

Emotional Wellness and Well-Being

The National Centre For Emotional Wellness defines emotional wellness as “*an awareness, understanding and acceptance of our feelings, and our ability to manage effectively through challenges and change.*” It is a key parameter that helps gauge how well an individual is able to adapt and navigate through life’s challenges.

The University of New Hampshire lists the following signs of emotional wellness:

- ✓ The ability to talk about one’s emotional concerns and feelings
- ✓ The ability to say “no” without feeling guilty
- ✓ Feeling mostly content
- ✓ The ability to relax and practice self-care
- ✓ Self-acceptance

Resilience is an important foundation of emotional well-being. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as “*the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.*” American professor and researcher Brene Brown in her book ‘The Rising Strong’ writes “*You may not control all events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them*”. Yes, nobody is born resilient. Resilience can be developed. Some of the factors that contribute to resilience are:

- An individual’s worldview and engagement with the world
- The availability and quality of social resources
- Use of specific coping strategies

While emotional wellness is an integral dimension or pillar of overall well-being, it is important to understand that overall well-being rests upon eight pillars of wellness

wherein one affects the other. The collapse or breakdown of emotional well-being, often results in the deterioration of the remaining pillars, sometimes gradually. The University of New Hampshire uses *the Well-being Wheel* as a tool to gauge an individual’s wellness to understand “*what is going well and what may be challenging.*”

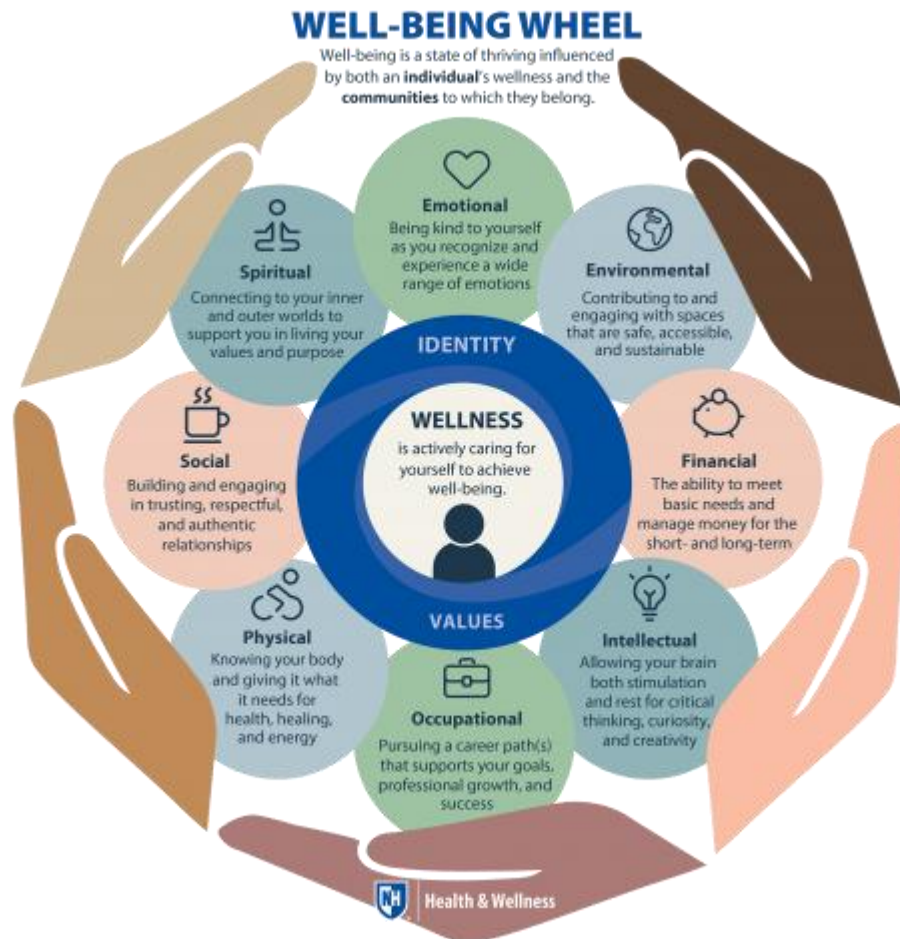


Fig. 1: The Well-Being Wheel

1. **Physical Wellness** consists of understanding the human body and it’s mechanisms, body positivity, healthy eating habits, an awareness and understanding of one’s sleep and stress cycles, healthy lifestyle choices, practicing self-care and relaxation regularly and seeking medical care when required.
2. **Emotional Wellness** includes self-awareness and acceptance of one’s feelings, ability to experience and appropriately express a wide range of emotions such as

fear, joy, humor, frustration, anger, appreciation, excitement, sadness, etc. Assertiveness and confrontation skills, healthy self-esteem and self-concept. Stress management and crisis management skills and the ability to develop, establish and maintain healthy relationships.

3. ***Social Wellness*** comprises the ability to create and maintain healthy relationships, multicultural sensitivity, understanding and accepting the differences of others irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, gender, life experience, etc. Developing “*global consciousness*” by practicing *shared humanity*.
4. ***Intellectual Wellness*** consists of striving to be open to new experiences and ideas. “*Expanding one’s ability to create, develop, analyze, critique, concentrate, understand, evaluate, problem solve, predict, comprehend, etc.*” Intellectual and academic competence and becoming a lifelong learner.
5. ***Environmental Wellness*** includes awareness of the effects of the external environment around us, concern about the world ecology- both local, national and global. Working towards the betterment and damage control of the environment.
6. ***Spiritual Wellness*** includes exploring personal values and spiritual truths, Awareness and acceptance of ideological differences, search for meaning in life, striving towards personal integrity, healthy outlook towards loss and death, etc.
7. ***Vocational Wellness*** comprises of awareness of the variety of career opportunities available, challenging gender stereotypes, choosing a career that aligns with one’s values, preferences, interest and skills, managing work-life balance, developing job-related skills such as time-management, active listening, assertiveness, feedback, resilience, people skills, growth mindset, motivation, confrontation, etc.

