

Wellbeing and Resilience for Nursing, Health and Social Care Students

Annette Chowthi-Williams



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Creating Emotional and Mental Balance

Janet Goddard, Regina Holley
and Raquel Marta

NMC Standards of Proficiency for Registered Nurses (NMC, 2018)
Professional Standards Social Work England (2019)
Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2018)

Nursing & Midwifery Council

This chapter will address the following platforms and proficiencies:

- 1 Being an accountable professional
- 2 Promoting health and preventing ill health
- 3 Assessing needs and planning care
- 4 Providing and evaluating care
- 7 Coordinating care

Social Work England

This chapter will address the following standards:

Standard 1: Promote the rights, strengths and wellbeing of people, families and communities

Standard 2: Establish and maintain the trust and confidence of people

Standard 3: Be accountable for the quality of my practice and the decisions I make

Standard 4: Maintain my continuing professional development

Health and Care Professional Council

This chapter will address the following proficiencies:

- 1 be able to practise safely and effectively within their scope of practice
 - 3 be able to maintain fitness to practise
 - 4 be able to practise as an autonomous professional, exercising their own professional judgement
 - 8 be able to communicate effectively
 - 9 be able to work appropriately with others
 - 11 be able to reflect on and review practice
 - 12 be able to assure the quality of their practice
 - 14 be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice
-

Chapter aims

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Recognise the role of the mind and different types of emotion and understand how they might impact you.
 - Be able to reflect on how you are feeling, using one or more emotions.
 - Identify ways in which you might deal with your emotions before reacting to other people.
 - Demonstrate an awareness of emotional wellbeing and its impact on you.
-

Introduction

Our mind, consciousness and emotions are linked, and it is important to understand these connections. In this chapter, we will begin by exploring the nature of the mind and how it is embodied in the interactions we have with others and the environment. The discussion goes on to identify nurturing mind strategies to

cultivate wellbeing and it will help you to develop a robust understanding of emotions and their impact on behaviour and responses to situations. In the final part of the chapter, we will explore the workings of the mind and emotion and consider strategies to optimise positive wellbeing and limit maladaptive emotional responses, particularly in the social setting of the workplace. We will invite you to reflect on your own emotional resources and to begin to consider strategies to strengthen them. We will have activities to engage with and scenarios to underpin your engagement with critical thinking, which is a skill that will serve you well on your professional course.

The Importance of Mind

Imagine that your mind lives inside a backpack and that you open the backpack to look inside at its contents. What would you find? Images. An enormous diversity of images. Images that you create, images that you combine, images that you idealise. These are the images of reality – the landscapes you see, the sounds you listen to, the ideas you imagine, the projects you anticipate, the objects you touch, the events you experience, the aspirations you have – resulting from an intrinsic body/mind connection in interaction with the world that surround us, thus, always in motion.

As Damasio (2018) underlines, in normal circumstances, when we are aware and alert, the images that flow through our mind have one perspective only: our own. We recognise ourselves as owning the mental experiences we are exposed to. Each one of us appreciates that specific mental state accordantly with different perspectives: mine/yours.

Traditionally, the mind has been associated with the linear associations performed in the brain activity, but recent research has brought into discussion the notion that the mind is both embodied and relational (Siegel, 2020). This means that, together, mind, body and features of our interpersonal relationships and of the environments in which we live regulate both energy and information flow. To better understand the embodiment and the relational nature of mind consider, for example, how do you think and feel both individually and when in a group or in a community: the interpersonal experiences that you might have, while in a group/community influence how your mind processes the images information and how it works. This means that your internal mental experience – your sense of knowing, of imagining and being aware – is enriched and challenged by the subjective nature of interactions that occur between you and others, and between you and the environment.

Is the Mind Conscient?

