



MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM DEFINITION

naming, understanding, and
analyzing contributors and
signs of problem



mental health problem definition

Identifying a mental health problem for which to create a solution is more challenging than it seems. While a clinical diagnosis has its place, we must first conduct an in-depth investigation into what it is we are identifying in the households, communities, and contexts where we serve. Culture and context can be particularly influential in the naming of the particular pain or struggle that a person is experiencing.

This exercise walks you through the process of naming, describing, and recognizing the numerous ways in which your chosen mental health problem is connected to daily life. The challenge here is to resist giving the problem your own name or diagnosis too soon. Focus on the possible contributors and outward signs of the problem. How do you know it exists in the community? What are the shared experiences of those who struggle with this?

instructions

This exercise has three sections: contributors to the problem, names for the problem, and signs and symptoms of the problem.

Step 1: Start with names for the problem with a brainstorm. Together with your team, explore how this problem has been identified by the participants of your program or members of your community. How do they describe the problem? What names are they calling it? Remember that they may not be using terms that you associate with mental health or psychology.

Step 2: Identify potential contributors to the problem across the different areas where your participants live and work. Which events, interactions, or patterns might cause the problem in the first place? Are there triggers to the problem? What makes the problem worse?

Step 3: Now imagine that you are an external observer into the lives of your participants. What do you notice in their behavior that tells you they experience the problem? What are they saying, and what are others saying about them? Be as concrete and specific as possible, including quotes, past incidents, and examples.

As you move forward in designing a model, this problem definition exercise will help you think about visible, measurable changes that you may want to aim for. Specifically, pay attention to which of these contributors, signs, or symptoms may change over time if you are successful. What might get in the way of your success?



related tools: ecological systems analysis, evaluation planning workbook, problem chain analysis



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Contributors: what leads to the problem?



in the home



at work or school



in the community



in the world

What do you call this problem?

Signs & Symptoms: what does the problem lead to?



What do you see them doing?



What do you hear them saying?



What do their family, friends, or colleagues say about them?