

MENTAL HEALTH SPACES



Highlights

- Our surroundings can help our mental health. It's time to build public spaces with intention.
- How can a place encourage connection with people and nature?
- Designing trails to intersect and creating "nodes" of social areas are two small ways to encourage connection.
- Engaging the five senses is a proven way to aid mental well-being.
- Inclusive spaces contribute to better community well-being.

Overview

This two-page handout introduces the concept of designing public spaces for mental well-being and provides a few tips to think about when considering mental health in your designs.

How Can Spaces Aid Mental Health?

Our physical surroundings can help or hurt our physical health; it's the same for mental health, and often in the same ways.

Things that aid mental well-being are all around. Spaces that engage the senses can help us focus on the present. Sidewalk and trail networks can allow us to be active in everyday life. Public seating can encourage people to take time and connect with each other. It's time to build public spaces with intention.

How can a place encourage **connection** with **other people and nature**?

Tip #1: Engage with Others

It's a well-established fact that relationships with other people are a natural part of well-being – emotionally, socially, and otherwise. As Aristotle and other philosophers note, people are “social animals”.

A facet of space design often overlooked is the art of promoting human interaction. Event planners use the concept readily, making it convenient to get into a venue but placing tables too close together, forcing contact.

Public spaces can be designed to serve these purposes too. Designing trails to intersect and creating “nodes” of social areas are two small ways to encourage connection.

Tip #3: Make It Inclusive

If people are on foot, in a wheelchair, or pushing a stroller, can they safely access and navigate your public space? Have you engaged with this segment of people about what they want at the place? Inclusive spaces serve more people and contribute to better community well-being.

Tip #2: Engage the Senses

A blooming garden in spring, maple leaves in fall, luminaries in winter... Can you smell the flowers, hear crunching leaves underfoot, and see the lights along a snowy path?

Engaging the five senses can have a great impact on a visitor's experience. And it's a proven way to aid mental well-being – especially through natural elements.

It's this concept that inspired the terms “green space” (for vegetation) and “blue space” (for water), along with their undeniable connection to mental benefits. Think how you can incorporate sensory elements into your public space design.



Learn more at
OrangePlacesProject.com

**Orange
Places
Project**