

# CALMD

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## UNIT 3.

*An independent life for  
adults with mental disabilities  
interface for specialist*



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# **The specifics of learning for adults with mental disabilities**

We, as psychologists, psychotherapists, humanitarian or social workers, educators, teachers, are called upon to create, like acrobats, our work of caring with and for the other through balances that are never immobile and with respect for the dignity and specificity of each person, in every place, in every time.

## Introduction and Objectives

Learning enables every individual, in every era of life and with every subjective characteristic, to experience new ways of doing, feeling, thinking, applying their knowledge and acquiring new knowledge. Learning is born and nurtured in a favorable environment, in the emotional sense: **emotional involvement is the basis of effective learning.**

When an individual takes an active part in what he or she does, when he or she can make sense of what he or she does, when he or she feels involved, the individual will be more ready to open up to new learning.

“Growing is a succession of acquisitions of independence [...] Education must begin from birth. It must understand the psychological development of man. It must know of the great psychic energy of man”, said Maria Montessori<sup>1</sup>.

### Objectives of course:

- Define the concept of learning.
- Integrate the concept of psychosocial well-being in learning practices.
- Recognize the specificity of each educational intervention and every educational relationship.
- Discover the social/psychological/cultural features to be taken into account in the development process.
- Identify the step to develop a learning process.

These objectives will allow at the **end of the course:**

- to recognize and promote the development of a continuous relationality between oneself (one's inner world), the other and the environment;
- to reinforce contents with regard to:
  - social skills;
  - communication;
  - community integration;
  - functional living activities;
  - behavior management;
  - mental health and wellbeing.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Montessori. *The 1946 London Lectures*



**What do we mean by learning?**

Learning is configured as an outcome of activity and not as an outcome of specific memorisation, so that the fundamental characteristic of this function is the direct involvement of the individual and his or her active participation, to the extent that he or she learns with all five senses, and not only through listening and solitary study<sup>2</sup>.

- Learning can provide a sense of stable routines and support a sense of participation in one's own life and in community life.
- Learning spaces provide opportunities for friendship, as well as peer and adult support. These interpersonal skills and relational supports are essential for a healthy social ecology, psychosocial wellbeing, and longer-term resilience<sup>3</sup>.

Psychology is an important factor in building educational pathways in general and even more so specifically with our target, young people with mental health disease. We cannot think of building educational pathways without the help of psychology.

The development of the educational plan involves the following points:

- Reflection on oneself as an educator, thus on one's own competences, limits, available resources, areas one would like to improve.
- Knowledge of the other: thus his/her learning needs in his/her specific life context, his/her available resources, his/her learning methods.
- Selection of teaching methods to make the learning plan individual.
- Recognition of and respect for individual differences.
- Discipline: a learning path involves processes of individual needs assessment, organization of an personal educational plan, monitoring, modifications when necessary, experimentation and research, reassessment.
- Active involvement of the beneficiary - family - community in the construction of his/her own educational plan.
- Knowledge of mental health.

<sup>2</sup> Ajello A.M. 2002, *Apprendimento e competenza: un nodo attuale*.

<sup>3</sup> INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support, 2018

## **Tool: Individual Development Plan**

Name person: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name Trainer/Youth worker/Social worker/Psychologist: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Plan start date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Plan expected completion date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Preliminary steps to the implementation of the individual development plan

<p><b>1. Need Assessment</b></p> <p>The need assessment starts from the trainer's participant observation but should be constructed in collaboration with the person with mental disability as far as possible.</p>	<p>Person and trainer should analyse and discover the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hobbies, interests, activities people are passionate about;</li> <li>• Strengths;</li> <li>• Area of difficulty and/or concern for the person;</li> <li>• Areas of growth.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Identifying Learning Objective</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social skills;</li> <li>• Communication;</li> <li>• Community integration;</li> <li>• Functional living activities (financial skills, autonomy movement, access to public services);</li> <li>• Problem solving;</li> <li>• Decision making;</li> <li>• Behaviour management;</li> <li>• Mental health and wellbeing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Identifying Methods and Activities of Learning</b></p>	<p>Some examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• visual material according to the need that emerged to promote respect for oneself and others, to facilitate access to health services: doctor, psychologist (create a visual map), to reach people to ask for help (caregivers, social and health services) or to reach routine places, e.g., community centres (create visual map);</li> <li>• role-playing;</li> <li>• practical learning exercises and experiences in the community (shopping, public transport, managing one's budget);</li> <li>• participative-recreational activities in the city (museums, theatres, concerts).</li> </ul>

