

Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work through the Science of Positive Psychology

IIA Edmonton Chapter | January 2023

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Presentation synopsis

Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work through the Science of Positive Psychology

Despite many organizations returning to in-person or hybrid work and most provincial and federal public health restrictions lifted, life and work in 2022/23 has not really returned to normal for many of us. In this session, we will begin by looking at how we are doing as we head into 2023 and some of the key ongoing challenges to mental health and wellbeing for Canadians.

After touching on mental health and workplace trends, we will turn to the question: ‘What can we do about these challenges?’ The relatively new science of Positive Psychology has some ideas. After a brief introduction to this field, we will turn to three proven and practical Positive Psychology steps you and your team can take to improve mental health and wellbeing: i.) Building authenticity, ii.) savouring positive emotions, and iii.) strengths spotting.

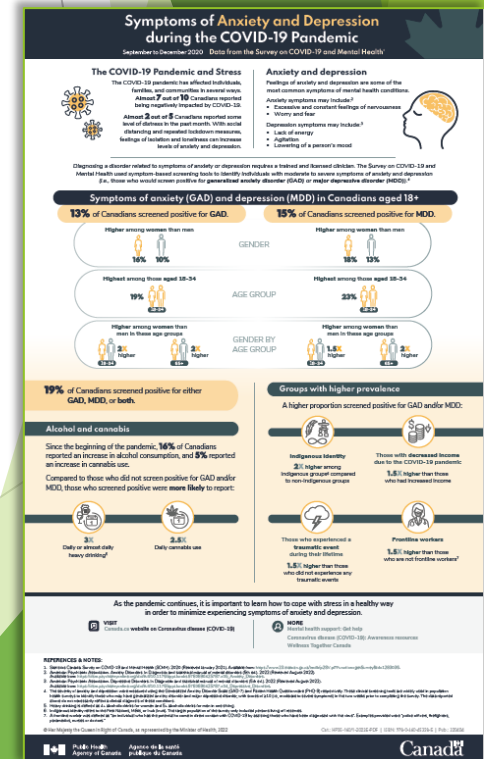


1. How are we doing as we head into 2023?

Key challenges to Mental Health and Wellbeing for Canadians

Mental health and mental illness in Canada

- ▶ Mental health ≠ mental illness
- ▶ We all have (varying) mental health
- ▶ Mental illness directly or indirectly affects **all Canadians**
- ▶ **1 in 5** Canadians experience a mental health problem or illness every year
- ▶ Major depression and anxiety disorders collectively affect **10%** of the Canadian population
- ▶ Racism, poverty, homelessness, discrimination, and systemic inequality can worsen mental health
- ▶ **\$79.9 billion** was the projected economic cost of mental illnesses to the Canadian healthcare and social support system in 2021
- ▶ The COVID-19 Pandemic worsened already declining mental health
- ▶ A Q4 2020 GoC survey found:
 - ▶ 13% of Canadians screened positive for Generalised Anxiety Disorder
 - ▶ 15% screened positive for Major Depressive Disorder
 - ▶ 16% reported increased alcohol consumption



Zoom Poll #1



Our mental health in 2022/23

"After two years, Canadians are really feeling overwhelmed and exhausted"

Margaret Eaton, national CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

"The information we have now about the impact of COVID-19 on the world's mental health is just the tip of the iceberg"

WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Overall personal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Answers to the prompt: "Describe the last two years for you."

■ Better ■ Worse



Chart: Dexter McMillan • Source: Angus Reid Institute

CBC News

*"While more than **a third of disability claims** under Canadian employer-sponsored benefits plans in 2022 were due to mental-health reasons, just two-thirds (63 per cent) of organizations are addressing this risk effectively"*

