



Steps to Mental Fitness

How's your mental fitness? Much as you can build your cardiovascular or muscle strength by exercising, you can build mental fitness by embracing new ideas and behaviors. Here's your training guide:

1. ACCEPT YOURSELF.

Learn to understand and accept your preferences, passions and needs. Remember: No one knows you like you do. Spend quiet time writing in a journal or meditating. Talk to a friend about what matters most to you. Don't blame others for your problems. If your life is boring—or if you feel put upon or neglected—admit it and do something about it.

2. MAKE YOUR NEEDS KNOWN.

Express yourself and present your feelings without attacking others. If you have trouble expressing your feelings to others, learn new communication skills. Don't expect other people to read your mind.

3. DEMONSTRATE BEHAVIOR THAT REFLECTS HIGH SELF-ESTEEM.

Relate to yourself and others in ways that reveal that you care for yourself. Use positive body language and project a positive attitude. Look alert and interested and keep a cheerful smile. Practice good grooming habits and dress appropriately for the occasion.

4. DEVELOP YOUR POTENTIAL.

Make full use of your abilities and cultivate your personal interests. Learn through reading or taking adult education classes. Try new and interesting things you have never done before. Commit yourself to improving your nutrition, getting adequate rest and starting a regular exercise program. Seek out optimistic people.

5. LET GO OF NEGATIVE JUDGMENTS.

People often “push your buttons” when they reflect parts of your own feelings or behavior that you don't like. Instead of judging others, learn to appreciate their unique strengths.

6. PLAN FOR SUCCESS.

Emphasize what you do well. Learn to value and build on your strengths. Take disappointments in stride. Everyone experiences failure at times. The most successful people learn from their disappointments, rather than allowing themselves to be defeated by them.

7. THINK POSITIVELY.

Embrace your good qualities and look ahead to a positive future. Believe that you have the power and ability to transform negative situations into more satisfying experiences.

8. LEARN TO ESCAPE WHEN APPROPRIATE.

It's good to confront people and problems head-on, but sometimes, taking the path of least resistance is the best solution. Be aware of when your expectations of yourself are unrealistically high. Add variety to your life by planning some new activities. Don't depend exclusively on others to add excitement to your life.

9. FIND WAYS TO HELP OTHERS.

Refocus some of your attention away from your own concerns and toward the needs of others. Volunteer for a community project or help a person who is in need of companionship. Listen with all your attention when involved in a conversation.

10. BE WILLING TO SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED.

Find people you can talk to when you have problems. If your cares seem overwhelming, seek professional help. Counseling may be helpful if the intensity of your feelings doesn't go away after sharing them with friends or family or if you experience persistent feelings of worthlessness or low self-esteem.