

# Ways to Mental Wellbeing

in Waterloo Region

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Simple steps to improve your  
mental health and wellbeing



Mental  
Wellness  
Network  
of Waterloo Region

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# What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is more than occasional feelings of happiness – wellbeing includes feeling good and functioning well.

There are many things that influence how we feel and function, including: external things like income, housing, employment and social networks; and internal things such as health, self-esteem and optimism.

When these things support us, we can develop a positive sense of wellbeing and experience feelings of happiness, contentment, and enjoyment. To function well, we all need support to:

- Participate in meaningful activities that help us feel competent and independent.
- Develop inner resources to help us cope when things are difficult and be resilient to changes that are not in our control.

It is also important for our wellbeing that we feel connected to other people. So, in addition to internally feeling and functioning well, our social experiences – like having supportive relationships and feeling linked to our community – form an important part of our wellbeing.

# What is this initiative?

Ways to Mental Wellbeing is a Waterloo Region initiative inspired by the framework “The Five Ways to Wellbeing,” which was developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in the United Kingdom in 2008.

This framework was created by researching evidence-based actions that improve mental health and wellbeing. NEF’s goal was to create simple actions that anyone can do to improve their mental wellbeing, no matter their age, culture or external resources.

We all face challenges and know what it’s like to feel stressed, drained, and mentally or physically unwell. This framework helps us to build our strengths, better respond to challenges (big or small), and live to our full capacity.

As you read on, you may discover that you’re already using some of the Ways to Mental Wellbeing! However, deliberately choosing to engage in the Ways to Mental Wellbeing in our daily lives can improve our mental and physical health. When we improve our wellbeing, we can move from just coping and surviving to flourishing and feeling happier and more satisfied with life.

By working on our mental health and wellbeing we can enjoy life and our surroundings, better connect with others, and contribute to our community.

# Five Ways to Wellbeing

## Connect

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

## Be Active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity that you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

## Take Notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are on a train, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

## Keep Learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.

## Give Back

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

# How to use this guide...

The goal of this guide is to help you understand the actions you can take to strengthen your mental health and wellbeing. At first, these suggestions may seem like common sense, but they may not be common practice in your every day life. It's all about choices and, sometimes, choosing to change our habits can be hard work.

This guide will explain each of the Ways to Mental Wellbeing, give simple suggestions for action, and provide questions to help you pause, reflect, and set goals. While you don't have to share your responses with anyone, you may find it helpful to discuss the Ways to Mental Wellbeing with family or friends. By talking to others, you can share the framework and help them improve their mental wellbeing, too.

When working through this guide, it may be helpful to begin by focusing on the 'ways' you're doing the least of. By putting extra effort into these areas, you may be able to achieve better balance in your life leading to improved overall mental wellbeing.

Some weekly reflection questions and logs have been provided at the end of this journal to help you reflect on your behaviours and the benefits you're seeing.

Making any type of change takes conscious effort, so these tools are here to help you commit to and practice new behaviours.

As you practice the Ways to Mental Wellbeing, you'll develop your strengths and resources, become more resilient, and be better able to cope with challenges when they arise. You'll also increase your capacity to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance your ability to enjoy life and live to your full potential.

# Connect

Connecting with others and surrounding ourselves with positive relationships has a significant influence on our mental health and wellbeing. Our social connections help us to feel like we belong, feel valued and accepted, and can support our sense of self-worth.

Connecting with others helps us to build a network of people to turn to during difficult times. It's these people who can help us move forward from negative experiences with greater ease.

Your network can be made up of anyone: family, friends, coworkers, or neighbours. While not all relationships need to be close, it's important to have relationships where we can share our feelings, feel understood, and receive support.

To improve our mental health and wellbeing, it's important to spend time nurturing all these different types of connections. But keep in mind there are other ways of connecting, too: you may connect with yourself through quiet reflection, connect with nature or animals, or connect with a spiritual body.

As well, sharing interests and values with others in your community can help you

feel connected to something larger where you live.

At first, connecting may take effort, but small gestures can quickly become second nature. Try these simple tips to connect:

- Put away distractions when spending time with others.
- Say hello and strike up a lighthearted chat with someone you don't know.
- Make the effort to phone someone, instead of texting.
- Arrange a day out with someone you haven't connected with in a while.
- Chat with your coworkers at break or over lunch.
- Join a hobby group or a sports team to meet new people.
- Attend community events and festivals.

