

Wellbeing Workshop // Resources and Reading List

Change Your Thoughts, Change Your World

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Abraham Lincoln once said, "Most folks are about as happy as they want to be." Was he implying that, when it comes to our happiness, we actually have a choice? Apparently, yes. Research abounds on the impact of positive and negative thinking on ourselves and others, and the fact that we have the potential to transform ourselves by changing our habits of mind.

For years, it was thought that the brain was fixed and immutable—that we were stuck with what we were born with in terms of our hardware and its abilities. Then came research to show we were wrong, including Sharon Begley's book *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain*, which offered ground-breaking documentation to support the idea that we can even change our brains by changing our thoughts. The results are staggering. These breakthroughs in our understanding show it is possible to "reset our happiness meter, regain the use of limbs disabled by stroke, train the mind to break cycles of depression and OCD, and reverse age-related changes in the brain."

So where do we start? What needs to be changed about the way we think, anyway? Let's look first at the number and nature of our thoughts. We humans, it seems, have anywhere from 12,000 to 60,000 thoughts per day. But according to some research, as many as 98 percent of them are exactly the same as we had the day before. Talk about creatures of habit! Even more significant, 80 percent of our thoughts are negative. This is important because of what we call the mind/body connection, *psychoneuroimmunology* in medical terms. You know what this is from your own experience. If you're tired physically, it's hard to think clearly. On the other hand, if you've been using your mind doing mental work all day, you're likely to feel the effects physically, too.

Negative thoughts are particularly draining. Thoughts containing words like "never," "should," and "can't," complaints, whining or thoughts that diminish our own or another's sense of self-worth deplete the body by producing corresponding chemicals that weaken the physiology. No wonder we're exhausted at the end of the day!

The good news is, if you can recognize a negative or limiting thought, you can consciously choose to change it. Instead of saying, "I can't meet this deadline," try "I don't know how I'm going to meet this deadline, but I know I can if I give it enough thought." The chemicals produced by the body as a response to this kind of thought are more likely to support you in fulfilling your goal.

Pastor Will Bowen of Christ Church Unity in Kansas City knows well the power of changing the way you think. In an effort to help his congregation find a concrete way to focus on what they *do* want rather than what they *don't* want, he created a purple bracelet and gave one to everyone at church one Sunday.

Because it takes 21 days to create a new habit, the idea was for people to switch the bracelet to the other wrist if they found themselves complaining (one of the most common forms of negative thinking)—and keep switching it until they'd gone the full 21 days without a single complaint.

The "Complaint-Free World" project exploded from 250 bracelets to five million in nine months. Pastor Will receives letters daily from schools, prisons, hospitals, churches, businesses, even the Pentagon, telling him what a powerful and positive impact the bracelets are having. Families are getting closer. People's health is improving. People are turning their lives around.

But the influence of our thoughts transcends the personal. The work of Japanese scientist Dr. Masaru Emoto has shown that our thoughts also influence the world around us. Dr. Emoto photographed frozen samples of polluted water before and after prayer was done over the water, and distilled water before and after exposure to various kinds of music, such as heavy metal and Beethoven. He also taped words to containers of distilled water such as "You make me sick; I will kill you" and "Love and appreciation."

The energies from beautiful words and thoughts, even if only written, created exquisite snowflake-like patterns in the water. The less uplifting energies created images of disorder and toxicity. Even a simple "thank you" produced a lovely crystalline pattern.

Since our bodies are 70% water, imagine the beauty of the subtle structures created in your body—and those around you—just by changing your thoughts. Could this form the basis of improved health and well being?

