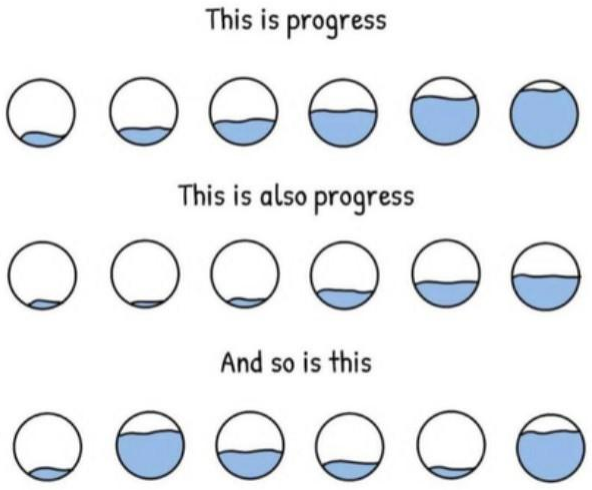
Mental Health Awareness Guide

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act, and also determines how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is more than just "feeling okay", it's our overall well-being in three key areas: **emotional**, **psychological**, and **social**.

- **Emotional** – how we handle feelings like stress, sadness, anger, or joy
- **Psychological** – how we think, learn, and make decisions
- **Social** – how we connect with and relate to others

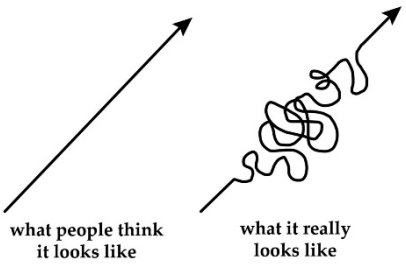
Good mental health means having balance in these areas. But that balance isn't always perfect and that's completely normal.

Mental health is not a straight line. There will be days when you feel strong and focused, and others when you wake up tired, irritable, or unmotivated. That does **not** mean something is wrong with you. It means you are human.



If even one of the three areas is off. For example, if you feel emotionally drained, disconnected from others, or mentally foggy, it can affect how you function. That is why checking in with yourself, and knowing when to rest or reach out, is so important.

Mental health does not mean being happy all the time. It means being aware of your internal state, knowing how to cope with the hard days, and having tools or support to get through them.



Maintaining mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood through adulthood.

Common Mental Health Challenges Among Seafarers

- **Isolation and loneliness –** Extended periods away from loved ones
- **Fatigue and sleep disruption –** Due to shift work and irregular hours
- **Stress –** From high workload, safety responsibilities, or emergencies
- **Anxiety –** Related to job security, performance, or personal concerns(Family problems)
- **Depression –** Feeling hopeless, demotivated, or disconnected
- **Cultural or communication barriers –** When working in diverse crews

Signs to Watch For Onboard

1. **Irritability or Sudden Mood Changes**
    - Snapping at crewmates over small issues
    - Becoming easily frustrated or angry without clear reason
    - Swinging from being sociable to completely withdrawn
2. **Withdrawing from Social Interaction or Crew Activities**
    - Skipping meals or staying in the cabin most of the time
    - Declining invites to group activities like movie night or games
    - Avoiding conversations, giving short or one-word responses
3. **Trouble Sleeping or Excessive Fatigue**
    - Frequently complaining, “I haven’t been able to sleep for days”
    - Falling asleep during off-hours but waking up tired

- Saying things like, “I’m just tired all the time, even after resting”

4. **Reduced Concentration or Motivation**
    - Repeatedly forgetting tasks or making uncharacteristic mistakes
    - Taking much longer than usual to complete routine duties
    - Saying, “I just can’t focus lately” or “I don’t feel like doing anything”
5. **Increased Alcohol or Substance Use** (if accessible)
    - Drinking alone often, or drinking more than usual
    - Joking about needing a drink to get through the day
    - Becoming defensive or secretive when asked about drinking
6. **Verbalizing Hopelessness or Thoughts of Self-Harm**
    - Saying things like:
        - “What’s the point of all this anyway?”
        - “I feel like I’ll never get off this ship.”
        - “Maybe it would be better if I just disappeared.”
        - “No one would really notice if I wasn’t here.”
        - “I’m tired of everything.”