Mind and consciousness, as Damasio alerts, 'are not synonymous' (Damasio, 2021, p. 135). Consciousness is a distinctive and subjective state of mind that allows us to integrate the experiences we are exposed to. Let us go back to the images in your

backpack: without conscience all these images will be meaningless, deprived from any type of value. The conscience is what makes the mental experiences possible: think of everything you learn, remember, manipulate or, as Koch (2018, p. S9) illustrates: 'It is the tune stuck in your head, the sweetness of chocolate mousse, the throbbing pain of a toothache, the fierce love for your child and the bitter knowledge that eventually all feelings will end'. Our consciousness involves, then, a variety of distinctive experiences that imply more than mental images, as it also includes conscious experiences that arise from real sensations, feelings and experiences.

Creating Wellbeing: Conscious Mind Training What Can You Do?

Beyond the provision of the professional support available, you play a core role in developing awareness, strategies and promoting a positive state of mental wellbeing for yourself. Therefore, the choice to train your mind is, naturally, sensitive to your own life experience, your own cultural, social, spiritual and environmental dynamics. Additionally, as an upcoming professional, one of the major challenges ahead is also connecting yourself to the continuously changing social, political, educational and environmental conditions in relation to your future everyday professional practice. As different kinds of experiences shape the way your mind works, we share below different suggestions:

- ***Delve yourself into a world of imagination and creativity***

Imagination and creativity are skills that you would aim to understand and develop to face the unpredictability and complexity of life. Embedded in imagination, creativity is, *per se*, a stimulant for the mind allowing different ways of thinking and embracing different perspectives. Whether you are actively engaged with an art activity (e.g., chorus), visiting a museum, finding shapes in the cloud's movements, or simply ingeniously expanding yourself while dancing in your living room, you are creating elements of originality and expressiveness. Creativity has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of each one of us and results from a recent large study (BBC, 2019) highlighted 3 ways you can actively use it:

- As a distraction tool – so we can use creativity, inspiration and imagination to avoid stress.
- As a contemplation tool – using creativity to give us the space to think and re-evaluate problems in our lives and make plans for resolving them.
- As a means of growth and self-development to face challenges by building up and reinforcing our self-esteem and self-confidence. It is important to keep in mind, then, that engaging in imaginative and creative activities have long-term benefits, including handling your own mood and boosting your overall wellbeing, allowing your mind a healthy gateway (APPGAHW, 2017; BBC, 2019).

- ***Develop mindful awareness***

Studies on the physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness have been growing for the past two decades; yet, as noted by Smith et al. (2017), a review on the existent literature on mindfulness and meditation highlighted there is still no consensual definition or common understanding of its impact. The Oxford Mindfulness Centre defines mindfulness as an intrinsic aptitude transversal to all human beings, a state of mind that allows us to focus in the moment, free from any judgemental chains; it is like a quiet inner exploration aligned with the structure of your consciousness. Some of the most ancient mindful practices are yoga and meditation, but there are so many more that you can explore from breathing exercises to mindful seeing, to find the best mindful practice for you.

While debates around mindfulness definition and mindful awareness practices continue, there are some benefits already consensually identified (Smith et al., 2017):

- Intensification of resilience to stress.
- Improvement in attention focus, reducing mind-wandering and, consequently, stimulating concentration and problem-solving skills development.
- Self-compassion and compassion behaviours increase.
- Positive impact in mental health.
- Reduces bias and, thus, promotes tolerance.
- Beneficial to relationships, as mindfulness could have a positive impact on your relationships. The beauty of mindful practice is that it can be applied to everyday life events or routines while embracing one's wellbeing.