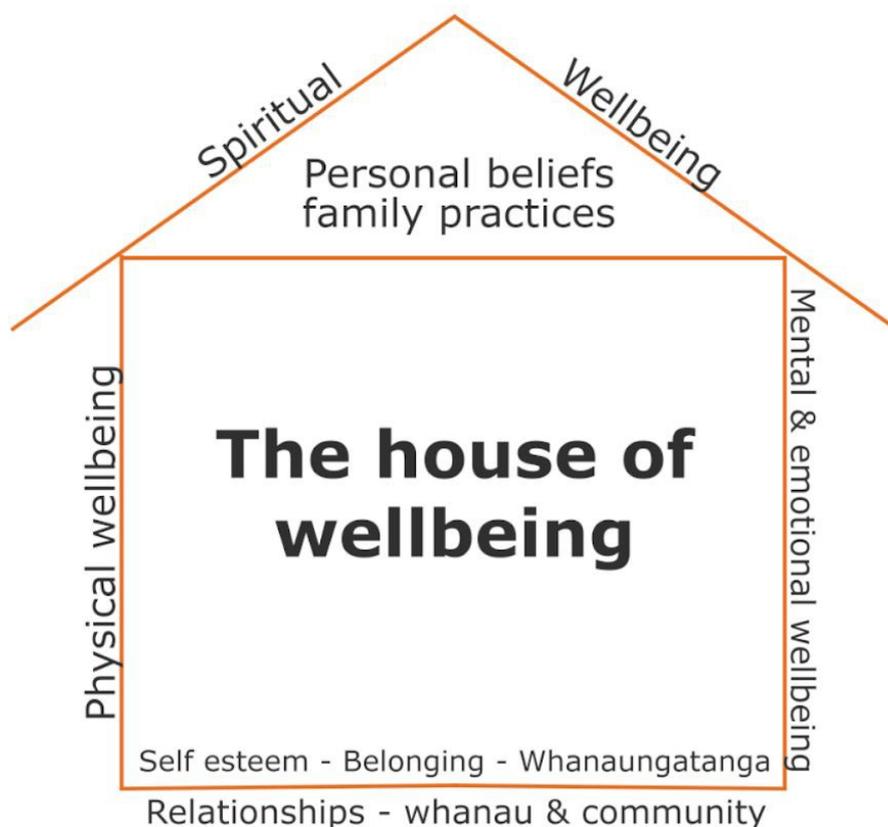
Remember: It takes 21 days to break a habit and create a new one—not much time and a relatively small commitment. But the results can powerfully impact a person and her environment. Consider the delightful anecdote about a young woman who woke up one morning and noticed she had only three hairs on her head. "Hmmm," she said, "I think I'll braid my hair today." She did, and she had a great day.

The next morning she woke up and saw that only two hairs remained on her head. "Well," she said, "I'm going to part my hair today." She did, and she had a really fun day.

The following morning she awoke to only one hair on her head. "Oh," she said, "I think I'll wear my hair in a ponytail today." She did, and her day was wonderful.

The next morning she awoke to find that she did not have a single hair on her head. "Yea!" she said. "I don't have to fix my hair today!"

Model of wellbeing - Holistic Approach



When the foundations, walls and roof are strong your house is strong.

Definition of Wellbeing

Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness. It is a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. In short, wellbeing could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.

There are four dimensions of Wellbeing:

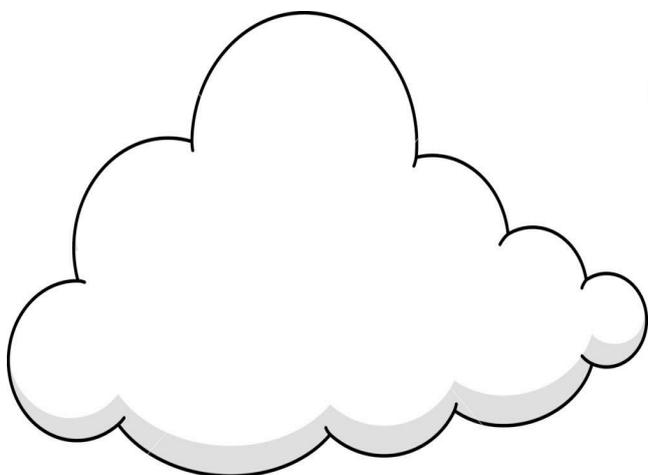
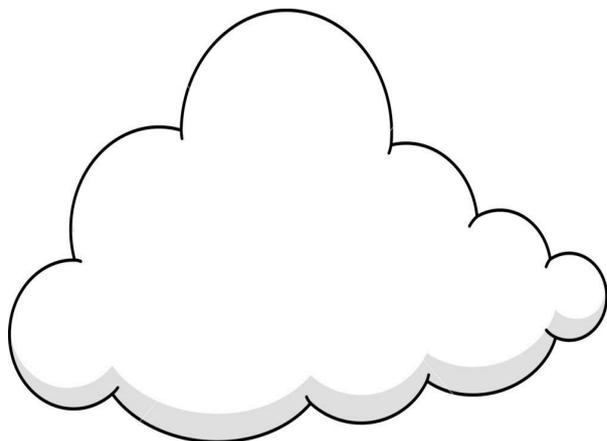
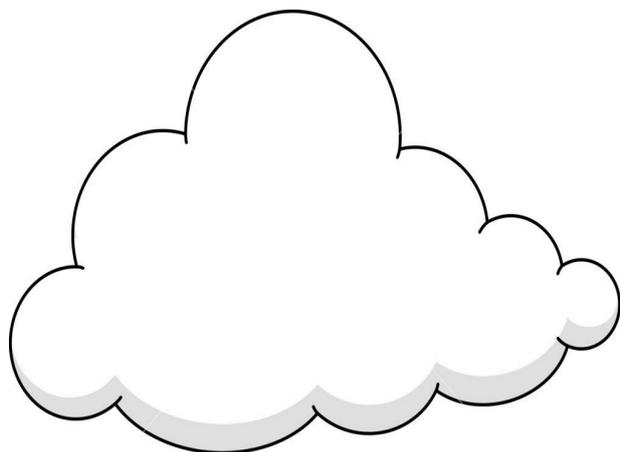
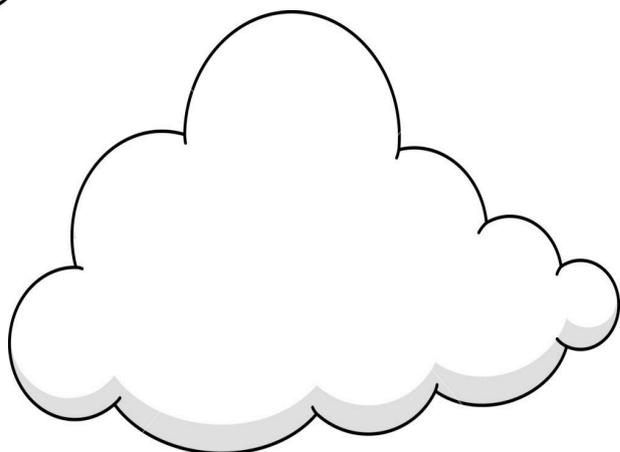
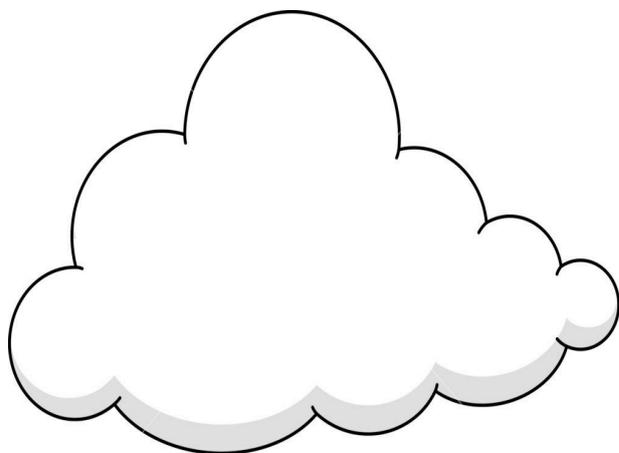
1. Physical Wellbeing,
2. Mental & Emotional wellbeing includes self-confidence,
3. Social Wellbeing includes relationships, whanau, self-esteem
4. Spiritual wellbeing comes from personal beliefs.

Benefits of Mindfulness/Awareness

- Reduce stress
- Relieve anxiety
- Reduce depression
- Increase feelings of wellbeing
- Aid ability to relax

Over time with regular practice

- Experience more self acceptance
- Improved relationships
- Stronger intuition
- Ability to stay calm when getting triggered. and
- More depth and meaning in life in general



Emotional Regulation Strategies

By Courtney Ackerman

Adapted from the *positivepsychology.com* site

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/emotion-regulation-worksheets-strategies-db t-skills/>

In popular culture, there is an odd yet oddly persuasive idea: that we are not in control of our emotions. We feel how we feel, regardless of what is happening around us or how much we'd like to control our feelings. You can see this idea played out in movies, television shows, books, and even on the news. This idea is a common one, but there's one big problem—it's not accurate!

As humans, we will never have complete control over what we feel, but we have a lot more influence over how we feel than you might have heard. The skills that allow you to manage and direct your emotions are called emotion regulation skills, and it doesn't take a pilgrimage to a holy site or thousands of dollars to learn these secrets to feeling better.

Read on to learn about emotion regulation and how you can develop and improve the skills necessary for staying balanced and emotionally stable.

Strategy 1 // Letting Go of Painful Emotions

Perhaps the most important emotion regulation skill, learning to let go, can be very difficult but is worth the effort you invest.

