2. Definitions

2.1 Mental Health

Since so many definitions of mental health exist the committee feels it important to state the conception of this state which it has had in mind during its discussions. Conceptions which define it negatively as a state in which the individual is free from overt psychiatric disorder are obviously unsatisfactory; but to maintain that adaptation to the environment is in all circumstances a mentally healthy phenomenon is to ignore the fact that an environment may be such that the healthy response is to attempt to change it. Nevertheless, although the compulsion to adapt to any and every environment is not a characteristic of mental health, the capacity to form harmonious relations with others is.

Mental health as the committee understands it is influenced by both biological and social factors. It is not a static condition but subject to variations and fluctuations of degree; the committee's conception implies the capacity in an individual to form harmonious relations with others, and to participate in, or contribute constructively to, changes in his social and physical environment. It implies also his ability to achieve a harmonious and balanced satisfaction of his own potentially conflicting instinctive drives — harmonious in that it reaches an integrated synthesis rather than the denial of satisfaction to certain instinctive tendencies as a means of avoiding the thwarting of others.

It implies in addition an individual whose personality has developed in a way which enables his potentially conflicting instinctive drives to find harmonious expression in the full realization of his potentialities.
2.2 Mental hygiene

It is equally necessary to explain the manner in which the term mental hygiene is used in this report; for the expression is frequently used as a euphemism for early psychiatric treatment, presumably in order to avoid the stigma which is still often attached to established psychotic disorders and through them to the term "psychiatry". This report uses the term in its strict and literal sense, analogous to the way in which the general term "hygiene" is used in public-health practice. For the committee, therefore, mental hygiene consists of the activities and techniques which promote and maintain mental health. Its practice demands that groups and individuals should examine and re-evaluate patterns of interpersonal relationships in the light of their influence on personality development and mental health. To accomplish this, education in theory alone is insufficient. It must be accompanied by practical methods of learning through actual personal and group experiences which foster emotional insight and modify behaviour in the direction of healthier personality development. An individual's experiences in group and individual relationships influence and become part of his personality. In all societies, individuals have the possibility of participating in such groups as the family, the neighbourhood, and the work-group, but societies differ widely in the range of opportunities they provide for participation in other group relationships. The development of schools, for instance, not only provides individuals with the opportunity for the acquisition of attainments; it also provides a new and important experience of group relationships.