- ***Cultivate the sense of gratitude***

An increasing body of research is beginning to study how gratitude improves different features of our life and how it contributes to a healthy mind (Allen, 2018; Short, 2021). As Allen (2018) points out, nurturing the practice of gratitude inspires us to value what is good in our lives, to develop new relationships and enrich the existent ones. Gratitude meaning can vary from person to person, but overtime, it has been recognised and conceptualised as 'an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait or a coping response' (Short, 2021, p. 130). Understood in these terms, the experience of gratitude embraces different features of our personality development (individual factors) and the way we live the emotional, the cultural, the social, the religious dimensions of our life (social factors). Generated by value, gratitude can be seen as an integrated multi-value practice involving a range of behaviours and actions that shape the person we are and the relationships

we have with others with a variety of beneficial outcomes (Allen, 2018; Short, 2021) such as:

- Increase of the energy levels, the enthusiasm and determination.
- A real sense of happiness, joy and satisfaction. Values the feeling of self-worth.
- Stimulates emotional intelligence development.
- Fuels the conscious mind in the search for opportunities of development.
- Refines cognitive skills such as creativity and fosters social connections.
- Development of resilience mechanisms and associated improvement of mental health. Engaging and cultivating gratitude practices is simple and, just like the mindful practices, can be incorporated in our daily life.

ACTIVITY 4.1

Reflection and Practice

Choose one of the following exercises:

- 1 Go for a walk by the streets of your city or town. Pay attention to the details, look for an open-air art gallery or the unrestricted and diverse street art also known as graffiti and appreciate it. Perhaps you will identify, and question embedded political statements, perhaps you will be enchanted by the aesthetic of a mural. The possibilities are immense.
 - 2 Select a place that makes you feel good, either indoors or outdoors. Focus on your breathing and calmly start developing an awareness of the length and depth of each breath in and out. Start a 10-minute timer and initiate controlled inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Make sure you feel the deepness of your breathing into your core. Find your own exercise pace and repeat it regularly.
 - 3 Write a short thank you note for yourself or for a person that you like to nurture. Expressing appreciation will make you both happier. Try to do it recurrently.
-

Emotions

Emotions cover aspects of how we feel, they are subjective and transient, fluid or changing and we might change our emotional 'state' throughout the day depending on what we are doing. So, what do we really understand when we think of emotion, do we think of only one feeling, or do we think of a range of feelings from vague to deep? When we speak of feeling happy, sad, afraid, angry, nervous, tearful or excited, what we are doing is describing our emotional state (Tantam, 2014). We sometimes feel two or more emotions, so we might feel happy and excited, or tearful and afraid, or even happy and tearful at the same time. Sometimes our emotions are identifiers of our internal state, but other times they are in response to an external factor (Barrett, 2018). So, we might feel nervous if we are waiting for a grade for a paper we have

submitted and then happy or sad depending on whether we passed the assessment or not. We can also hide our feelings, so we might show the world a different picture to how we really feel (Satpute et al., 2016), for example, we might look happy when we are feeling quite sad (Barrett, 2018). We know, therefore, that emotions trigger or underpin behavioural, hormonal, somatic or pathological, and neurochemical reactions, which we refer to as 'expressions of emotion' (Zach & Gogolla, 2021).

ACTIVITY 4.2

How Do You Feel Right Now?

Describe how you feel. Are you feeling a mix of emotions, or is one emotion more powerful than the other?

Image Source - (GDJ) <https://openclipart.org/detail/222289/bright-idea>

The chances are that you considered only a few emotions, but research proposes there are 27 distinct categories, which are bridged by continuous gradients (Cowen & Keltner, 2017). While there has been a significant body of research on emotions, we tend instead to think of them from an automatic, perfunctory perspective, focusing on our physiological, psychological, cognitive or as a behavioural response to a specific experience or event, but emotions can be complex and create within us a psychophysiological response; so, we might feel angry or upset and our heart may feel as if it is racing where we experience a blend of an emotional and physical response to something (Nagoski, 2020), but we can also experience the same physiological response to love or excitement which means our physical response to situations is only a part of our reaction and our psychological response is another. We can also consider the positive aspect of this union between the mental and physical response to something; so, before we sit an exam, we might naturally feel nervous or anxious. This natural feeling is releasing cortisol and adrenaline, which are both stress hormones, into our body which will allow us to be ready for the challenge of the exam (Partridge, 2020). So, when you start to feel anxious and jittery, try to remember that this is normal and is your body and mind preparing you for the task in front of you.