Humans have a tendency to become stuck when attempting to process negative emotions. Instead of simply letting them go, we often hold ever tighter to them, obsessing over every little bit of our emotional experience and wondering why it's happening to us.

It sounds paradoxical, but the act of accepting that we are feeling emotions we would rather not feel can be the key to letting go of them. When we accept that we are suffering, we stop running from the difficult emotions and turn to face them—and when we do, we might see that it wasn't the big bad monster we thought it was, but a smaller and more manageable beast.

Follow these steps to work on your ability to let go of negative emotions:

1. Observe your emotion. Acknowledge that it exists, stand back from it, and get yourself unstuck from it
2. Try to experience your emotions as a wave, coming and going. You may find it helpful to concentrate on some part of the emotion, like how your body is feeling or some image about it. For example, you could use this imagery:

“Try to imagine an ocean wave flowing through you, but not so big that it knocks you over. Don’t try to push the emotion away. This makes it bigger and increases our suffering. Don’t reject the emotion. Don’t judge your emotion. It is not good or bad. It is just there. There are no bad emotions, just emotions. Anger, fear, sadness are all painful emotions, but they are not bad. Everyone has them, and they are just as valid as the happy emotions. At the same time, do not hang on to your emotion.

Don’t rehearse it over and over to yourself. Don’t escalate it or make it bigger. Sometimes when we feel a very painful emotion, like anger or a deep grief, we hold on to it, or we intensify it, making it stronger and stronger, in our efforts to deal with it or to give it our full attention. Try not to do this. Just let it be, however it is. This can result in a lessening of the pain.”

3. Recognize that you are not your emotion. Your emotion is part of you, but it is not all of you. You are more than your emotion;
4. Do not necessarily act on the emotion; having the emotion does not mean that you have to act. You may just need to sit with the emotion. Often, acting can intensify and prolong the emotion;
5. Practice LOVING your emotions. This can be a difficult concept. Why would we want to love painful emotions?

We can learn to love our emotions just the way we can learn to love (accept) anything else about ourselves or our experience that we cannot change—our age, our height, freckles, the birds that sing early in the morning and wake us up, the weather, the size of our feet, allergies, etc.

Remember that acceptance (love) and approval are two different things. You don’t have to like your freckles, but they are there and you can’t change that, so if you just accept or love them, you will feel a lot better than if you keep fighting the idea that they are there (Dietz, 2012).

Strategy 2 // Emotion Regulation Tips for the Holidays

(When holidays come up), you might be planning on visiting with family you don’t see often in everyday life. These get-togethers can be great opportunities to reconnect with loved ones, but they can also be stressful and emotionally charged situations. Follow these self-help tips to get through your holiday visits with dignity and grace (Dietz, 2012).

1. Take Care of Your Body

To have a healthy mind, it’s extremely helpful to start with a healthy body. Take care of yourself by eating healthy meals, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, avoiding toxic or mood-altering substances, and treating any illnesses or issues that require treatment.

We don't make the best decisions when we are feeling sick, tired, or hungry, so eliminating these physical issues will make it easier for you to maintain your emotional balance.

2. Increasing Positive Emotions

Focus on increasing your positive emotions during the holiday season. You shouldn't ignore your negative emotions, but make sure to leave room for the positive as well.

3. Find Ways to Have Fun

This one is self-explanatory—give yourself permission and the opportunities to enjoy yourself during the holidays.

4. Work on Relationships

Holiday gatherings are a great opportunity to repair and restart relationships with friends that you haven't seen in a while. Leave yourself open to the possibility of renewing old friendships, as well as to forging new friendships.

Perhaps most important of all, commit to maintaining and strengthening your current relationships with family, friends, and anyone else you are likely to see on your holiday travels.

5. Be Present and Mindful of the Positive

Focus on the good things that your holiday season has brought you, such as seeing an old friend, getting a present that you're really excited about, or attending a fun New Year's Eve party. Even if bad things happen, there's bound to be at least one or two positive things to savour.

6. Be Unmindful of Worries

While you're focusing on the positive, it will make the next suggestion easier to implement: putting your worries and insecurities aside. Crowd out the negative in your head with all the positives that you can find. Remind yourself that you deserve to have fun, to enjoy your time with friends, and to bask in the warmth of a loving family. Make room in your mind for the positive, and the negative will have less space to fill (Dietz, 2012).

