

Principles of Wellbeing

Many of us seem to be in the pursuit of better mental wellbeing nowadays, but what if we had a model to help guide us?

There are many ways to reach wellbeing, including training your mind for wellbeing, doing nice things for others, being more empathetic and so on. But what are the actual elements that promote wellbeing within ourselves and others?

The principles presented here are an extension of Martin Seligman's theoretical model of positive psychology (PERMA). The principles which have been added to Seligman's PERMA model are Vitality, Autonomy, Self-Image and Security.

Positive Emotions

Experiencing emotions such as joy, interest and contentment on a regular basis are important for our wellbeing.

Positive emotions trigger an upward spiral of wellbeing. They expand our possibilities for social, intellectual and physical interactions and broaden our range of habitual behaviour. Experiencing joy has been shown to encourage our desire to push the limits and be creative. While feeling interested increases our urge to digest new information and to explore. Positive emotions result not only from our current experiences, but also from reflecting positively on the past and looking forward to the future.

Engagement

Have you ever been so immersed in an activity you enjoy that you feel a sense of flow and lose track of time?

That's engagement, and it occurs when we use our strengths to perform an activity we like, are good at and which gives us energy. Being fully engaged creates a sense of flow, or blissful immersion, which contributes to a sense of vitality and wellbeing. Engagement helps us learn and grow, which develops our abilities. It also contributes to a sense of accomplishment and the experience of positive emotions.

Positive Relationships

Positive relationships - with colleagues, friends and family - are critical to wellbeing. Humans thrive on love and positive emotional and physical interactions with others. Research shows the pain centres in our brain are activated when we're at risk of being isolated - from an evolutionary perspective isolation is disastrous for our survival.

Expressing gratitude is one way of building positive relationships. It can develop friendships and positive working relationships, improve empathy and establish a sense of wellbeing. Studies have shown people who practise gratitude have better physical health and mental resilience.⁵

Meaning & Purpose

This is about having a sense of purpose or the pursuit of something bigger than ourselves. It includes engaging in work that provides meaning or fulfilment, as well as spiritual, religious or community activities, creative work and raising children.

Having a sense of purpose and meaning increases our sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. When we feel our work and activities have an impact beyond ourselves we experience a range of positive emotions and associated behaviours, which improve the quality of our life and work.

Achievement

A sense of achievement that comes with reaching our goals and being able to accomplish what we set our minds to.

Achievement does not mean winning awards, it means the ability to meet goals you set out to achieve. It may be writing a report in time, delivering a project or completing a task well. A sense of achievement and accomplishment contribute to feelings of pride and fulfilment.

Vitality

Eat, sleep, move. Vitality is about feeling healthy, capable and energetic, and having a zest for life.

High vitality is about feeling alive - living energetically with a sense that your actions have meaning and purpose. High vitality is supported by nourishing the body with healthy food, good sleep and physical activity. It also includes activities that are good for the mind and spirit such as mindfulness, meditation and stress management.

Autonomy

Being independent and able to handle what life throws our way.

Being high in autonomy is about being self-reliant, able to think for yourself, not worrying too much about what others might think, and feeling well equipped to cope with situations. It also means you have the confidence to adapt to situations without getting overwhelmed by stress or needing to rely on others.

Self-Image

Self-image is how we perceive yourself, not just in the mirror but at a deeper level. It is all of the self-impressions that you have built up over time. Ideally, these self-images will be very positive, giving a person confidence in their thoughts and actions. Conversely, a negative self image makes a person doubtful of their worth, ideas and capabilities.

Security

Being secure is a basic human need. Security is something that can be calculated, such as how financially secure you are and how likely is it that you might be murdered. It can also be an internal feeling where your 'feeling' of security is worse than what it is in reality.

By understanding your real level of security you can either find peace in the level you of security you already have or you can make steps to improve your security, such as how to improve your income, reduce debt, or move to a safer neighbourhood.