## Template to organize the Personal Development Plan

### Learning Activity

- 
- 

### Learning Objective

- 
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### Methods

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### Planning steps and timing

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- 

### Date and notes for next follow up

- 
- 

### Recommendation for the future training and social support

- 
-

**What does psychosocial well-being mean and why integrate it into learning practice?**

Psychosocial well-being is a significant component of the learning process. It is an important precursor to learning in both formal educational contexts and non-formal learning spaces. The work, both psychological and educational, with children, young people and adults, in any cultural context, as in the private setting or in public health, makes it possible to observe the close **osmosis** that exists **between the affective and cognitive components**.

**Through the bond-tie with the other, learning takes place.** Learning is not just a process of memorizing content, but an opportunity to get to know one's own aptitudes and inclinations, one's limits, to experience collaborative relationships, to learn flexibility, the habit of considering other points of view, the ability to give and ask for help, to support and feel supported. All this happens for every human being, although in a different and specific form for people with mental disabilities. **No one mental disability is identical to another.** Even if at a clinical level we can find similar elements about MH signal or symptoms, which could guide us in our work, let us remember that in the process of building an educational relationship the essential element is to consider the individual as such, with his specific disability but also with his specific social, emotional, cognitive history, with his fears and hopes, with his community and environment.

On the basis of these considerations can a relevant learning plan be developed.

For example, there are people with autistic signal who appreciate to learn through a group work, and people with autistic signs who wish to learn solitarily.

**Some key definitions to better understand the value of the psychosocial element in the learning process and to promote a specificity of each educational intervention**



## COMMUNITY

Can be defined as a network of people who share similar interests, values, goals, culture, religion or history – as well as feelings of connection and caring among its members<sup>4</sup>.

## CULTURE

Is a set of shared values, beliefs and norms in a society. Culture is dynamic and changes as societies adapt to new information, challenges and circumstances<sup>5</sup>.

## DISTRESSING EVENT

Is an experience that impacts on a person's mental health and psychosocial well-being, for example, losing a loved one or experiencing bullying adapt to new information, challenges and circumstances<sup>6</sup>.

## HUMAN CAPACITY

Refers to physical and mental health and specifically considers individuals' knowledge, capacity and skills. Identifying an individual's own human capacity is the same as realizing his or her own strengths and values<sup>7</sup>.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community<sup>8</sup>.

## PSYCHOSOCIAL

The term "psychosocial" refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimensions of a person, where the one influences the other. The psychological dimension includes emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions. The social dimension includes relationships, family and community networks, social values and cultural practices. It is important to remember that what happens in one of these areas will<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> UNICEF, 2018 *Community-based Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Humanitarian Settings: Three-tiered Support for Children and Families*, [www.unicef.org/media/52171/file](http://www.unicef.org/media/52171/file)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>7</sup> IFRC 2009 *Psychosocial Interventions - A Handbook*

<sup>8</sup> WHO, 2018, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>

<sup>9</sup> IFRC 2018 <https://ecbhfa.ifrc.org/guides-and-tools/>

## PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

PSS refers to the processes and actions that promote the holistic wellbeing of people in their social world. It includes support provided by family and friends<sup>10</sup>.

## WELLBEING

Wellbeing is defined as a condition of holistic health and the process of achieving this condition. It refers to physical, emotional, social, and cognitive health. Wellbeing includes what is good for a person: having a meaningful social role; feeling happy and hopeful; living according to good values, as locally defined; having positive social relations and a supportive environment; coping with challenges through positive life skills; and having security, protection, and access to quality services<sup>11</sup>.

Well-being depends on many factors. The overlapping circles in the “well-being flower” below suggest that individual and collective well-being depends on what happens in a variety of areas, that meeting **at least some minimum level of need in each of these areas is necessary and that the areas are interrelated**<sup>12</sup>.