Benefits Canada Staff, citing findings from a Mercer survey

Zoom Poll #2



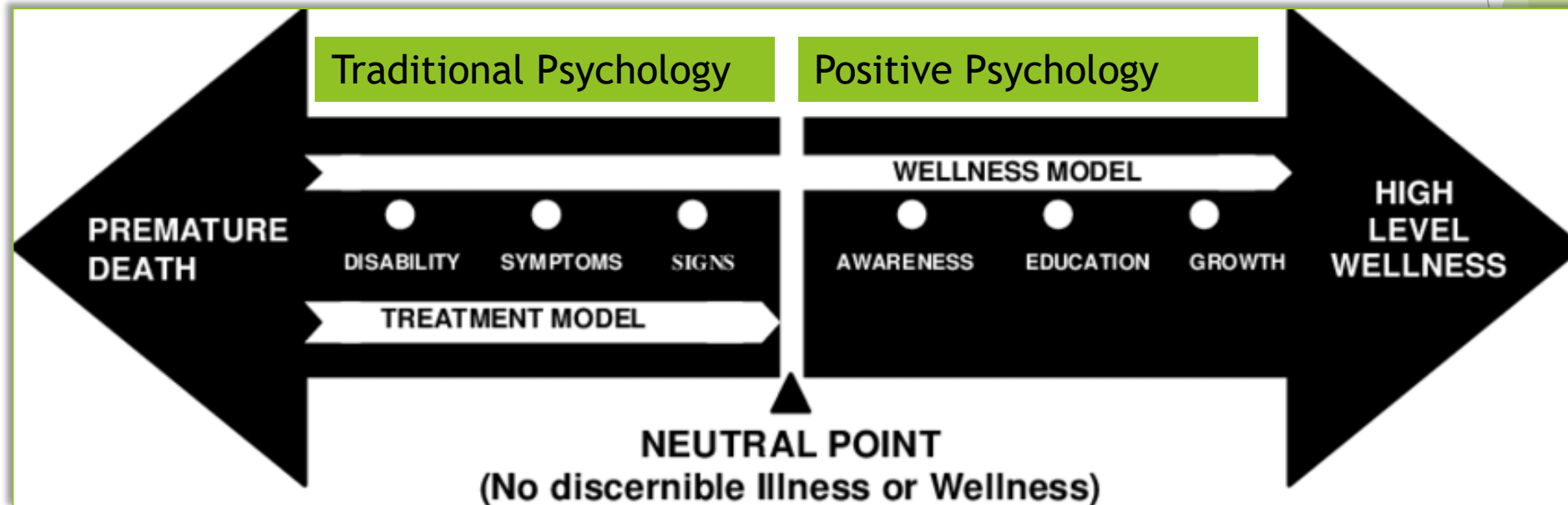


2. What can we do to support our own and our teams' mental health?

The science of Positive Psychology has some ideas

What is positive psychology?

- ▶ Contemporary Positive Psychology was introduced by Professors Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the early 2000's
- ▶ The science of well-being, excellence, and optimal human functioning
- ▶ If traditional Psychology is mainly about diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, Positive Psychology is about assessing and enabling optimal mental health and wellbeing



Zoom Poll #3





3. Three proven Positive Psychology steps you and your team can take to improve mental health and wellbeing

3.1 Increasing authenticity and decreasing toxic positivity

- ▶ **Brené Brown on authenticity:** *It is not comfortable but also not excruciating for those that embrace vulnerability and are not prone to debilitating shame*
- ▶ Practice and model authenticity, but be mindful of the **authenticity to relationship ratio**
- ▶ **Toxic positivity** and what to say instead

Two things you can do:

▶ Brené Brown's two-word exercise:

- ▶ Start a weekly team meeting or 1:1 by going around and answering the question 'how are you doing/feeling' in two words.
- ▶ No explanation and no comments, but do it regularly for at least 2-3 months

▶ Stopping toxic positivity:

- ▶ Avoid the urge to say, "just be/stay positive," "look on the bright side," or "everything happens for a reason" the next time you feel negative emotions, or someone shares a challenge or struggle.
- ▶ Rather say something like "Sometimes, things happen to us and they're very difficult and we can't really make sense of them. And it just sucks and that's okay," or "I don't even know what to say - that must be really hard/sad/upsetting."