You Noticed Something Is Not Right, What Now?

Maybe a crewmate has been saying things that sound worrying. Maybe they have withdrawn from the group, seem unusually tired, or are not acting like themselves. You might not be sure what exactly is wrong, but your gut tells you something is off.

So, what can you do when you think someone onboard might be struggling?

1. Start a Simple Conversation

Check in privately and gently. You can say:

- "Hey, I noticed you’ve been quiet lately. How are you doing?"
- "I just wanted to see if everything’s okay, you don’t seem like yourself."
- "I’m here if you ever want to talk."

Even if they are not ready to open up, showing that you care builds trust.

2. Listen Without Judgment

Let them speak freely without interrupting or rushing to fix the problem. The goal is not to offer solutions right away. The first and most important step is simply to listen.

- Avoid saying things like:
  “You’ll get over it” or “Just toughen up.”
  These may come from a good place but can make someone feel dismissed or misunderstood.
- Instead, try saying:
  “That sounds really difficult” or “Thanks for sharing that with me.”
  These responses show empathy and make the person feel heard.

Sometimes, just being listened to — without advice, judgment, or pressure — is what brings the most relief.

3. Encourage Them to Seek Help

Remind them that it is okay to talk to someone else — a superior, office personal, or a professional service. You can say:

- "You don’t have to go through this alone. Would you consider talking to the captain or a mental health provider?"
- "There’s nothing wrong with asking for help. It’s a sign of strength."

4. Offer Practical Support

Help them with simple tasks if they seem overwhelmed. Invite them to meals, games, or light activities. Even small acts of kindness like making coffee or just sitting with them can make them feel less alone.

5. Know When to Alert Someone

If you believe the person is in serious danger or expressing suicidal thoughts, do not keep it to yourself. Inform the ship's master, welfare officer, or a designated mental health contact immediately. This is not betrayal, it is care and responsibility.

What If It’s You Who’s Struggling?

Sometimes it is not someone else, it is you. Maybe you are feeling overwhelmed, disconnected, or simply not yourself. That is okay. Life at sea can be mentally demanding, and looking after your own well-being is just as important as looking out for others.

Here are some simple but powerful ways to take care of your mental health while onboard:

Maintaining Mental Wellbeing at Sea

1. Stick to a Routine

Having a daily rhythm helps you feel grounded. Try to wake up, eat, work, and rest at consistent times. It brings structure, even in unpredictable conditions.

2. Stay Connected

Use any chance to reach out to loved ones whether through messages, calls, or emails. If internet access is limited, writing in a journal or letters can help you process your thoughts.

3. Move Your Body

Even short stretches, bodyweight exercises, or walking around the deck can lift your mood, improve sleep, and reduce tension.

4. Make Time for Rest

Rest is not a luxury, it is essential. Prioritize sleep when you can, and take short breaks during long or demanding shifts. Fatigue affects both body and mind.

5. Eat and Hydrate Well

Nutrition plays a key role in how you feel. Try to eat balanced meals, drink enough water, and limit caffeine or sugar, especially before bed.

6. Stay Mentally Engaged

Keep your mind active during downtime. This helps reduce stress and boredom, especially during long voyages. Some ideas include:

- Reading books or listening to music or podcasts
- Doing puzzles, brain games, or writing in a journal
- Joining karaoke nights or singing with crewmates
- Playing an instrument if you have one
- Playing video games with others if there's a console onboard
- Fishing off the vessel (if allowed and safe to do so)

These small moments of enjoyment can boost your mood and strengthen crew bonds.

7. Talk to Someone You Trust

You do not have to carry everything alone. If something is bothering you, share it with a trusted crewmate or your officer. Speaking up is a strength, not a weakness.

8. Be Kind to Yourself

Some days are harder than others. Do not be too hard on yourself. Your mental well-being deserves care and attention, just like your physical safety.

Remember

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Taking care of your mind is not a weakness, it is a responsibility we all share for ourselves and each other.