

## Tools for improving mental health

*“Mental health is not a destination, but a process. It is about how you drive, not where you’re going”*



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I believe mental health is synergistic with physical health. Both mental and physical health is not a destination, they are the process. Similarly, life is not a destination, life is a process. To understand “what is the difference between the process and the destination” let’s take an example:

You are a medical student aspiring to get the gold medal for your final exams. Let’s say you have 100 days to prepare for it. Destination in this example is the final results of your exam, whereas the process is you preparing for the exam. When you prepare for your exam, you create a lot of meaningful tools to achieve the result you want such as you

make meaningful connections with like-minded people, discovering resources that can make you more efficient and you create opportunities. And as time progresses, you most importantly develop discipline. But imagine, if you gave the exam without preparing for it. Unfortunately, you would have not created any tools that would have developed a sense of discipline inside you. The gold medal will be worthless if you don’t have the discipline to get it, but it will be 100% worth it if you went through the process to achieve the gold medal.

From the above example, we can clearly say that destination is

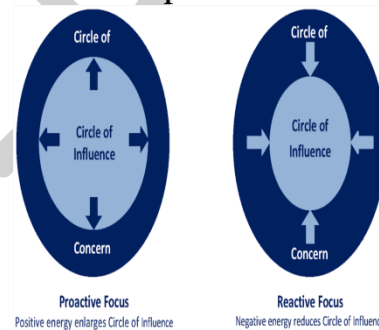
meaningless without the process. Let's relate this to mental health. Mental health cannot be defined as you feeling happy and satisfied at all times. Instead, we can say that mental health is the discipline you must have to lead a happy and satisfying life. And the discipline for developing mental health is not going to be a downhill task, it is going to be full of ups and downs like the famous quote says "Pressure makes Diamonds".

Mental health can be influenced by a variety of factors. I believe that it is limited to 2 factors:

1. Intrinsic
2. Extrinsic

Intrinsic factors are the ones that arise from within and are controllable, whereas extrinsic factors are the ones that arise from your surroundings and are not entirely controlled.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. There is an amazing concept called the "Circle of control, concern and influence". I came across this concept when I read the book "7 habits of highly effective people". And this concept is like a tool anyone can use to organise one's thought process. Organising one's thought process develops discipline and developing one's discipline, positively impacts mental health. The intrinsic and extrinsic factors that I talked about are all encapsulated within this concept:



Those who effectively embrace change, focus their time and energy on things they have control over, instead of wasting their time and

energy on things they don't.

The "Circle of Concern" includes the wide range of concerns you have in the world, your work and life – including health, family, finances, the economy, national debt etc.

Everything you include inside the circle is a concern and matters to you and everything outside the circle is of little or no concern to you.

The challenge with the Circle of Concern is you start to realize that some of the things you find yourself concerned about are outside of your control and some are inside your realm of control.

For example – you may be concerned about the health of a family member or the economy, however, can you do anything about it? This is why it is important to identify

your Circle of Influence within your Circle of Concern. Your Circle of Influence is the things that concern you that you can do something about. For example – you may be worried about the economy or climate change or coronavirus (i.e., circle of concern), however, what can you do about it (i.e., your circle of influence)? We could rightly say that there's no point in wasting time and energy on the things we can't control. This is easy in theory but more difficult in practice.

We can't control the economy or a global pandemic. As we react, we tend to focus on the Circle of Concern, which depletes our energy, because we have no control over it. The energy focused on the Circle of Concern is negative. If you focus on the Circle of Concern and neglect the Circle of Influence, eventually the Circle of Influence will get smaller.

This will add to feelings of stress and helplessness because you cannot change anything in the Circle of Concern. Keeping a proactive focus helps

you enlarge the circle of influence and hence you have better mental health.

As discussed in the initial parts of this article, remember making the circle of influence bigger takes time and is part of the process and is not the destination. The discipline you create here is the proactive nature you develop within yourself.

Remember,  
*“The strongest people are those who win battles we know nothing about”*