# Reflect

How are you currently connecting? Think about relationships with others, time you spend in nature or with animals, and how you participate within your community.

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What challenges do you face when trying to truly connect with others and your community?

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How could you overcome these challenges?

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What actions do you plan to take to strengthen, remake, or build new connections?

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# Be Active

Making an effort to be active can improve our mental wellbeing as much as our physical health! Our mental health and physical health are strongly connected – when our bodies are working well, our minds are more likely to be working well and vice versa.

Staying active can improve our mental health and wellbeing in many ways – it can reduce feelings of anxiety, boost our mood, and clear our mind! Being active can also help us cope with stress, increase our self-esteem, help us gain a sense of mastery, and give us an opportunity to connect with others.

New technologies like cars and computers have made our lives easier in some ways, but they have also made fitting in physical activity a deliberate choice.

Choose simple actions throughout each day to move your body however you are able to. Try taking the stairs or walking from place to place. You may also consider structured activities such as playing sports or exercising at home or a gym.

The important part to being physically active is to find things that suit your abilities and that you enjoy – being active does not need to be complicated!

Sometimes we may feel guilty taking a break from our work or busy schedules to be active. However, taking even a short break to be active can positively refresh our minds, help us be more resourceful and productive, and help us to be present in our connections with others.

Make daily activity a priority by trying some of these simple suggestions:

- Walk, ride, or roll to nearby places.
- Take the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator.
- Get off the bus one stop early and walk or roll the rest of the way.
- Walk over to speak with your colleagues instead of emailing or calling them.
- Move and stretch for a few minutes after sitting or standing in place for one hour.
- Try gardening at home or at a local community garden.

# Reflect



What physical activities do you engage in regularly?

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What challenges do you face when trying to be active throughout the day? Think about your work, family, and personal life.

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How could you overcome these challenges?

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What daily actions do you plan to take to be more active?

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# Be Mindful

For many of us, our minds are constantly active throughout the day – we’re focused on scheduling plans, worrying about deadlines, making to-do lists, jumping from task-to-task, or thinking about upcoming appointments.

The opposite can also be true – we may not be doing much of anything but our minds are occupied with worry or unhealthy, negative thoughts. In either case, we may forget to take notice of our surroundings and the way our bodies are feeling. When we are distracted by our thoughts, we may not see how the present moment is influencing our emotions and behaviours.

Our thoughts are important for productivity and it’s natural to respond to stressors by thinking about them. However, when we focus on the present moment, we can step back from our thoughts to see their patterns. This can help us learn to recognize when our thoughts are taking over and let go of patterns that are not helpful.

Observing our surroundings and reflecting on our thoughts and feelings without getting lost in them are small ways that we can be mindful.

By being present in the moment and noticing what is going on around and within us, we can improve our mental state, achieve better control over our emotions and behaviour, become more self-aware, and make better choices that reflect our needs, values, and interests!

Try these simple suggestions to take notice and be more mindful:

- Take pictures with a camera or try drawing what you see.
- Turn your thoughts into words by writing poetry or journaling.
- Pick a regular time each day to pay attention to your surroundings.
- Spend time outside and enjoy nature.
- Try keeping a gratitude diary.
- Sit quietly in a busy place and notice the interactions between people.
- Try meditation, yoga, or Thai Chi.

# Reflect

In what ways do you currently take notice of your thoughts, feelings, and the world around you?

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What challenges do you face when trying to take notice and be mindful? Think about your everyday tasks, busy schedule, or possible negative thoughts.

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How could you overcome these challenges?

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How will you pause to take notice and be mindful in the present moment?

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# Keep Learning

It can be difficult to to keep learning if we are told to learn or develop certain skills that we may not be interested in or value. But learning can be an opportunity to enrich our lives by challenging ourselves to try something different and experience something new!

How we think about learning is important to making the experience positive for our wellbeing. Participating in the Ways to Mental Wellbeing is about learning what you can do to be more satisfied and fulfilled in your life and the very act of learning is part of that.

Learning helps us gain insight into life, ourselves, and the world around us. Lifelong learning is associated with greater satisfaction, optimism, and ability to get the most from life. By continuing to learn after childhood, we can experience higher wellbeing and an improved ability to cope with stress.