3.2 Savouring positive emotions

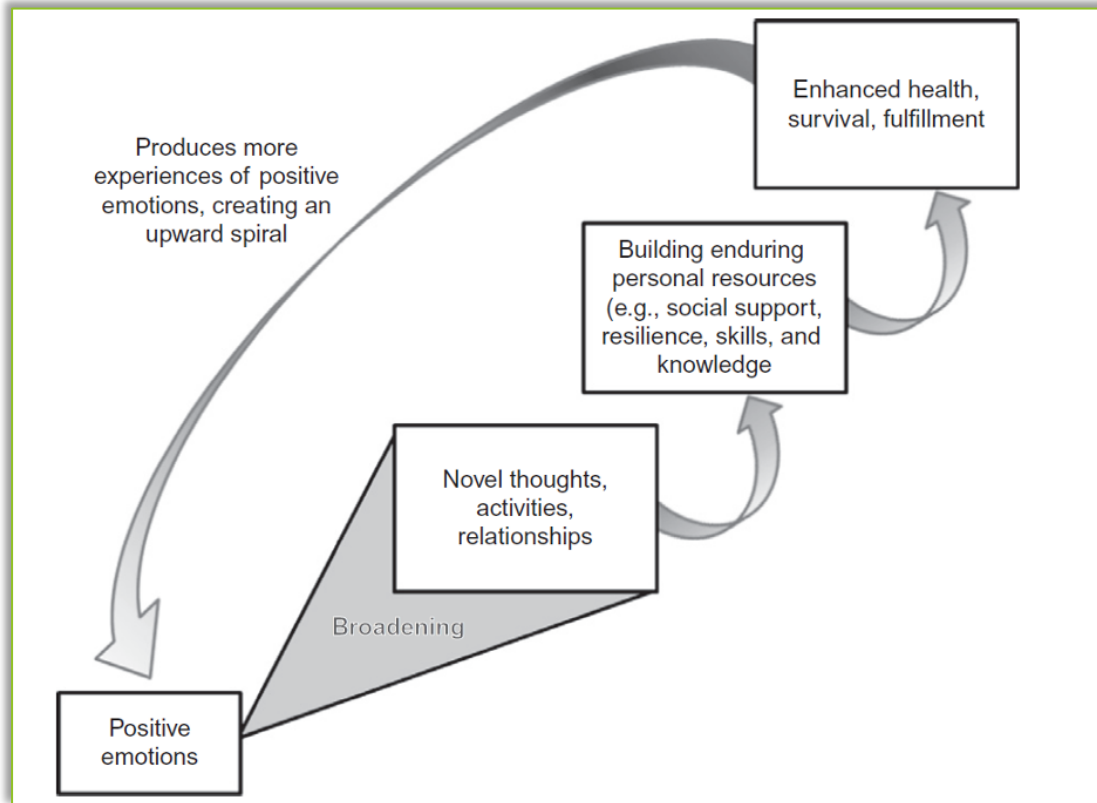


Image from 'Broaden and Build Theory of Positive Emotions - Psychology of Human Emotion: An Open Access Textbook (unizin.org)'

Two things you can do:

- ▶ **Expand your emotional vocabulary**
 - ▶ Review the Berkeley Well-Being Institute's Positive Emotions [article and resources](#)
 - ▶ The next time you feel 'good' or 'happy,' can you expand and add a little nuance?
- ▶ **Notice and savour positive emotions**
 - ▶ Gratitude journaling
 - ▶ Keeping an eye out for the good in your day/week, and then [savouring](#) it for 5-10 seconds
 - ▶ Test and improve your [positivity ratio](#)

3.3 Strengths Spotting

- ▶ The VIA Character Strengths classification is Positive Psychology’s ‘diagnostic tool’ of what is **good** with you
- ▶ You can take the survey and get your results for free [here](#)
- ▶ Once you know your own strengths, you can start **noticing** them and **applying** them when faced with an opportunity or challenge
- ▶ To take it to next level, **notice and call out** when your team members exhibit their character strengths (this is called **strengths spotting**)

VIA INSTITUTE ON CHARACTER

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues

VIRTUE OF Wisdom	CREATIVITY Original & Adaptive, Clever, A problem solver, Sees and does things in different ways	CURIOSITY Interested, Explores new things, Open to new ideas	JUDGMENT A critical thinker, Thinks things through, Open minded	LOVE OF LEARNING Masters new skills & topics, Systematically adds to knowledge	PERSPECTIVE Wise, Provides wise counsel, Takes the big picture view
VIRTUE OF Courage	BRAVERY Shows valor, Doesn't shrink from fear, Speaks up for what's right	PERSEVERANCE Persistent, Industrious, Finishes what one starts	HONESTY Authentic, Trustworthy, Sincere	ZEST Enthusiastic, Energetic, Doesn't do things half-heartedly	
VIRTUE OF Humanity	LOVE Warm and genuine, Values close relationships	KINDNESS Generous, Nurturing, Caring, Compassionate, Altruistic	SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE Aware of the motives and feelings of others, Knows what makes others tick		
VIRTUE OF Justice	TEAMWORK Team player, Socially responsible, Loyal	FAIRNESS Just, Doesn't let feelings bias decisions about others	LEADERSHIP Organizes group activities, Encourages a group to get things done		
VIRTUE OF Temperance	FORGIVENESS Merciful, Accepts others' shortcomings, Gives people a second chance	HUMILITY Modest, Lets one's accomplishments speak for themselves	PRUDENCE Careful, Cautious, Doesn't take undue risk	SELF-REGULATION Self-controlled, Manages impulses and emotions	
VIRTUE OF Transcendence	APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY & EXCELLENCE Feels awe & wonder in beauty, Inspired by goodness of others	GRATITUDE Thankful for the good, Expresses thanks, Feels blessed	HOPE Optimistic, Future-minded	HUMOR Playful, Brings smiles to others, Lighthearted	SPIRITUALITY Searches for meaning, Feels a sense of purpose, Senses a relationship with the sacred

