



Creative Wellbeing: Strategies for Increasing Wellbeing, Life Satisfaction, and Happiness

Creative Wellbeing Workshops

Wellbeing can be most simply described as a state of being healthy and happy. Wellbeing has affective (feeling) and cognitive (thinking) components—feeling better more often, feeling worse less often, and being generally satisfied in the relevant domains of one’s life (relationships, health, career and finances/security, interests, and sense of purpose). We experience wellbeing when we have the psychological, social, and physical resources we need to meet the psychological, social and physical challenges we encounter.

To use a metaphor, wellbeing can be likened to the lift and drag ratio of an airplane. When we are carrying too much weight and there is too much resistance, we may never take off. And even if we do, we may operate below efficiency and quickly run out of fuel. With the right equilibrium, we have sufficient force and speed for lift off. If conditions are right and our momentum persists, we reach an optimal cruising speed where we move efficiently and smoothly through the air.

9 Strategies for Increasing Wellbeing

There is no exact “recipe” for increasing wellbeing but the list below includes some of the most important ingredients:

1. Positive Relationships and Support
2. Self-Care and Self-Awareness
3. Express the Stress
4. Positive Experiences and Emotions
5. Attend to the Good
6. Cultivate Optimism
7. Identify and Develop Your Strengths
8. Accomplish Something Everyday
9. Connect with Meaning and Purpose



1. Positive Relationships and Support

Relationships that offer encouragement and reassurance are essential to wellbeing. When we are experiencing stress, support from others is also important. This includes family and friends and if we have been exposed to trauma or loss, we often benefit from professional help or connecting with others who have been through similar struggles.

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2. Self-Care and Self-Awareness

Self-care—rest, nutrition, exercise—is another critical component of wellbeing. Sleep is our primary source of restoration and healing. Eating well is also critical—both for nourishment and to eliminate toxins. Exercise does the same and, in addition to literally making us stronger, it can help us sleep better.



Self-care also includes self-awareness, attuning to our physical and emotional state, without judgment, and recognizing when we need to eat, rest, stretch, connect to someone else, be alone, etc. Developing self-awareness allows us to control how we are responding to things that are happening around us and internally, so that we are less reactive and more proactive.

3. Express the Stress

If/when you are experiencing stress, either because you are anxious by nature or you have stressors in your life, or both, express the stress through support, journaling, creative writing, and artwork. Research has shown that when people are able to express and then reflect upon their struggles, they gain more perspective and are better able to find some positive meaning in the hardships they have faced.



4. Positive Experiences and Emotions

Feeling better is one of the main indicators that we are doing well. Ideally, we want to shift the ratio of our negative to positive emotions so that, even though we may have moments when we feel bad, we are feeling good more often than not. Feeling better helps us heal physically and recover emotionally more quickly; it gives us hope and it broadens our perceptions so that we feel more capable of managing. Strategies for feeling better right away include:



- Spend time in nature
- Exercise/Move
- Humor
- Play with pets
- Listen to music
- Connect with others
- Do things you enjoy at work and at home
- Notice big and small blessings
- Do for others/kindness

- Breathe

5. Attend to the Good

Focusing on what is good in our lives makes us feel more hopeful and appreciative, it makes us more receptive to others and to possibilities, and it counteracts negative

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feelings. We can attend to the good by feeling better and by consciously noticing what is functional and good in and around us.



A Native-American fable has an elder telling his grandson that inside of us there is a battle between two wolves. One wolf is negativity and one wolf positivity. “Which wolf wins?” asks the grandson. The grandfather replies, “The one you feed.”

6. Cultivate Optimism

You probably have a sense of whether you’re an optimist or a pessimist. There are benefits and drawbacks to both styles of thinking. Pessimists are generally more “realistic” and better able to identify potential threats in their environment, but they may get stuck in negative perceptions. Thinking more optimistically is correlated with higher levels of wellbeing and better health, although being too optimistic can lead to poor judgment and lower motivation.

Optimistic and pessimistic styles of thinking derive from our beliefs about what is happening to us and to what we attribute those circumstances. For example, when negative things happen to pessimists, they tend to personalize it—they blame themselves. When good things happen, they attribute it to outside factors. Optimists tend to personalize *positive* events, they believe that good things will generally come their way and they tend to see negative ones as “one-offs” that could have happened to anyone. When optimists run into obstacles, they find other pathways to accomplish their goals, and they tend to believe they can positively effect outcomes. Pessimists tend to doubt their capacity to impact their circumstances.



Pessimism is only a problem when it leads to low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness or helplessness. We can develop a more optimistic mindset by transforming discouraging core beliefs. This involves identifying and challenging negative assumptions and coming up with more positive and empowering alternatives.

The serenity prayer, which acknowledges how powerless we can feel about things we cannot change but also helps us identify and channel our energy toward the factors that we can, is a useful motto for optimism.

***Grant me the serenity to accept the things
I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can and
Wisdom to know the difference.***

Attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr 1943

7. Identify and Develop Your Strengths

Think about what makes you “You!” What are the special skills and talents that others appreciate about you? Use the strengths that energize you more and the ones

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that deplete you less. Notice the many strengths that have helped you survive and even thrive despite challenges you have faced—perseverance, tenacity, doing what had to be done because others depend on you, maintaining hope and faith, or showing up even though your hope and faith have been tested. Notice and celebrate strengths in others.

8. Accomplish Something Everyday

Do something every day, big or small, that gives you a sense of accomplishment. When something in our past or present is draining us, or we are worried about the future, moving toward something that inspires or motivates us can help get us through.

Visualizing and imagining detailed and concrete elements of what things would look like if our lives turned out as well as they could—who and what would be around us, where we would be, and what it would feel like—pulls us toward a more hopeful future.

9. Connect with Meaning and Purpose

Last but not least, finding purpose and exploring what gives our lives meaning seems to be the lynchpin to wellbeing. This means thinking about what is important to us, what values we hold, and what motivates and inspires us. If we have been exposed to adversity, we sometimes question meaning in life and we naturally experience sorrow, anger, and a range of challenging emotions. The grieving process cannot be hastened and people recover at different rates. Although some losses are very difficult to overcome, people who are the most resilient are able to find some positive meaning from the challenges they face. For example, they are amazed by the support of their loved ones; their priorities change; and they have a greater appreciation for the fragility and value of life.

Helping others makes us feel better. It can distract us from our worries and pre-occupations. Helping others in more unfortunate circumstances than our own often creates compassion, “I thought I had it bad but what he is going through must be so heart-wrenching.”

I find hope in the darkest days, and focus in the brightest.

Dalai Lama



Resources:

- Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being. Martin Seligman.
- Authentic Happiness Website <https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu>
- Positivity. Barbara Fredrickson. www.positivityratio.com
- Realise 2 Strengths Profiler <http://www.capeu.com/R2StrengthsProfiler>
- Choose the Life You Want: 101 Ways to Create Your Own Road to Happiness. Tal Ben-Shahar.
- The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want. Sonja Lyubomirsky.
- The Upside of Your Dark Side. Todd Kashdan, Robert Biswas-Diener, and Jeff Cummings.
- <http://www.innerhealthstudio.com/relaxation-response.html>

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