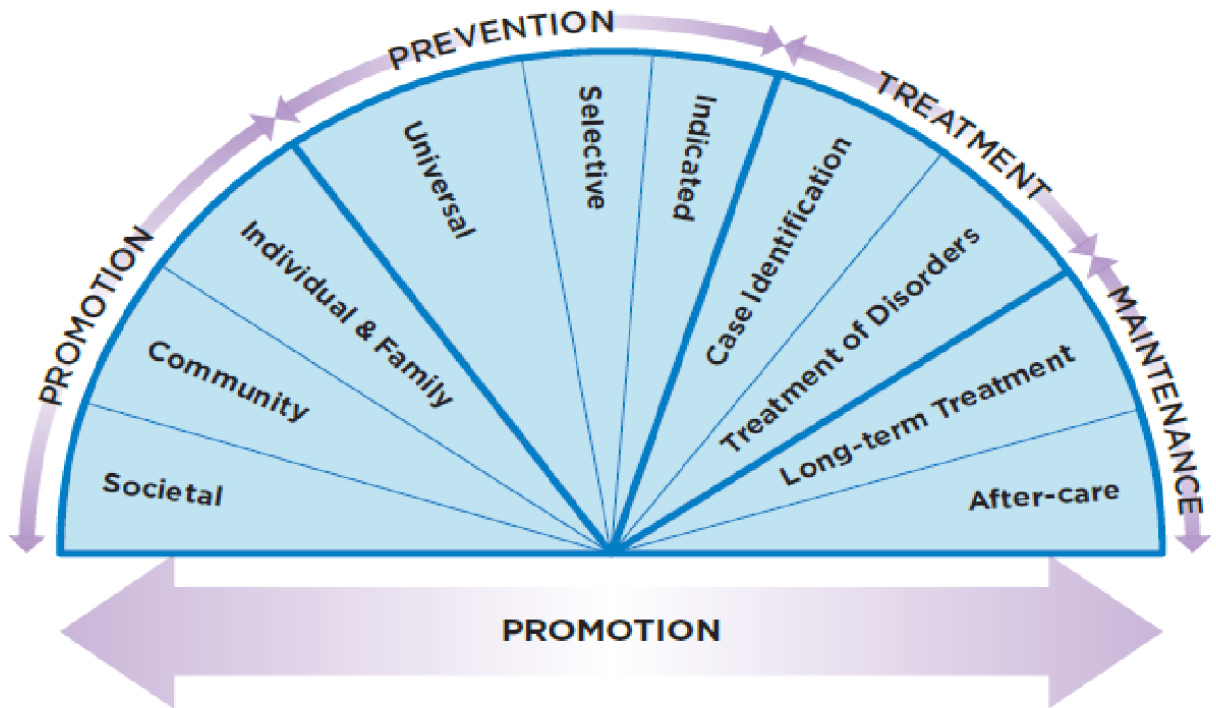




Spectrum of Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Interventions

In its report, *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health Among Children and Youth*,¹ the National Academies of Sciences shares the Spectrum of Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Interventions (also known as the “continuum of care”). It is a classification system that presents the scope of behavioral health services: the promotion of health, the prevention of illness/disorder, treatment, and maintenance/recovery.



Promotion involves interventions (e.g., programs, practices, or environmental strategies) that enable people “to increase control over, and to improve, their health.”⁹⁻² As such, interventions that promote health occur independently as well as throughout the continuum of care as part of prevention, treatment, and maintenance/recovery.¹

The focus of promotion is on well-being with the goal of enhancing people’s ability to do the following:¹

- Achieve developmentally appropriate tasks
- Acquire a positive sense of self-esteem, mastery, well-being, and social inclusion
- Strengthen their ability to cope with adversity

Emotional well-being “allows people to realize their full potential, cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their community.”³ Further, because childhood experiences can have a lasting impact on a person’s life, promoting wellness in the early years can help “build a foundation for overall health.”³

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In its report, *Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional and Behavioral Health Among Children and Youth: A National Agenda*,¹ the National Academies of Sciences added more content to the spectrum discussion by segmenting promotion into three sub-sections:

- **Societal:** strategies that promote the overall health of people living in a country or region (e.g., through the media or federal programs, policies, or laws)
- **Community:** strategies that promote overall health at the local level or with a specific cultural group (e.g., regional or local public awareness programs, community forums, ordinances, policies, practices, and programs, such as bike paths, healthy menu choices in restaurants, and no-smoking areas)
- **Individual and Family:** strategies that promote overall family or individual health (e.g., family health education and school health education)

Prevention focuses on interventions that occur prior to the onset of a disorder and that are intended to prevent the occurrence of the disorder or reduce risk for the disorder.¹ Prevention is also about striving to optimize well-being.

The National Prevention Strategy states that “preventing drug misuse and excessive alcohol use improves quality of life, academic performance, workplace productivity, and military preparedness; reduces crime and criminal justice expenses, and motor vehicle crashes and fatalities; and lowers health care costs for acute and chronic conditions. Excessive alcohol use includes binge drinking, underage drinking, drinking while pregnant, and alcohol impaired driving. Drug misuse includes inappropriate use of pharmaceuticals and any use of illicit drugs.”³

Preventive interventions can be designed to address three levels of risk—universal, selective, and indicated—described as follows:

- **Universal** preventive interventions focus on the “general public or a population subgroup that have not been identified on the basis of risk.”⁴

Examples: community policies that promote access to early childhood education, implementation, or enforcement of anti-bullying policies in schools; education for physicians on prescription drug misuse; and social skills education for youth in schools

- **Selective** preventive interventions focus on individuals or subgroups of the population “whose risk of developing behavioral health disorders is significantly higher than average.”⁴

Examples: prevention education for new immigrant families living in poverty with young children, and peer support groups for adults with a history of family mental illness and/or substance misuse

- **Indicated** preventive interventions focus on “high-risk individuals who are identified as having minimal but detectable signs or symptoms” that foreshadow behavioral health disorders, “but who do not meet diagnostic levels at the current time.”⁴

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Examples: information and referrals for young adults who violate campus or community policies on alcohol and drugs, and screening, consultation, and referrals for families of older adults admitted to emergency rooms with potential alcohol-related injuries

Treatment interventions include case identification and standard forms of treatment (e.g., detoxification, outpatient treatment, in-patient treatment, or medication-assisted treatment).⁴

Maintenance includes interventions that focus on compliance with long-term treatment to reduce relapse and recurrence, and after-care, including rehabilitation and recovery support.⁴

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.⁵

Fostering Healthy Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Development in Children and Youth: A National Agenda is available to download for free at <https://doi.org/10.17226/25201>.

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