Case study 4.1

Bob

Bob is coming to the end of the first semester and about to sit his assessments. When he joined the university, he was very concerned he would not be able to keep up with the work and pass the assessments. Bob failed one paper at college and can remember how upset he was when he saw his grade. He now keeps remembering how he felt, and although he is worried about all of the assessments, he is particularly worried about an upcoming exam which is making him feel very stressed and anxious.

ACTIVITY 4.3

Critical Thinking

Read the scenario above and think about Bob's situation.

Can you understand how he is feeling?

What would you advise him to do?

Think about Bob's experience when he failed his assessment at college. Think about yourself. Do you have any similar concerns? What are they? Can you put them into simple words to explain them to another person? What might help you to feel less stressed or anxious?

Make a note of how you might address any concerns around your studies and assessments as this will allow you to really think about how you are feeling and consider what events make you feel more anxious. Think also of what you could do to support yourself or help others support you if the concerns feel overwhelming as this will allow you to be proactive and seek out the support you might need.

The effect of emotions on our body can be significant but serve different purposes; for example, you may find that you have heard of the 'fight or flight' response to stimuli, which is involved in self-preservation (Quick & Spielberger, 1994) but it might be that you have less awareness of how unresolved emotional responses can affect our day-to-day functioning. McGonigal (2015) proposes that stress can also be a force of good, for change, and for development; so instead of trying to avoid addressing a situation, or denying there is a problem, or starting to withdraw from your studies, recognise that these are not helpful responses as you may end up facing a bigger problem later. So, what can you do to address it? See below (Figure 4.1):

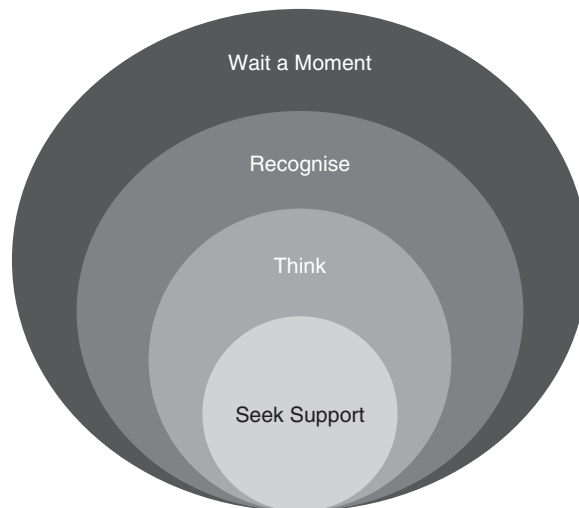


Figure 4.1 Steps in positive emotional stress management

i. **Wait a moment**

This is important because, sometimes, we react immediately to something and create a different problem for ourselves, so stopping before reacting can allow us to think it through a little more clearly.

ii. **Recognise**

It is important to recognise your feelings and think about why something is affecting you so much, for example, does it make you remember something that happened previously, or has your day not started well and the issue that occurred made it worse. It is fine for you to feel upset by something, but it is important to not make someone else responsible for something they have no knowledge of.

iii. **Think**

Now that you are in the ‘thinking’ phase, points for consideration might be

- What is the issue for you?
- How are you feeling?
- What could be the outcome of you reacting?
- What is another way to deal with the issue?
- What can you do for yourself to make you feel better?

iv. **Seek Support**

- What support might you need?
- How might you access it?
- Who can you speak with?

ACTIVITY 4.4

Reflection

Go back to Case Study 4.1 and remind yourself of Bob’s situation.

Think about making a plan to help prevent any anxiety or stress around your own assessments. What might you include in it? Your plan could include things like pre-planning, writing support, help with proofreading, or help with referencing. Remember it is your plan, personal and bespoke for you, so focus only on what you need.