By setting and reaching learning goals, we experience positive feelings of achievement, and increased self-confidence and self-esteem. Additionally, learning often involves interacting with others which can further increase our wellbeing by helping to build and strengthen social relationships.

Learning can take many shapes and forms and will look different for each person. As long as we focus on pursuing learning for our interests and get satisfaction from doing so, it will enhance our wellbeing!

Here are some ways you can keep learning:

- Try out a new recipe or sign up for a cooking class.
- Rediscover an old interest (or find a new one) like drawing, knitting, or writing.
- Keep up with local news.
- Look up do-it-yourself projects.
- Learn about the people and places around you.
- Visit a public library and explore new books, magazines, and events.
- Learn to play an instrument or try a new sport.

# Reflect

What are you doing right now to learn new information or develop new skills?

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What challenges do you face to learning something new or trying something different?

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How could you overcome these challenges?

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What new things or new skills do you commit to learning or developing?

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# Give Back

When we talk about mental health and wellbeing, a lot of focus is on what we can do for ourselves. However, part of improving our own wellbeing includes doing things for others.

Giving is the act of offering something to someone else – a stranger, friend, family member, a charitable organization, or our wider community. This can include material things, like money and gifts, but it often means giving our time, our kindness, our skills or knowledge, our enthusiasm or passion, and our support.

Giving is a two-way process where our acceptance of what someone else gives to us is as good for them as it is for us. It's important to learn to accept and show gratitude to those who give to us while also learning to give to others.

Giving, can help us connect by strengthening our relationships with others and our connection to the community. We experience good feelings when we give to others and giving is contagious – people who are given to are more likely to act kindly and give to others! This can promote happiness and improved wellbeing throughout the community.

Giving back gives us a sense of purpose, and creates feelings of happiness and satisfaction with life. It also helps us to be mindful by taking our thoughts away from our own concerns to see the 'bigger picture.' By showing others that we care, we increase feelings of positivity and gratitude within ourselves and others.

To give back, try these simple actions and remember to show gratitude to those who give to you:

- Remember to say 'please' and 'thank you.'
- Provide company or support to a friend or family member in need.
- Ask others how they are and truly listen to their answer.
- Donate unused items to a charity.
- Help pick up litter in places you visit.
- Give a compliment to acknowledge what others have done well.
- Organize random acts of kindness days.

# Reflect

In what ways do you currently give back to others and what are you grateful for?

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What challenges do you face to giving to others and showing gratitude to those who give to you?

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How could you overcome these challenges?

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What do you plan to do to give to yourself, others, and your community?

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# Weekly Reflection

To complete this activity, list as many examples of how you engaged in the Ways to Mental Wellbeing in the past week.



## People I connected with:

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## Physical activities I did:

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## Things I have noticed:

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## New things I have tried:

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## Small gestures I made:

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# Weekly Reflection

To take notice and be mindful, how has engaging in each of the Ways to Mental Wellbeing made you feel this week and what have you learned?



**Connect**

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**Be Active**

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**Be Mindful**

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**Keep Learning**

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**Give Back**

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# Reflection

How do you plan to continue to engage in the Ways to Mental Wellbeing?

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What can you do to remind yourself to engage in the Ways to Mental Wellbeing every day?

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How can you share the Ways to Mental Wellbeing and your journey with others?

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# Support Services

The Ways to Mental Wellbeing is not intended to replace professional support for mental health concerns. If you're struggling, please contact your health care provider or access one of the available local support services listed below.

## Crisis Support

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, you should:

- Go to your nearest hospital emergency room where crisis support is available.
- Call 9-1-1.

## Phone Support

Call HERE 24/7 at 1-844-437-3247 (1-HERE247) for access to addiction, mental health, and crisis services provided by local agencies.

Call Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 for access to 24-hour child and youth counselling and referral services.

Call Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line at 1-800-268-9688 for access to confidential peer support and referral services that support the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, 2-spirited, queer, and questioning youth in Ontario.

Call Connex Ontario at 1-866-531-2600 for free and confidential information about mental health services and supports in communities across Ontario.

## Local Mental Health Services

Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo-Wellington-Dufferin provides a full care system for those with addictions, mental health or developmental needs.

Front Door provides access to child and youth mental health services.

Health Line provides a list of community mental health programs in Waterloo Wellington.

Mental Health Resource List provides a list of mental health services, help, and supports in Waterloo Region.