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Deeper dive into strengths spotting

This and additional character strengths resources available on the VIA Institute on Character's website on the resources and activities page: [Strengths-Based Activities & Exercises | VIA Institute \(viacharacter.org\)](#)

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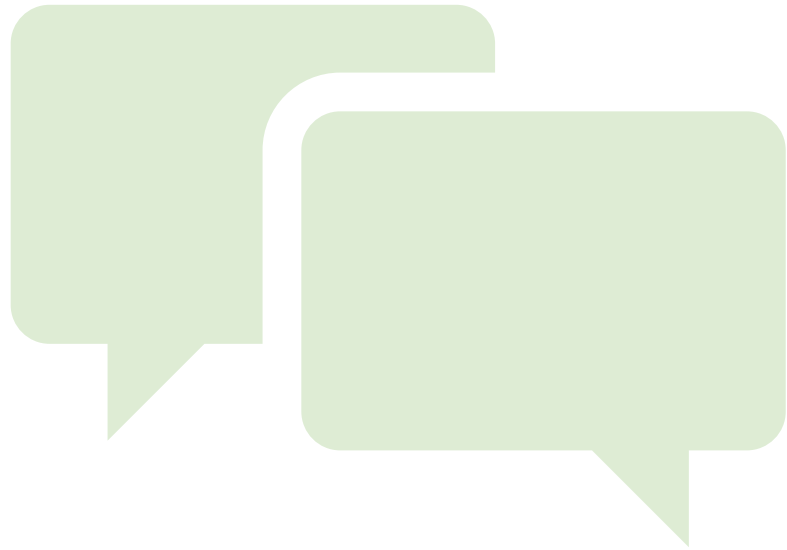
TO BE SPONTANEOUS WITH
STRENGTHS-SPOTTING



- 1** | SPONTANEOUS GROUP | Spot strengths "on-the-spot" in front of others! As strengths pop-up, point them out.
- 2** | SPONTANEOUS INDIVIDUAL | Take someone aside to recognize and appreciate their strengths use.
- 3** | EMPLOYEE REVIEWS | Weave strengths-spotting into formal feedback meetings.
- 4** | MISSION LINK | Evaluate and connect your organization's mission with the strengths you see in your employees.
- 5** | E-MAIL | Use 1-2 sentences of an email to your customer or coworker to show appreciation for their unique strengths.
- 6** | SOCIAL MEDIA | Observe others' posts and comment on specific character strengths at play.
- 7** | PHONE MEETINGS | Use the audio-only nature of phone calls to practice strengths-spotting and build confidence for face-to-face situations.
- 8** | CHARACTER STRENGTHS-360 | Give your boss or coworker the VIA Classification and ask them to check off 5 strengths they have observed most in you. Invite them to share 1 concrete example for each strength they've checked.
- 9** | WHEN YOU'RE ALONE AND THINKING | Reflect on the highest character strengths of others in order to prepare yourself for strengths-spotting when the time comes.
- 10** | USE CUES | Consider the top 3-5 signature strengths for each person you work with, then post these top strengths next to your computer or on the inside of a folder so that they're top-of-mind.

Zoom Poll #4





Q & A

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect. The central area is a plain white space where the text is located.

Thank you!

Speaker Bio



Jasper Buys is an Organisational Psychologist, Functional Medicine Certified Health Coach, and Canadian Mental Health Association Certified Psychological Health and Safety Advisor.

Jasper is currently a Director at the Alberta Innovates Impact Action Lab and has over 13 years of experience as a Canadian not-for-profit and professional association board director. He specializes in strategy and facilitation and is currently studying mental health policy and impact science. Before moving to the public sector, Jasper was a Consulting Manager at EY's People Advisory Services practice in Western Canada, focused on Change Management, Leadership, and Culture.

While at EY, Jasper launched a national workplace mental health and wellness initiative and was active as a Mindfulness Champion within the firm. In his free time Jasper enjoys singing in choirs, downhill skiing, and reading science fiction.

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From a sunny afternoon spent wandering around the Glasshouse at RHS Wisley by [Annie Spratt](#) on [Unsplash](#)

*[Health continuum according to Travis \(Travis, 1984\)](#) in Bertsch & Osterman (2011) *The Effect of wellness brand awareness on expected and perceived service quality* article on ResearchGate*

Women in black shirt holding white ceramic mug by [Nathan Dumlao](#) on [Unsplash](#)