Mind and Emotion

One of our uniquely human qualities is the ability to think and reflect on experiences in any situation. The thinking we apply to our experiences can affect our emotional responses. Likewise, our emotions can affect our thinking (Barrett, 2018). This synergistic relationship can be beneficial in that it allows us to have a holistic sense of our experiences, which allows us to learn from them, achieve personal growth, and move on. However, the opposite can also be the case. Negative

thoughts, often stemming from previous experiences, can infiltrate our emotions and cause us to have maladaptive responses in our environment.

Until recently, the popular belief was that our emotional experiences influence our thinking. However, recent research by Barrett (2018) suggests that it is our brain that uses its predictive power to construct our emotions. This suggests that we have more control over our emotions than we think we do.

The Mind and the Emotion in Context

The work of health and social care professionals involves a high level of physical and emotional interaction with patients, clients, service users and between staff. Challenges in the health and social care environment contribute to staff stress and burnout (Kings Fund, 2018) which according to Hagemeister and Volmer (2018) can promote social conflict in the workplace; so how do we resolve this? Most people are able to manage their emotions, but some use ‘Display Rules’ defined as the expression of positive emotions while masking negative emotions (Fasbinder, Shidler, & Caboral-Stevens, 2020, p. 118). This type of adaptive approach to emotional stress leads to longer-term negative wellbeing consequences and contributes to stress, burnout and a range of physical and mental health problems which calls for an emotional regulation.

The ability to regulate emotions is key to avoiding negative consequences for personal and professional wellbeing and to optimally support patients and clients. Emotional regulation is a learned process and involves the ability to identify your emotion, the meaning the emotion has for you and how you experience and express the emotion. It allows us to recognise and find alternative responses to the beliefs we have created about ourselves, others and our surroundings, but because we are not born with emotional regulation, it needs to be developed and this requires self-work and self-care.

Gross (2015), who conducted early research in this area, identified reappraisal and suppression as commonly used approaches to emotion regulation. While reappraisal is about cognitively reframing a negative situation in a positive light in order to change the negative emotional impact, suppression is about modifying your response to the situation, sometimes by inhibiting your natural response. Kelly et al. (2018) argues that both strategies are successful in reducing the negative impact of a situation; but suppression is seen as a more maladaptive approach that can lead to the return of negative emotional responses (Brockman et al., 2016).

Resilience Building and Emotional Regulation

Emotion-driven thinking is a component of our emotional responses (McKay, Fanning, & Zurita, 2011) and is the way our mind works to give meaning to a

situation. McKay and colleagues propose that our cognitive responses can be divided into predicting what might happen as a result of a situation or making a judgement. They argue that while predictions can prepare us for a future event, they can also create stress and anxiety about something that may never happen.

Judgement tends to be negative about the subject of the situation and this can trigger further negative emotions. If you are the object of the situation, then judging yourself using negative ruminating thoughts can leave you feeling sad or depressed. When other people are the object and we judge them negatively, this can create feelings of anger and resentment and cause rifts in social relationships (Arimitsu, 2015). A healthy way to manage our reactions is to use emotional regulation strategies.

We often use emotionally driven thoughts to create beliefs about ourselves, others and our surroundings. McKay, Fanning, and Zurita (2011) suggest dividing these thoughts into two categories, predicting and judgement.

- Predicting what could happen. These are the ‘what-if’ questions we ask ourselves when we think about what might happen in a situation. These predictions tend to be negatively biased. The problem with this kind of thinking is that you can catastrophise a situation and project yourself down a ‘rabbit hole’. For example: ‘What if I fail the assignment?’ ‘I will be removed from the course,’ ‘I will be so ashamed’. ‘My family will be very disappointed in me’ and so on.
- Judgement of the incident and the people involved. This is how we evaluate and draw conclusions about ourselves, others and the situation. This type of thinking is usually based on the positive or negative emotions we generate about ourselves, others and the situation. For example, you may get a poor grade on an assignment, and one way to understand this is to assess the situation and the people involved, including yourself. For example, ‘the assignment guidelines were very confusing’, ‘the tutor did not explain things well’, ‘I am just not smart enough to become a social work/nursing student’.

