

Students and Mental Health

Personality Traits of Healthy Individuals

What personality traits do some people have that allow them to cope with life experiences more effectively than others? As students are returning to school to fulfill academic requirements, I believe it is equally important to focus on helping students develop characteristics that reinforce healthy mental health.

The study of characteristics that make up mental health is called "positive psychology." The following characteristics are taken from Dr. Abraham Maslow's study of personality traits that constitute a self-actualized person, Dr. Victor Frankel's model of logotherapy and my husband, Mike Archer, who has been an extraordinary role model for me.

- "Resilience"

The ability to bounce back from adversity. These people recognize that life has limitations and disappointments. They are able to overcome or manage obstacles by finding creative ways to problem solve.

- "Humility"

The capacity to ask for help. These people are willing to admit they "do not have all the answers" and they can benefit from the expertise of others. I have noticed that the most successful people are those who are open and willing to listen to other's advice to further their potential.

- "Empowerment"

Find resources to respond to life events in a way that allows for resolution rather than victimization. These people can differentiate what they can control and what they can not control. Dr. Victor Frankl was a holocaust survivor. When his family was killed and he was stripped naked, he realized, "they can take everything from me except my freedom to respond any way I choose to what they are doing to me." While he was in the concentration camp, he wrote the book *Man's Search for Meaning* which continues to be one of the most influential books ever written.

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- **“Interpersonal Relationships”**
The ability to interact with others with compassion and empathy. These people have intimate relationships with a few and maintain a friendship with everyone.
- **“Flexibility”**
Being able to adjust expectations to fit with current reality. These people are willing to make adjustments in their opinions and choices when they are presented with new facts or circumstances.
- **“Temperance”**
To identify and channel emotions without internalizing or acting out of control. These people are able to take responsibility for their reactions by speaking their truth without blaming or hurting others.
- **“Acceptance”**
The ability to respect self and others. These people are secure with themselves and can allow others to be different without feeling threatened. In fact, these people appreciate diversity and realize they can learn from anyone.
- **“Balance”**
Maintain healthy life style to include solitude and social interactions. Other areas of balance include time spent at work and play; sleep and wakefulness; rest and exercise; and time spent indoors and outdoors.
- **“Humor”**
The capacity to laugh at self with others. These people can find some humor even in difficult situations. Randy Pausch, in his book "The Last Lecture" stated that after he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer he had planned a scuba diving trip with his friends. One of his friends said, "Randy, don't bother using sunscreen." He laughed and said, "humor is one of the greatest gifts our species has."

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- "Meaning"

Recognize that regardless of changing circumstances, life never ceases to have meaning. Victor Frankl concluded, "There is always someone looking down, a friend, family member or even God, who would expect not to be disappointed." My husband was diagnosed with leukemia and suffered greatly during his chemotherapy and bone marrow transplant. He never complained or asked "why me." Instead he kept focusing on me and our son. He knew his struggle to survive was more than just for himself.

"It is surmounting difficulties that make heroes."

Louis Pasteur

"Success is in the Journey not the destination."

Arthur Robert Ashe, Jr.