



## MENTAL FITNESS

### Mental Fitness Defined

Mental fitness is a personal state of *psychological wellness* that reflects our self-perceptions (*thoughts and emotions*) regarding the satisfaction of three *basic psychological needs*: Relatedness, Competency and Autonomy.

### Mental Fitness Needs

**Relatedness:** *“I feel included, supported and encouraged by others.”*

Our need for relatedness refers to our need for connection to and closeness with family, peers, and other significant individuals. This need is met through interaction with others, our participation in groups, and the support and encouragement we receive from others.

**Competence:** *“I have strengths and gifts that are recognized by myself and others.”*

Our need for competency refers to recognizing and using our personal gifts and strengths in achieving personal goals. Fulfillment of this need provides individuals with a sense of personal achievement and accomplishment.

**Autonomy:** *“I am able to make choices about things that are important to me.”*

Our need for autonomy refers to our need for personal freedom to make choices or decisions that affect our lives. When this need is satisfied in conjunction with other need areas, freedom and choice are expressed in ways in which respect is demonstrated for self and others.

### Mental Fitness, Resilience, and Healthy Lifestyle

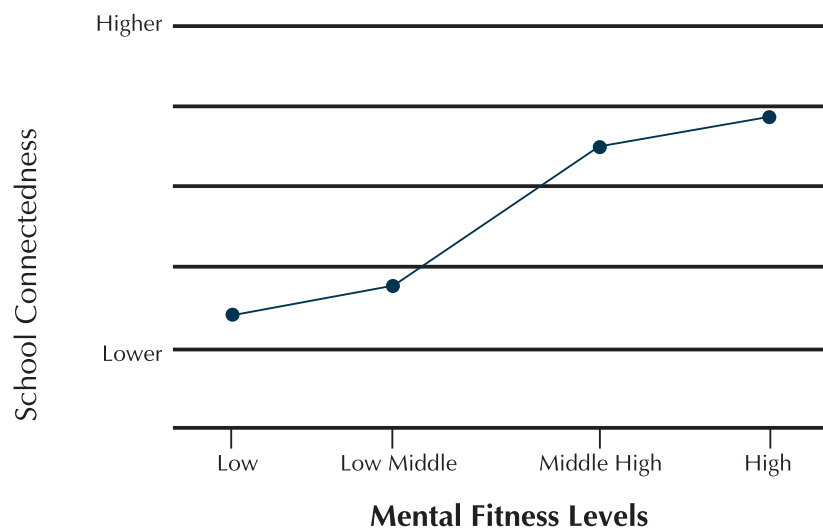
- There is considerable evidence that **satisfaction of all three needs** is associated with emotional well-being or **resilience**, as well as **participation in healthy lifestyle choices and actions** during childhood and adolescence.
- When mental fitness needs are met, **people are more likely to be engaged** in pursuing healthy lifestyle behaviours.

## Mental Fitness Needs and Student Functioning

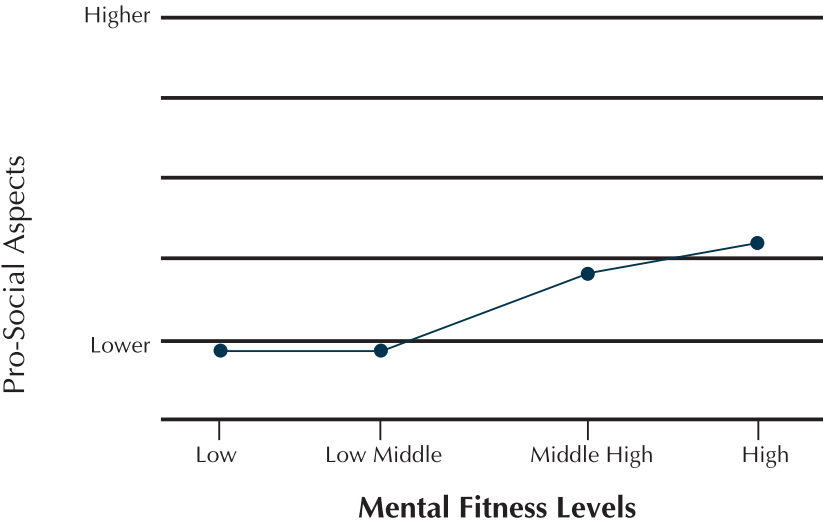
- Students in Grades 4 and 5 answered a series of questions related to their level of mental fitness need fulfillment (relatedness, competency and autonomy).
- Students' outcomes for relatedness, competency and autonomy needs were aggregated to produce an overall measure of mental fitness.