Prediction and judgement responses are not without history and consequences. We base our judgements on past experiences, often in our social circle of family, friends or founded on our upbringing. These emotionally based thoughts can lead to feelings of sadness, depression and anger which, if left unchecked, can lead to increased feelings of worthlessness, decreased self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence. This can result in poor decision making.

ACTIVITY 4.5

Reflection

Reflect on a situation where your thoughts, driven by your emotions, led you down a ‘rabbit hole’. What alternative thoughts could you have had to avoid catastrophising a situation?

ACTIVITY 4.6

Reflection

Reflect on an incident where you came to a conclusion about yourself, others and the situation related to the incident.

Reflect on your thoughts at the time. It helps if you write them down.

Do you still believe that thought?

Case study 4.2

Shirley

Shirley was asked to call a relative to pick up her partner from the unit. She knows this is an easy task, but it is her first time calling a relative and she is keen to get it right. She writes down the instructions and is given the phone number. Before she could make the call, Shirley was asked to help her colleague. This took longer than she expected, and she realises that she is now late with the call. Shirley hurriedly makes a phone call but because she is nervous, she forgets that the instructions are in her bag.

When a person answers the phone, Shirley starts right away and gives all the details until the person interrupts her to say that her partner came home yesterday. Shirley checks the number she was given and finds that she was given another person's number. She apologises and quickly hangs up the phone. She worries that she may have compromised a patient's confidentiality.

ACTIVITY 4.7

Critical Thinking

Read the scenario above and think about Shirley's situation.

- What might Shirley be feeling and how might these feelings affect her thinking?
 - What prediction might Shirley make based on the situation?
 - What judgement might Shirley make based on the situation?
-

One of the first steps in understanding how and why we react to the different situations we encounter is to understand the internal and external influences on those reactions. Manstead (2005) emphasises the role of the social environment in influencing our emotional responses and expression. Zych and Gogolla (2021) argue that there is a mutual relationship between the social environment and our reactions and the meaning we give to our experiences.

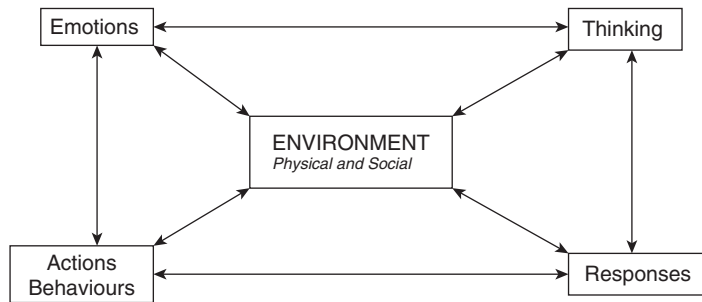


Figure 4.2 Graphic representation of the mutual correlations between mind, emotion and the environment

The following diagram provides a visual framework that illustrates the synergic nature of the interaction between our mind, emotion and the environment (Figure 4.2).

Our mind and emotions work together to form responses and form experiences. This can have positive and negative influences on how we interact with our social environment. Our ability to function within the social environment in the workplace requires us to be able to regulate our emotions. Being aware of how to evaluate and think about a situation can be the first step in regulating our response which can bring about a more positive outcome for us.

Chapter Summary

We started this chapter by introducing the importance of understanding how our mind works and how our mental wellbeing also correlates with specific states of mind. We used several examples to illustrate how you can develop mind training strategies to promote your wellbeing. This was followed by the discussion of role and effect of emotions. Even though our emotional state is formed from a complex set of processes that were not explored in depth, we hope it has become clear to you that emotions are a central part of the process that generates a certain state of mind in a specific context; and that they are at the core of internal and interpersonal processes that create the subjective experience of yourself and the world. Being able to regulate your mind will help you to manage your emotions which will enable you to function optimally in the health and social care spaces. Throughout this book, there are links and further advice to do with managing your emotions and stress, so do read it but also keep it with you as you can refer back to it when you need to.