

# 4TH SHAW-IAU WORKSHOP ON ASTRONOMY FOR EDUCATION

## Astronomy for Mental Health

Using astronomy to improve mental health  
and well-being within education activities



# Mental Health for Astronomy in Education and the Importance of Mental Health

- Globally there are close to a billion people living with various mental health disorders.
- Mental health affects all aspects of the individual's life.
- Covid-19 highlighted the importance of mental health for society at large as many were unable to engage in their usual coping mechanisms. (e.g. social gatherings, sports, gym, religious gatherings)
- Astronomy not only has clear benefits for educational outcomes but can also improve mental health and well-being <sup>1,2,3,4</sup>
- By incorporating mental health activities into both educational activities and school activities we can both educate students and also supporting them to overcome challenges.
- Mental health activities can be as simple as a guided talk to provide students with information and concepts to think through or as complex as a tailored activity made for the group following an assessment of their mental health and well-being needs.

1. Ackerman, C. (2018, November 13). What is Kaplan's Attention Restoration Theory (ART)? <https://positivepsychology.com/attention-restoration-theory/>
2. Berto, R. (2014). The role of nature in coping with psycho-physiological stress: A literature review on restorativeness. In Behavioral Sciences (Vol. 4, Issue 4, pp. 394–409). MDPI Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs4040394>
3. Oliveros, B., Agulló-Tomás, E., & Márquez-álvarez, L. J. (2022). Risk and Protective Factors of Mental Health Conditions: Impact of Employment, Deprivation and Social Relationships. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116781>
4. Piff, P. K., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D. M., & Keltner, D. (2015). Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 108(6), 883–899. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000018>

# How Mental Health can be Incorporated into Educational Activities

Mental Health can be incorporated in various ways

Planning

In planning the activity it can be added by being aware of mental health concerns facing the target group.

Implementation

During implementation of the activity space can be given to allow for guided discussions, sharing and assessment of individual and group mental health states

Review and Assessment

During the review and assessment of activities areas can be identified where mental health can be incorporated for future activities.

# Example: Mental Health Activity (Guided Talk)

One example from Jules Evans is the “view from above” activity <sup>5</sup>:

“This is an exercise from ancient Greek philosophy. Think of yourself and your situation, then zoom out and see it from the sky – see your house and the street you live on. Then zoom out further and see the city and the country underneath the clouds. Then zoom out further and see Europe, and the Earth spinning round. Then zoom out further and see the solar system, and then the whole galaxy of the Milky Way, and then thousands and thousands of galaxies, containing billions and billions of stars and planets. Look around you, at the limitless expanse of the universe, glittering with light and energy. What were you getting so worked up about?”

5. Evans, J. (2019, May 3). Ten diffusion techniques for unhooking your mind — Philosophy for Life. <https://www.philosophyforlife.org/blog/ten-difusion-techniques-for-unhooking-your-mind>

# The Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD)

- OAD has found there is potential for astronomy to improve mental health and well-being.
- An “**Astronomy for Mental Health**” guideline has been created.
  - This is an open document containing experiences and resources used to create and facilitate mental health projects.
  - The document can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/3DLZO1k> or using the QR code below.
  - Anyone is able to contribute to the resources
  - The guideline contains information on the activities the OAD has conducted with:
    - **Elderly**
    - **Primary school children**
    - **Mental Health care staff and volunteers**



# Astronomy for Mental Health

The Astronomy for Mental Health Guidelines continue to grow and develop as more people contribute their resources and experience to them.

If you would like to **get involved**, **find out more**, or **share ideas**, reach out to the team at:

[mentalhealth@astro4dev.org](mailto:mentalhealth@astro4dev.org)

