



Five Domains of Wellbeing

DEFINITIONS & KEY ASPECTS

Wellbeing is the set of needs and experiences essential, in balance and combination, to weather challenges and have health and hope. We all are driven to meet our needs in and have experiences that provide social connectedness, safety, stability, mastery and meaningful access to relevant resources without unsustainable tradeoffs.

We can have assets in one domain and be challenged in others, or even have assets and challenges in the same domain. We don't either have wellbeing or not, it's not all or nothing.

Our ability to build assets is deeply dependent on the external environment and context, including: 1. How people respond to us; our race, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, disability, religion and other identities impact our access to wellbeing, 2. The structures and policies of systems and society give some people greater, easier access to wellbeing than others, based in significant part on these identities. Building assets in the domains isn't all about a mindset or motivation, it's dependent on the context of your life.

Our needs don't follow a hierarchy. In reality, they're in constant interplay. At any moment, one can feel more important, it's fluid.

We're all driven to meet our needs for wellbeing based on what's available to us. The ways we meet those needs can help us or harm us. Having greater access to wellbeing gives us more options to choose from. There are not "good" and "bad" ways to meet our needs for wellbeing.

Social Connectedness

The degree to which we have and perceive a sufficient number and diversity of relationships that allow us to give and receive information, emotional support and material aid; create a sense of belonging and value; and foster growth.

Key Aspects:

- Number and diversity of relationships (there's no magic number!)
- Having people we can count on and people who count on us
- Belonging
- Growth

It's just as important to be needed. Social connectedness doesn't just go in one direction, it's not just people who support us, but people who we support too. **Social connectedness is critical for mental and physical health** (as are all the domains). Indeed, social isolation and exclusion are linked to serious health problems. **Social connectedness also comes from weak ties.** It's not just the strong bonds or close relationships, less prominent relationships matter as well.

Safety

The degree to which we can be our authentic selves and not be at heightened risk of physical or emotional harm.

Key Aspects:

- From people, places and systems
- Ability to be true to core identities without danger or shame

What is safe for one person may not be safe for another. Safety is contextual, there is not only one way it's experienced.

We don't prioritize safety over everything else. Taking risks often means feeling a bit unsafe, and is also where growth occurs.

Stability

The degree to which we can expect our situation and status to be fundamentally the same from one day to the next; where there is adequate predictability for us to concentrate on the here-and-now and on the future, growth and change; and where small obstacles don't set off big cascades.

Key Aspects:

- Anchors (small weekly or daily routines) which create a sense of predictability
- Familiarity
- Buffer that keeps small problems from snowballing into big problems

We experience stability through anchors and having “buffers”, not the big things like housing or finances. Our sense of stability comes from day to day predictability. **A certain amount of stability is necessary to take risks and try new things.** Everything doesn't need to be exactly the same all the time, but we each need a certain level of predictability.

Mastery

The degree to which we feel in control of our fate and the decisions we make, and where we experience some correlation between efforts and outcomes.

Key Aspects:

- The effort put into something influences the outcomes
- The outcome is desired and possible given circumstances, but not guaranteed
- Sense of choice
- Curiosity
- Sense that we can influence, not necessarily control, our environment, future and/or relationships.

Mastery comes from accomplishment and progress, which can come from making progress or getting better at something even if we're not “the best.” We don't have to “master” something to feel mastery. **Mastery is not the same as self-esteem.** We can have high self-esteem and not have a sense that we can influence people or our world, or to overcome challenges.

Meaningful Access to Relevant Resources

The degree to which we can meet needs particularly important for our situation in ways that are not extremely difficult, and are not degrading or dangerous.

Key Aspects:

- Self-determination of what basic needs are relevant and important
- Resources are accessible without shame, danger or significant hardship

Resources are not the same as services. Services can help people gain access to resources. A grocery store and a food pantry are both services; if they offer meaningful access to food to the recipient, then the resource is accessible. **Accessibility is not just about physical proximity**, language or other elements of accessibility. These are important but insufficient. “Meaningful” is the experience a person has in accessing resources (without danger or extreme difficulty).



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The Full Frame Initiative is a social change organization that partners with a growing cohort of pioneering organizations, systems and communities across the country to fundamentally shift their focus from fixing problems to fostering wellbeing – the needs and experiences essential for health and hope. Together, we are creating possibilities for lasting change in people's lives and sparking a broader movement that replaces poverty, violence, trauma and oppression with wellbeing and justice.

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