



Tapping into Productive Cultural Models

What Are Cultural Models?

Cultural models are widely shared assumptions, expectations and ways of reasoning about the world that people use to interpret information and engage with communications about children’s wellbeing. Some cultural models are more productive than others. Use this brief guide as a resource for choosing words, phrases and ideas that tap into the public’s knowledge and helpful assumptions about children’s wellbeing.

If You’re Talking About Parents ...

- Explain how attachment promotes mental health: show mental health as a positive result of attachment and offer examples of policies or systems-level changes that support attachment.
- Position parents as “brain-builders” and “buffers” against the toxic effects of stress.
- Brains get built in a process that begins before birth. Name parents as active “builders” of their children’s physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Use words like “support”, “trade” and “reciprocate” to describe how responsive, back-and-forth interactions between adults and children are important for healthy brain development.
- Explain the “bi-directionality” of how mental health challenges affect families. For example, when children don’t have access to the screenings and interventions that can help them build positive mental health, that can affect parents’ and other primary caregivers’ health and wellbeing, too, and affect their ability to function well.



If You're Talking About Children ...

- Compare children's development to a building process and emphasise that mental health is a part of the foundation.
- Explain how the processes of developing emotional regulation skills and resilience are critical aspects of children's mental health.
- Emphasise the collective benefits to communities or society at large of investing in children's healthy development.
- Discuss how children's attachment to parents forms and offer concrete examples.
- Demonstrate how social conditions can affect children's mental health directly and through the stress those conditions put on their parents or primary caregivers.

If You're Talking About Wellbeing ...

- Emphasise that health is integrated: use themes like "connection" and "weaving" to talk about how all pieces of health fit together, both in terms of individuals (e.g., mental, physical and social-emotional health are connected) and in terms of families (e.g., children's and adult family members' positive mental health are necessary for the wellbeing of everyone in the family).
- Reinforce the definition of mental health as a positive state of wellbeing, not just the absence of mental illness. Offer examples of promotive factors that support positive mental health.
- Wellbeing needs to be bolstered by external resources and relationships: use the language of "support" and "strength" to make this point.
- Name mental health as part of children's development.
- Remind audiences that mental health affects infants, babies and young children, not just older children.
- Explain how trauma can change the brain and behaviour and identify these as components of wellbeing.