Strategy 3 // STOPP

If you're struggling with controlling your emotions, consider learning how to STOPP (Vivyan, 2015)! STOPP is a strategy that will help you in the heat of the moment when you are dealing with intense emotions. It incorporates aspects of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), and mindfulness meditation to help you more effectively address and manage your emotional response to a challenging, difficult, or rage-inducing incident.

STOPP stands for:

- **S – Stop!** Just pause for a moment.
- **T – Take a Breath** Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out.

- **O – Observe**

What thoughts are going through your mind right now?

Where is your focus of attention?

What are you reacting to?

What sensations do you notice in your body?

- **P – Pull Back – Put in Some Perspective**

What's the bigger picture? Take the helicopter view

What is another way of looking at this situation?

What would a trusted friend say to me right now?

Is this thought a fact or an opinion?

What is a more reasonable explanation?

How important is this?

How important will it be in six months' time?

- **P – Practice What Works – Proceed**

What is the best thing to do right now?

For me? For others? For the situation?

What can I do that fits with my values?

Do what will be effective and appropriate (Vivyan, 2015).

If you learn only one skill that will help you to more effectively regulate your emotions, this should be the one you learn.

Learning how to pause in between an intense emotional reaction and your ensuing actions is one of the most valuable and life-changing skills that a person can have. Practice STOPPING, and you will be in a great position to manage your most difficult emotions.

Strategy 4 // Differentiating Between Healthy and Unhealthy Emotion Regulation Activities

There are many techniques to help you steer your emotions in the right direction, or to maintain your positive mood and emotional balance. There are also many techniques that on the surface seem like they will help you keep your emotional balance but upon further consideration reveal themselves to be unhealthy.

Different activities might work best for you, but these lists are a good start if you are unsure where to begin separating healthy from unhealthy activities.

Healthy activities that help you regulate your emotions include:

- Talking with friends
- Exercising
- Writing in a journal
- Meditation
- Therapy
- Taking care of yourself when physically ill
- Getting adequate sleep
- Paying attention to negative thoughts that occur before or after strong emotions
- Noticing when you need a break – and taking it!

These activities are healthy because they not only contribute to better management of your emotions, they do not cause you any harm.

Unhealthy activities that may seem like they help, but actually hurt, include:

- Abusing alcohol or other substances
- Self-injury
- Avoiding or withdrawing from difficult situations
- Physical or verbal aggression
- Excessive social media use, to the exclusion of other responsibilities (Rolston & Lloyd-Richardson, n.d.)

These activities might feel good, and they might even help in the moment, but they can leave lasting and/or unanticipated damage and may lead to avoidance of situations that will inevitably require a head-on solution.

When you are tempted to engage in an unhealthy activity, consider an activity that builds a sense of achievement instead. Try an activity that will result in you learning something new or developing a new skill, and allow yourself the space to build on it every day.

Doing something positive and fulfilling like this can not only increase your skills and boost your positive emotions but will also leave less room for negative emotions (Rolston & Lloyd-Richardson, n.d.).

Gratitude Exercise

Write down 10 things you are grateful for:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

Doing this every morning will help address the negativity bias and rewire your brain to positivity.

Additional resources for wellness

Neurohacking: rewiring your brain | Don Vaughn | TEDxUCLA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzbHtIrb14s>

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https://www.jenniferhawthorne.com/articles/change_your_thoughts.html

How we can rewire our negativity bias - Rick Hanson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ed4RND4Ry3o>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpuDyGgIeh0>

Auckland University has really good wellbeing website for students keen to learn more about how to maintain their wellbeing

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/on-campus/student-support/personal-support/student-health-counselling/wellbeing.html>

Highly recommended the site covers: Staying active // Powering off // Fueling your body // Connecting with others // Take notice // Keep learning

Plus find out about the University's Wellbeing groups

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/on-campus/student-support/personal-support/student-health-counselling/wellbeing-groups.html>

Pasifika women's support group

Mindfulness for academic success (MAS)

Social confidence group

Rainbow men's group

Emotional Mastery: The Gifted Wisdom of Unpleasant Feelings | Dr Joan Rosenberg | TEDxSantaBarbara <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKy19WzkPxE>

What often blocks people from feeling capable in life and from having greater success with finances, health or relationships is how they handle unpleasant feelings.

Psychologist Joan Rosenberg unveils the innovative strategy and surprising keys for experiencing the challenging emotions that lie at the heart of confidence, emotional strength, and resilience.