8. **Financial Wellness** consists of learning to manage personal finance and budgeting without much stress, setting short term and long term goals, financial discipline, etc.

Quite similar in comparison to the Well-being Wheel is Maslow's '*Hierarchy of Needs*'. However, the needs are presented in a systematic progression where the *physiological needs* of food, water and shelter form the basic needs, followed by the *psychological needs* and finally, the *self-fulfillment needs*.

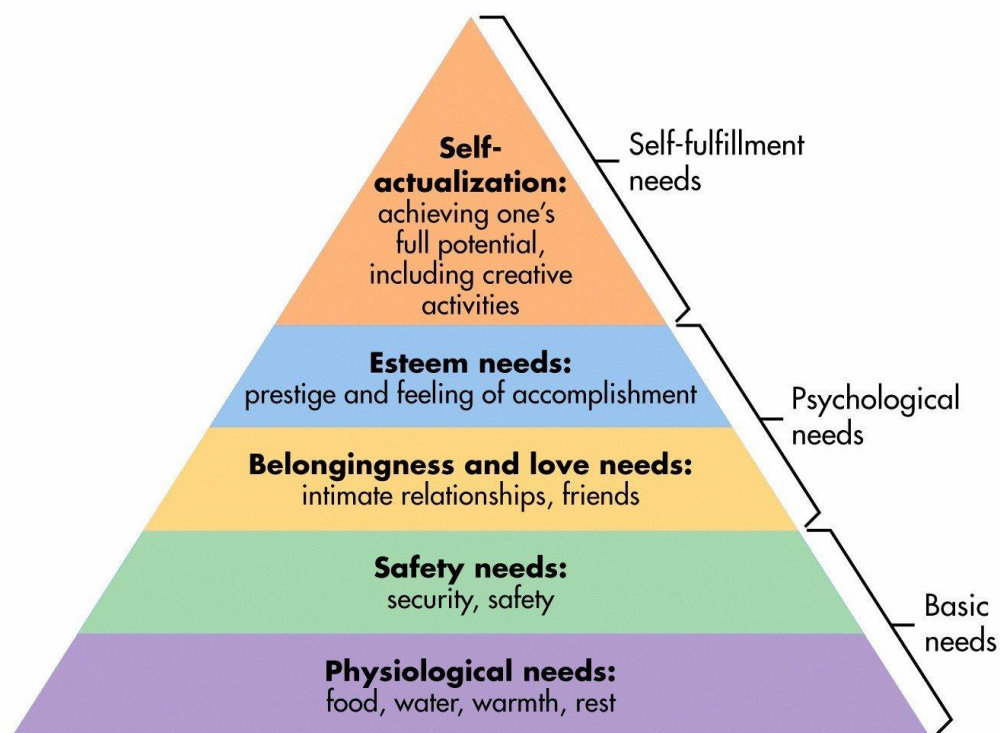


Fig. 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

When a client comes in distress for therapy, the Mental Status Examination (MSE) taken, reveals the extent to which the appearance, behavior, speech, mood, affect, thoughts, perception, cognition, insight and judgment and clinical judgment of the client has been affected. Psychological therapy can be a long process depending on the severity of the mental health concern. Putting back the pillar of physical wellness in place can, over the time, be visible in the form of positive improvements in the

overall appearance of the client by reducing fatigue, burnout, lethargy, irritability among several other symptomatic manifestations seen in the client. This can help boost the morale of the client by encouraging them to willingly participate in their journey towards mental health recovery. Little by little, these improvements, however small, prove to be a positive reinforcement for the client.

'Therapeutic lifestyle changes' (TLC's)- a concept popularized by Dr. Roger Walsh refers to making positive changes to one's lifestyle in order to improve mental health and overall well-being. This includes exercise, nutrition and diet, relationships, recreation, relaxation and stress management, religious or spiritual involvement, spending time in nature and service to others.

The comparisons drawn from theories stated above helps understand that emotional wellness is the most fundamental pillar which works in harmony with the other pillars of overall well-being. Which is why, there has been a growing emphasis on mental health in recent years. Emotional wellness can be enhanced by building resilience, reducing stress, getting quality sleep, being mindful, strengthening social connections, taking care of physical well-being, making healthy lifestyle choices, living a meaningful life and seeking professional help when required. In my own therapy sessions with clients, I've witnessed the *'Well-being Wheel'* produce drastic results. While the emotional healing journey can be a longer process, this framework clearly helps clients to keep going and consciously put in effort towards active recovery.

Lastly, humanity has survived and thrived centuries of war, famine, pandemic, natural calamities and other atrocities because of its resilience. Had mankind succumbed at any point, human race wouldn't have survived. As we hope for future generations to both survive and thrive, it is important to appreciate the need and

impact of emotional wellness and actively work towards building it, without taking it for granted. Each era of the past has presented with itself its own unique challenges. In the coming eras, that could mean competing with a rapidly-evolving AI (Artificial Intelligence), growing more and more powerful with every passing day. It is therefore important to build a world resilient to whatever crises, come what may. And as a first step, that can be achieved by awareness and psycho-education.

- Ms Anu John
Counselling Psychologist
St. Joseph's University, Bangalore

Reference

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