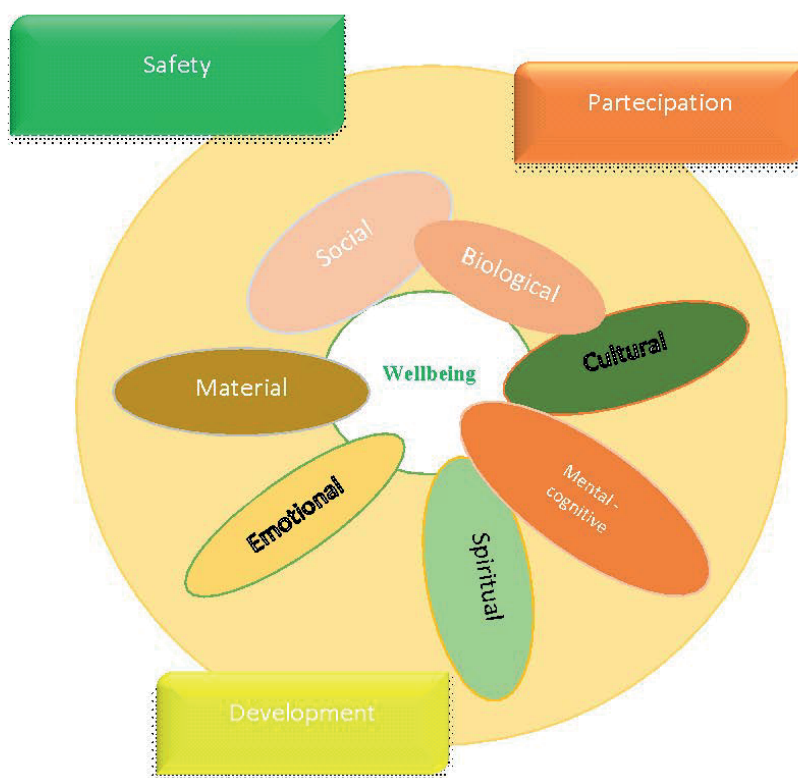


FIG. 1 - WELLBEING PROSPECTIVE

<sup>10</sup> INEE Guidance Note on Psychosocial Support, 2018

<sup>11</sup> ibidem

<sup>12</sup> IFRC 2018 <https://ecbhfa.ifrc.org/guides-and-tools/>

## Details of well-being flower <sup>13</sup>

**Social:** refers to friends, family, relatives, social activities, sports/leisure groups and clubs, as well as support groups. Human beings are social by nature and a denial of access to social activities and social interaction can increase a person's distress levels.

**Emotional:** refers to how we are feeling. Our feelings have an immense impact on our well-being, and if you have emotional distress, it can be difficult to ensure well-being even though you have all other parts of the well-being flower covered. One must feel at ease in order to truly experience well-being.

**Spiritual:** being free to practise one's religious or other spiritual practices is an important aspect of well-being.

**Cultural:** culture involves learnt patterns of belief, thought and behaviour. It defines how things are supposed to be for us. Culture makes life and its stages more predictable and enables a society to maintain itself. A culture also develops, adopts, or adapts the tools, types of shelter, transportation and other physical items needed to maintain itself. It defines standards of beauty, both of things and of people, and prescribes acceptable and unacceptable ways to express emotion. It defines what behavior is considered normal or abnormal. A culture evolves and changes over time.

**Mental/cognitive:** refers to thoughts and other related functions of the mind, which include problem-solving, learning how to learn, how to acquire information and how to be able to use it.

**Biological:** refers to the living organism. It is the physical health and the biological aspects of mental health as well as the absence of disease/disorder.

