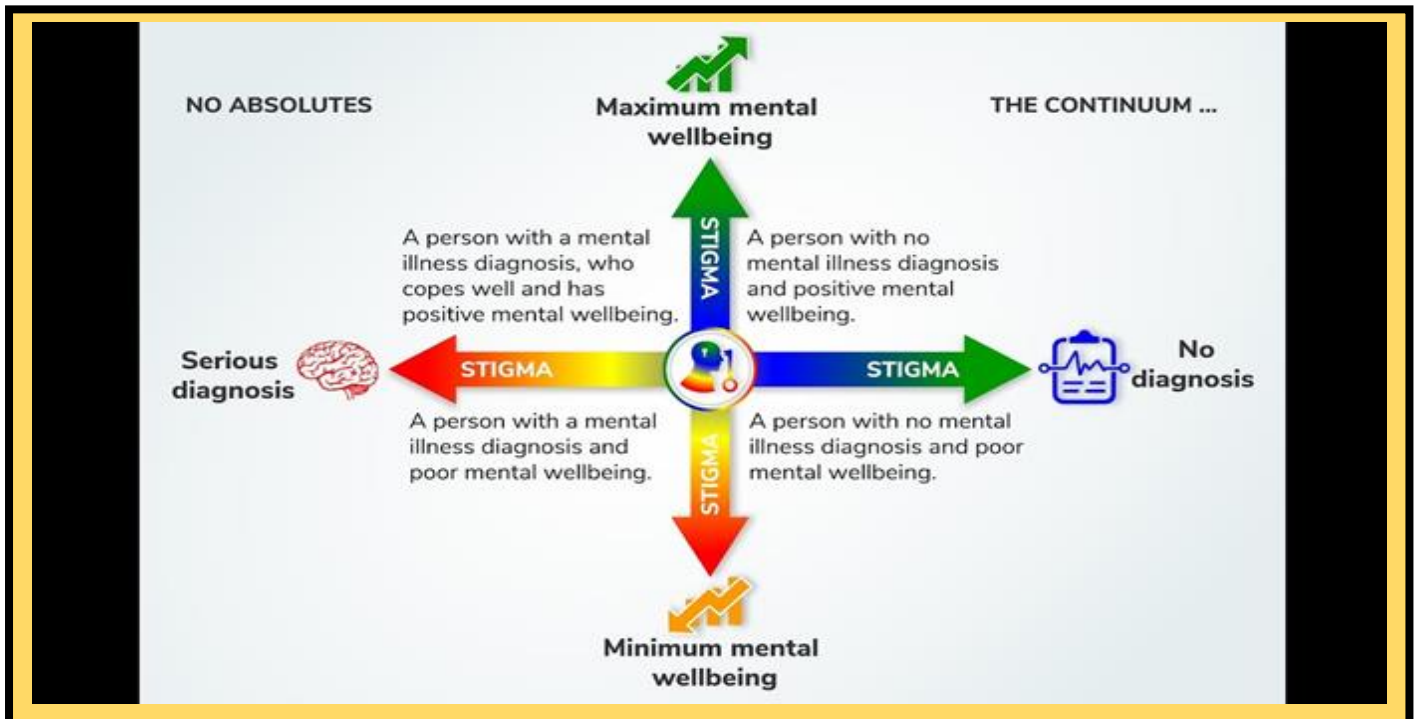


The Mental Health Continuum



Mental Health Continuum - MHFA England 2017

Mental Health First Aid England has a very useful tool for describing mental health. It uses the concept of two continua on different axes. The Mental Health Continuum starts with the vertical axis. This axis represents our emotional wellbeing. The top of the vertical axis is the maximum emotional wellbeing and the bottom is the minimum. The horizontal axis represents the medical diagnosis with severe diagnosis at one end and no diagnosis at the other. This helps us to understand that a person with a diagnosed disorder can have positive mental wellbeing and a person who has no diagnosis can have poor mental wellbeing. Mental health is fluid and changes over time depending on many different factors, but we all exist somewhere on these axes and can move around them depending what is happening in our lives or our lived experience. It is not a case of having or not having illness, or of situations staying the same forever.

There are no absolutes, meaning that there is nothing intrinsically healthy or unhealthy about any given pattern of behaviour. What is healthy and usual for one person maybe a warning sign of impending trouble for someone else, e.g. one person may sleep for five hours each night and function very well. Another person may sleep for eight hours. For them sleeping five hours may be a sign of anxiety.

We think it's important to understand mental health as not just the absence of illness, but as a broad concept that applies to us all.