What is mental health?

Mental health allows us to live life in a positive and meaningful way. It helps us to cope with normal day-to-day stressors, reach our potential and be actively involved in the community.

Mental health can be visualised as a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum is the 'healthy' range; we can bounce back from challenges in our lives and are socially connected. At the other end is 'illness'; conditions that negatively impact how we feel, think and behave (e.g. anxiety and depression).

healthy → coping → difficulties → illness

Everyone sits along the mental health spectrum and where we sit can change throughout the day depending on what's happening around us and how prepared we feel about dealing with the different stressors around us.

Why is it important to care for mental health?

Taking care of our mental health can keep us in the 'healthy' range of the spectrum and improve many aspects of our lives. Some benefits include:

- **Social connections:** we're able to maintain healthy friendships and relationships with family.
- **Resilience:** we're better able to cope with day-to-day stressors and life challenges.
- **Productivity**: we're in the headspace to learn and excel in our areas of study and/or work
- **Better physical health:** good mental health boosts our immune system!

For more tips on how to have a healthy headspace, see: https://headspace.org.au/young-people/tips-for-a-healthy-headspace/

How do we know if we're having mental health difficulties?

Mental health difficulties are commonplace in young people. In fact, 1 in 4 young people will experience mental health difficulties at some point in their lives. These challenges can impact how we think, feel and behave in different ways with signs. You can find some examples below:

Feelings: Lack of energy, irritability, mood swings, feeling 'down', lacking confidence

Thoughts: Constant worrying, disorganized, racing thoughts, negative thoughts
For example, "I'm a failure", "It's all my fault", "Why does nothing good ever happen to me?"

Behaviours: Isolating from friends/family, avoiding social situations, changes in eating/sleeping patterns, lack of interest in previously enjoyed activities, struggling with day-to-day tasks, increased alcohol consumption and/or drugs

Physical: Weight loss or gain, appetite changes, muscle pain/tension, fatigue, poor sleep or sleeping too much

Note: mental health difficulties present differently for each individual.