

Tutorial 4 - Looking after yourself

Lesson 1: Looking after your mental health

Self-care can be used to describe any activity that preserves and maintains a person’s physical, emotional and mental health (LifeInMind, 2020).

There are lots of simple, practical ways we can make life better for ourselves and for others. The more we focus on being happier, more connected and caring, the more it spreads to others through the spiral effect of positive emotions. It is important to note that everyone is different, as such, there is no single best approach for improving or staying mentally healthy. It is important to practice self-care every day and incorporate it into other activities in order to maintain positive wellbeing.

The science of wellbeing

Positive psychology is a science that seeks to help people be the best they can be and live a meaningful life, while making a difference to their families, friends, schools and communities.

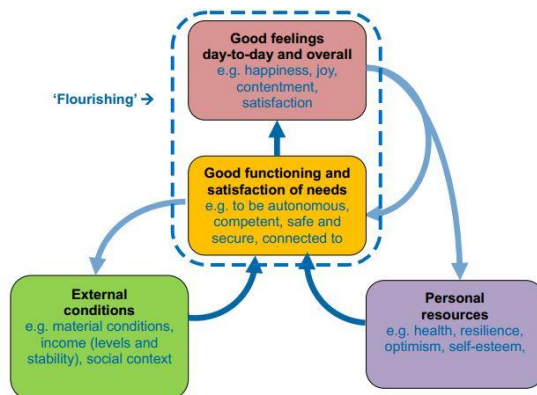
Clinical psychology has traditionally treated people experiencing mental illness(es). That’s critically important and always will be.

However, in the 1990s Dr Martin Seligman, then president of the American Psychological Association, realised that psychology could help well people be even better. By focusing on what makes us flourish and thrive we can create a better world for everyone.

Positive psychology isn’t just wishful ‘positive thinking.’ It’s the scientific study of human flourishing, how we can be at our best as people and improve and enrich our own psychological wellbeing, positive emotions and life satisfaction.

The Dynamic Model of Flourishing explains that the state of ‘Flourishing’ is a combination of functioning well and feeling good, which are influenced by external conditions and our personal resources.

*New Economic Foundation’s Dynamic Model of Wellbeing (UK)
What makes life worth living?*



Positive psychology helps us understand what makes life worth living and how to live well.



We can think of a life with high wellbeing as having these five dimensions:

- 1) **Pleasure** – the positive emotions we gain from participating in enjoyable activities and experiences, like travel, eating good food and entertaining with good friends
- 2) **Engagement** – using our strengths and engaging in enjoyable activities that energise and inspire us
- 3) **Meaning** – reflecting on the purpose of life, the significance of your life’s contributions and important relationships in the bigger picture
- 4) **Connectedness** – the joy and satisfaction we gain from having close family, friends and community ties; a sense of belonging and knowing that people care about us, the pleasure we gain from kindness and helping others
- 5) **Achievement** – focusing on cultivating mastery and working towards important, meaningful goals

There are many ways to look after ourselves. These fall broadly into physical, relationships, personal and spirituality (EveryMind, 2020). Examples include:

Physical

- Be active
- Get enough sleep
- Monitor and manage your stress levels
- Limit the use of alcohol and other substances

Relationships

- Nurture and maintain your relationships
- Connect with others frequently

Personal

- Make time for things you enjoy
- Get involved in a group of people with common interests
- Learn something new

Spirituality

- If you have spiritual beliefs, ensure you make time for regular spiritual practice
- Connect with others who share the same philosophy
- Nature can also provide a sense of awe and wonder

Lesson 2: The benefits of self-care

Engaging in self-care has many benefits for our mental health and wellbeing. Benefits include:



- Increased life satisfaction
- Increased optimism
- Increased happiness
- Increased self-awareness
- Improved mood
- Improved sense of belonging
- Improved emotional regulation
- Lowered risk of developing mental health conditions

Lesson 3: The five ways to wellbeing

The five ways to wellbeing is based on extensive research about protective factors for psychological and emotional wellbeing. The five ways provides practical actions to improve wellbeing, including:

1) **Connect** – when we connect with others we experience:

- Higher levels of happiness
- Improved mood and wellbeing
- Reduced risk of mental illness
- A longer life overall

Connecting can be done in various ways, such as:

- Catching up with a friend for a coffee
- Having lunch with a colleague
- Voice or video calling a family member
- Joining a group of people with common interests

2) **Keep learning** – when we learn new skills and extend our knowledge we experience:

- Improved self-esteem
- A sense of purpose of accomplishment
- Improved problem-solving ability

Learning isn't just about formal, classroom learning, you could:

- Learn a new recipe
- Learn a new DIY skill



- You could spend time connecting with experts in your field or reading relevant journal articles
- 3) **Be active** – being active is not only great for physical health, it can also improve our mental wellbeing. By being active we experience:
- Positive mood
 - Reduced anxiety and stress
 - Improved sleep
 - Improved motivation and productivity
- There are many ways we can be active, including:
- Walking to the shops or in local gardens
 - Playing a game
 - Organising a step challenge with your colleagues
 - Completing a gym class
- 4) **Take notice** – it's important to take time to pay attention to the little things. By taking notice we experience:
- Improved concentration and attention
 - Improved sleep
 - Improved stress management
 - Improved self-esteem
- You can take notice by:
- Savouring your favourite meal or drink
 - Reflecting on what you're grateful for
 - Practicing mindfulness
 - Feeling the sun on your skin, being in and observing nature
- 5) **Give** – helping others benefits both them and us. By giving we experience:
- Improved self-esteem
 - A sense of purpose
 - Improved life satisfaction
 - A sense of accomplishment



Giving can be as simple as:

- Helping a friend solve a problem
- Thanking your colleagues throughout the day
- Sharing your favourite recipe with friends or family
- Helping your neighbours do their shopping or walk their dog if they need assistance

Use the five ways to wellbeing to see how you can improve your wellbeing. Ideally, try and build these into your daily routines. Think about ways you're practicing the five ways now, and how you can do more of them to see further improvements in your mental health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing Wifi

You can also use the Roses in the Ocean Wellbeing Wifi as a helpful tool to prompt conversation and highlight areas of self-care that you can adopt in order to improve your personal wellbeing.

<https://rosesintheocean.com.au/wellbeing-wifi/>

https://rosesintheocean.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/18159_RitO_DLbooklet_final_digital.pdf

Video Testimonials

Bridget's Story: <https://youtu.be/JT8foEoEhIU>

Luke's Story: <https://youtu.be/d4WvoDKR9Fowith>

Resources

SuperFriend (2020). *Looking After You*. Retrieved from <https://superfriend.com.au/resource/looking-after-you/>

Every Mind (2020). *Self-care*. Retrieved from <https://everymind.org.au/need-help/self-care>

Life In Mind (2020). *A guide to self-care – Life in Mind Australia*. Retrieved from

<https://lifeinmindaustralia.imgix.net/assets/src/user-uploads/Life-in-Mind-Self-care.pdf>