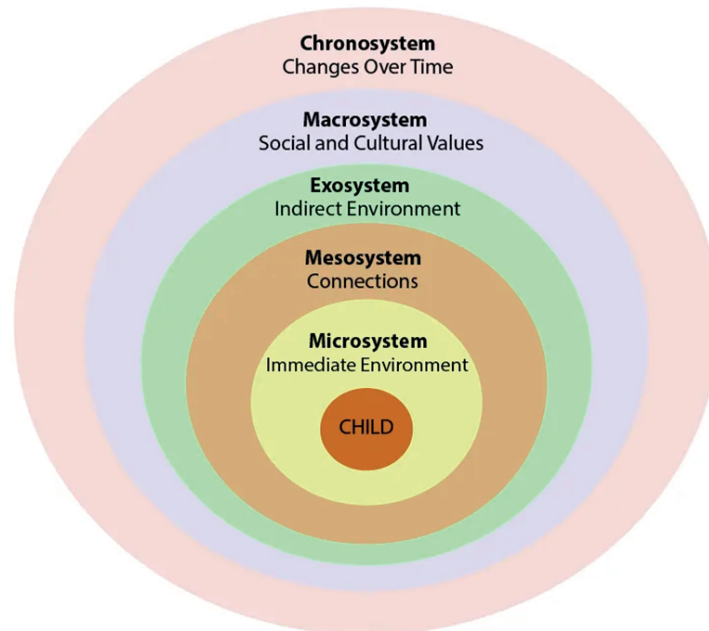
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<sup>13</sup> Source <https://ecbhfa.ifrc.org/guides-and-tools/>

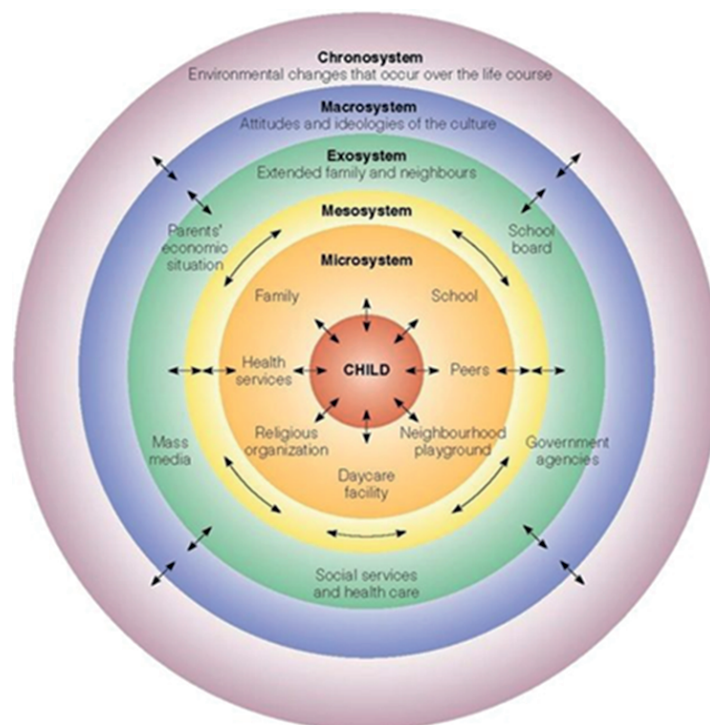
## SOCIAL ECOLOGY MODEL

The social-ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) is an important framework for understanding the influence of relational and environmental aspects in human development.<sup>14</sup>

### Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



(C) The Psychology Notes Headquarters <https://www.PsychologyNotesHQ.com>



<sup>14</sup> Bronfenbrenner U, 1979, *The Ecology of Human Development* <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.ht>

**What elements can we take into account when creating a specific learning process, in a specific context, with specific learners?**

Let us now look at the practical steps that can help in the conception of the learning process.

### Assessment and coordination

- Assess the services available in the area, the resources available and the activities that already exist (community centers, educational centers, theatres, libraries, public health centres, psychosocial support centers), assess gaps in resources.
- Develop a coordinated and intersectional dialogue between educational and psychosocial services, public structure, civil society stakeholders.

### Ethical consideration

- Analyzing the precise needs and resources of the young adults you work with.
- Recognise the specificity of each one and protect their human values.
- "Do no harm" must be the ethos of the learning work.
- Develop cultural sensitivity.

### Teamwork

- Identify roles in the team: who does what, how, when, why.
- Participate in trainings, supervision, interviews proposed by the organisation with which you collaborate.
- Organize tools and materials to work easily during the educational sessions (formal or in formal).
- Ensure mental health and psychosocial consideration in any learning activity and working group.

Youth worker, Educators, social worker may also feel fatigue or momentarily lose energy in accordance with their human work, so need psychosocial support: the organization must provide supervision or individual support interviews.

### Health Services

- Facilitate access to care in the event of a specific need for people or at a time of particular crisis for the person. In coordination with the team leader and the consent of the family.
- Learning about health services in the area in case of a need for specific care (mental health care, general health care, primary health).