Based on students' individual outcomes, they were identified as having low, low-middle, middle-high or high mental fitness.

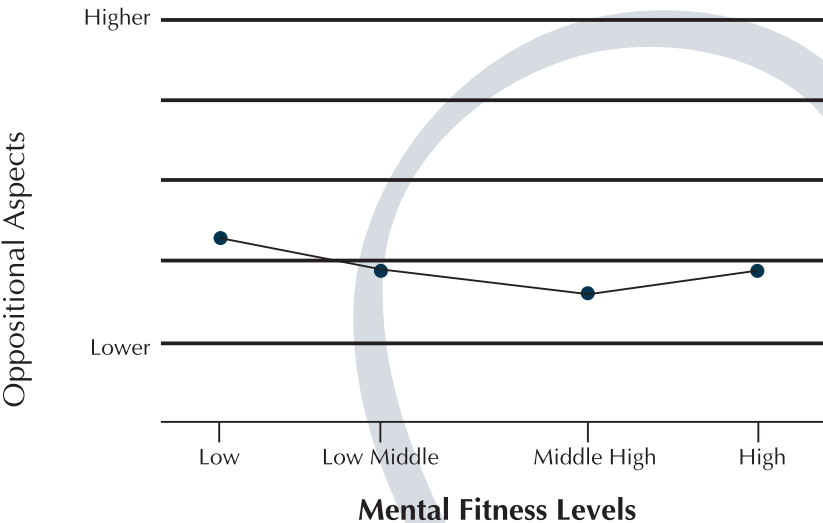
**School Connectedness:** Students with higher levels of mental fitness tended to report higher levels of school connectedness (e.g. feeling part of the school and positive school relationships).



**Pro-Social Aspects:** Students with higher levels of mental fitness tended to report greater identification with pro-social attitudes and behaviours (e.g. sharing and helping others).



**Oppositional Aspects:** Students with lower mental fitness scores tended to report greater identification with oppositional attitudes and behaviours (e.g. bullying, disruptive behaviour).



## Environments that Foster Mental Fitness

Schools, homes and communities can contribute to the satisfaction of mental fitness needs by:

- Empowering children to collaborate with their peers in the development of their own solutions for specific problems (**autonomy, competency, relatedness**)
- Suspending judgment and encouraging the expression of children's thoughts and feelings in classroom and home discussions (**autonomy**)
- Providing opportunities for children to identify and use their strengths in and out of school (**autonomy, competency**)
- Encouraging children to be involved in a wide range of activities that include emphasis on their interests and preferences (**competency, autonomy**)
- Emphasizing fairness and social inclusion in small group, school-wide and community learning activities (**relatedness**)
- Reaching out and involving children or specific groups who do not feel part of the school or community (**relatedness, autonomy**)
- Focusing on developing positive working relationships with parents and members of the community (**relatedness**)

The New Brunswick Provincial Student Wellness Fact Sheets are available at [www.unbf.ca/education/herg](http://www.unbf.ca/education/herg). Twenty-three elementary schools, (a representative NB sample) participated in the 2007-2008 New Brunswick Elementary Student Wellness Survey which included:

- Student wellness survey (Grades 4 and 5)
- Direct physical measures (Grades 1, 3 and 5)
- Physical activity monitoring (Grade 5)
- Home wellness survey (Parents of Kindergarten to Grade 5 students)