



Reflect and discuss

# Mental health dual continuum



Researcher Corey Keyes developed a dual continuum model of mental health that helps us reflect on our mental health as existing on a spectrum.

On one end of that spectrum is depression, characterized by feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. On the other end is flourishing: a sense of connection, purpose, and meaning. And in the middle is what's known as languishing—when we're neither depressed nor flourishing, but just getting by.

Languishing is “the absence of mental health.” Keyes describes it as “a state in which an individual is devoid of positive emotion toward life, and is not functioning well either psychologically or socially, and has not been depressed during the past year. In short, languishers are neither mentally ill nor mentally healthy.”

So, what does languishing look like in everyday life?

The following emotions and states of mind are indicators that a person may be in a state of languishing. Young adults and their family members may be able to recognize these signs in themselves or their loved ones.

- Lack of motivation
- Foggy thinking, feeling unfocused
- Low enthusiasm about life in general
- Feelings of emptiness
- Dullness and ennui
- Not highly engaged or passionate about work or school
- Working toward goals in order to avoid something negative rather than achieve something positive

A **quiz** has been developed by researchers at Harvard's Human Flourishing Program to gauge a person's overall physical, mental and emotional well-being. While there's no specific score to determine if someone is definitely flourishing, the higher the score, the better the person tends to be doing.

**Researchers found that just taking the quiz, and reflecting on the questions, can put people on a path to making positive changes.**

## Reference:

Keyes, CLM. The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life. July 2002 Journal of Health and Social Behavior 43(2):207-22



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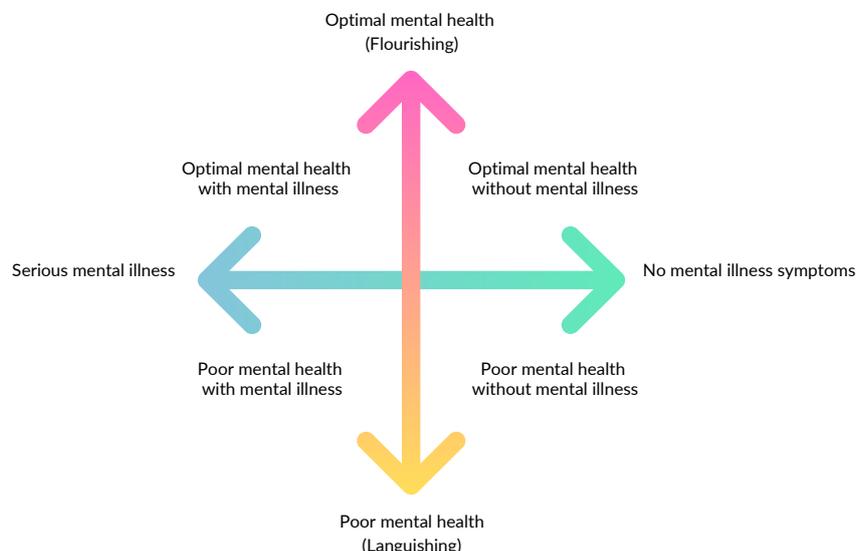
Mental health isn't simply "good" or "bad"—it's a spectrum that encompasses a wide range of experiences and symptoms. So, how can we make the most of our mental health, during stressful times and everyday?

## Discussion questions

1. In your opinion, why is it important to know what flourishing looks and feels like? Why is it important to know what languishing looks and feels like?
2. Consider your community. What percentage of people do you think are flourishing? What percentage are relatively mentally healthy? What percentage are languishing? What makes you say that?
3. What are some things a person can do to lift themselves out of a state of languishing? Why do you think those things might be helpful?

## Activity steps

1. Watch the [What is mental health?](#) video.
2. Walk through the **Mental health dual continuum** [handout](#).
3. Review the 10-question quiz developed for adults
4. Work in pairs or small groups to create a short quiz for their peers.
5. Create a list of tips for what a young person could do if struggling with motivation and energy or other signs of languishing
6. Try the quiz out on a few friends and report back on the experience





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For each question, choose the answer that most reflects where you fall on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being the most positive. This quiz is just for fun and should not substitute for professional mental health advice.

- How satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?
- How happy do you usually feel?
- In general, how would you rate your physical health?
- How would you rate your overall mental health?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- I understand my purpose in life.
- I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations.
- I am always able to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later.
- I am content with my friendships and relationships.
- My relationships are as satisfying as I would like them to be.

## Reflect and discuss

### 1. Past to present

Mark an X on the quadrant that reflects where you were in the past (e.g., last year).

Mark another X where you see yourself now.

Reflect on how you got there.

Share your insights with a friend.

### 2. Present to future

Mark an X on the quadrant that reflects where you see yourself now.

Mark another X where you'd like to be (if it's different from where you are now).

Reflect on ways to get there.

Share your ideas with a friend.



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## Dual-continuum model of mental health