## Community bonding

- Creating a link with the community.
- Organizing activities in and for the community:
  - specific moments of reflection on the link between learning and community, about the supportive role of the community for people with mental health disabilities and vice versa break down stereotypes and preconceptions specific moments of reflection on the link between learning and community;
  - involve parents in the managements of learning.

## Learning to learn a competence to enhance<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences>



**Learning to Learn** is the ability to effectively manage one's own learning, both individually and in groups. In the Recommendation the Council of The European Union of 22 May 2018<sup>16</sup> on the key competences for lifelong learning it is included in the wider competence named "Personal, social and learning to learn competence" and it is defined as the **ability**:

- to reflect upon oneself;
- to effectively manage time and information;
- to work with others in a constructive way;
- to remain resilient;
- to manage one's own learning and career.

And also:

- to cope with uncertainty and complexity;
- to support one's physical and emotional well-being;
- to maintain physical and mental health;
- to be able to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life;
- to empathize and manage conflict in an inclusive and supportive context.

The Skills of this competence include the ability to identify one's capacities, focus, deal with complexity, critically reflect and make decisions, the ability to learn and work both collaboratively and autonomously and to organise and persevere with one's learning, evaluate and share it, seek support when appropriate and effectively manage one's career and social interactions.

Individuals should be resilient and able to cope with uncertainty and stress. They should be able to communicate constructively in different environments, collaborate in teams and negotiate. This includes showing **tolerance, expressing and understanding different viewpoints, as well as the ability to create confidence and feel empathy.**

<sup>16</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C\\_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2018:189:TOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2018.189.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2018:189:TOC)

**Principles, practice and tools**

As we have seen so far, between learning and the emotional, relational, psychosocial dimension there are very strong interconnections. Disregarding these links can lead to poorly effective and unsatisfactory learning activity for people with mental disability and disappoint work for educators. Let's see now a pyramid tool that can help to put into practice the concepts presented so far.



Source: This illustration is based on the intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial support in emergencies in the IASC Guidelines (2007) and Psychosocial interventions in the education sector in Inee Guidance (2018)

Some example of support activities for young adults with mental disability or disease:

- Psycho-education: helping the person to understand emotions, needs, desires.
- Group activities: recreational, cultural, sports and other specific activities in line with the person's interests and in the community.
- Specific psychological support, if needed.

## Questionnaire

### 1. What do we mean by learning?

- To memorize information or knowledge.
- **The outcome of an activity.**
- Is a process being finally you do an exam/test.

### 2. What does it mean “psychosocial”?

- **The psychological part is the emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions. The social dimension includes relationships, family and community networks, social values and cultural practices. It is important to remember that what happens in one of these areas will affect aspects of the others.**
- The psychological part concerns the mental illness; the social part represents the well-being resource.
- The psychology applied to the social: the therapy groups.

### 3. What about the fatigue of the social workers, youth workers and professionals?

- Is common because all jobs have difficulties.
- **Is the result of stressing factors and is important to take care about this indicator and each organization must have a psychological support resource to cope it.**
- Is important to give to professional the opportunity to learn that this fatigue is normal and they have just to wait.

### 4. What is the competence named learning to learn?

- **Is the ability to effectively manage one’s own learning, both individually and in groups.**
- Is the competence in learning how to gain more knowledge in less time.
- Is a play on words.

### 5. Which are the components of the well-being flower?

- Biological, spiritual and emotional petal.
- Social, Sportive, Cultural and Cognitive petal.
- **Social, Emotional, Spiritual, Cultural, Mental/cognitive and Biological petal**

## 6. Which layers has the intervention pyramid for mental health and psychosocial emergencies?

- **4 Layers: 1st Advocacy, 2nd activate a network; 3rd basic focused non specialized intervention; 4th Specialized support.**
- 4 Layers: 1st specialized support, 2nd activate a network, 3rd basic focused non specialized intervention,
- Only one layer: you could do everything in the same moment, everything is helpful in such situations!

## 7. The individual development plan template is composed by different steps:

- **A need assessment, identify the learning objectives, identify methods of learning, planning activities steps and timing.**
- A map of the social network of the person, a list of contact numbers and a book to learning and make exercises.
- A step forward, a step back and one on the side.



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