



Psychological wellbeing for performing artists

What is psychological wellbeing?

You may feel that if you are feeling OK about yourself, that you're not feeling any distress, that that's all there is to your psychological wellbeing. However, the World Health Organisation has identified a more positive and proactive set of definitions about what psychological wellbeing can be.

1. Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.
2. Mental health is defined as a state of wellbeing in which an individual can realize their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to their community.

So, you can see that psychological wellbeing allows us to contribute positively to ourselves and to those we work or study with. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention note that '[t]here is general agreement that at minimum, wellbeing includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfilment, and positive functioning. In simple terms, wellbeing can be described as judging life positively and feeling good'.

Equally important is the fact that our psychological wellbeing is never simply about us. We all need others, in a healthy interdependent way, which will support us as we support them in ensuring and promoting aspects of psychological wellness. Knowing what we can reasonably do for others, without overstepping our own necessary personal boundaries, is invaluable for our mutual health and wellbeing.

Psychological wellbeing at your training place or workplace

If you feel unsupported at your training place or workplace, you should be aware that all institutions (and workplaces) have a primary duty under the Australian Work Health and Safety (WHS) Act to manage risks associated with exposure to hazards arising that could result in physical or psychological harm.

According to SafeWork Australia (2019), as a student, staff member or visitor of a training institution or employee or contractor of a workplace, you have a duty to take reasonable care of your own health and safety and not adversely affect other people's health and safety. Psychological hazards may be environmental (aspects that affect your comfort and performance), organizational (including task demands and role clarity, recognition, reward and justice) or individual (acknowledging each of us may respond differently to a common hazard). Work-related stress refers to the physical and psychological response of a person who perceives that the demand of their work/study or workplace/study environment exceeds their ability or resources to cope. Psychological wellbeing is both individual and social, so training institutions or workplaces that tolerate environments in which bullying, harassment and discrimination occur are failing in their WHS accountability.

Nurturing your psychological wellbeing at work or while studying

As you discover and nurture your gifts and talents for expression you should experience respect and support from employers, work peers or teachers and fellow students so you can generate good, if not exceptional creative outcomes. Otherwise creative processes which often require vulnerability and risk-taking can adversely impact your thinking (cognitive), feeling (emotional) and connection to others (social). The following are some tips from *Secrets of Performing Confidence* (2013) by Evans & Evans for maintaining your cognitive, emotional and social health while working or training.



ASPAAH

Australian Society for
Performing Arts Healthcare

Cognitive health: Dealing with stress and burnout.

- diversify your creative expression – produce, direct, arrange, write
- say no if you feel ‘used’ and eliminate badly paid work or work that is constantly stressful, without respite
- do challenging work so you keep constructively stretching yourself

Emotional health:

- meditation, mindfulness and emotional self-regulation can offset the ‘rollercoaster’ highs and lows during rehearsal and performance phases
- if you or a colleague or fellow student experiences sustained periods of sadness, tearfulness, loss of energy and appetite for a period of two weeks or more, seek support from your GP to ascertain if you may need help with these and other indicators of depression

Social health:

- join with friends to try things out just for pleasure

Support for psychological wellbeing in life

Even though performing may be a passion for performing artists, it should not consume all of life – you need to eat, sleep, travel, stay close to family and friends, feel the mutual support of significant others, and enjoy the journey as much as any destinations along the way. Here are some tips for bringing the best you can to your life choices, your sense of love, safety and connection through the ups and downs of life.

Cognitive health:

- have at least one other passion – hobby, reading, sport, the more interactive the better
- keep variety in your lifestyle choices

Emotional health:

- laughter keeps you healthy
- lean into joy (really savour it) and practise gratitude on a daily basis

Social health:

- stay connected to family, friends and keep participating in regular face-to-face times of socialising

Crisis support

If you or someone else is in danger, ring the police (000) as soon as possible.

Self-harm: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/; T: 1300 659 467

Support Act Wellbeing Helpline (24/7) <https://supportact.org.au/wellbeinghelpline/> T: 1800 959 500

Version August 2019 Contributor: Mark Seton

NB: This ASPAAH Guide is intended as an educational resource only and does not replace professional advice. ASPAAH recommends that diagnosis and initial advice is always obtained from an accredited healthcare professional.

Please note that all ASPAAH resources are protected by copyright and may not be altered without permission. If you are interested in further use or dissemination of this document, please contact admin@aspah.org.au.