

THE FIVE DOMAINS OF WELLBEING

All of us—from janitor to judge, senior executive to senior citizen, adult to adolescent—share a set of universal needs that are critical to our wellbeing. These essential human needs are what the Full Frame Initiative defines as the **Five Domains of Wellbeing**.

We all need: 1) **social connectedness** to people and communities, in ways that allow us to give as well as to receive; 2) **safety**, the ability to be ourselves without significant harm; 3) **stability** that comes from having things we can count on to be the same from day to day, and knowing that a small bump won't set off a domino-effect of crises; 4) **mastery**, feeling that we can influence what happens to us, and having the skills to navigate and negotiate life; 5) and **meaningful access to relevant resources** to meet our basic needs without shame, danger or great difficulty.



While we share a common need for assets in these domains, each of us experiences the domains in different and deeply personal ways, influenced by many factors, including our personal history, race, gender, age, community, family, values and context. A returning veteran may feel physically vulnerable sitting in traffic. A young black man may face extra scrutiny from security guards at a department store when he's buying clothes for school. A pick-up soccer game might give one person a sense of belonging and connectedness, but make another feel awkward and isolated.

Those same factors also influence what we are (or are not) willing to give up in order to increase our wellbeing. Increasing wellbeing doesn't happen by making progress in each single domain independently. The domains are interconnected. Sometimes, building assets in one

domain means giving up something we value in another: a tradeoff. We all ask ourselves, "Is it worth it?" *Is it worth it to take a job that gives me a big raise?* If it means waking up 20 minutes earlier, maybe so. But if it means always missing visiting hours at a parent's nursing home, maybe not. Sometimes we can find a way to minimize the tradeoff so that what wasn't worth it before, now is: convincing the nursing home to make an exception for visiting after hours twice a week. Being able both to decide for *ourselves* what's "worth it," and to navigate life in ways that build our assets and minimize tradeoffs, fosters wellbeing.

Yet many people, families and communities living at the intersection of poverty, violence and trauma face constant threats to their wellbeing, and services designed to help them address a challenge in one domain—gaining access to housing for example—rarely are set up to take into consideration the tradeoffs that might be an unintended by-product of this progress. And sometimes those tradeoffs aren't worth it, and so the progress doesn't stick. For example, if turning down available housing automatically disqualifies a person who is homeless from other housing options, the system has decided housing is "worth it," no

matter what the cost of the tradeoff. But what if taking that housing means a mother has to move across the state, away from her job and the grandmother who provides care to her child who has a disability? That housing placement probably won't last, even if she takes it.

To create change that *will* last, systems and services must help people minimize tradeoffs and build assets in the **Five Domains of Wellbeing**. Doing so will begin to break the cycles of poverty, violence and trauma that undermine wellbeing for us all.

WHAT THE FIVE DOMAINS OF WELLBEING MEAN FOR INDIVIDUALS

Social Connectedness

The degree to which a person has and perceives a sufficient number and diversity of relationships that allow her or him to give and receive information, emotional support and material aid; create a sense of belonging and value; and foster growth.

Related concepts: belonging, social capital, social networks, social support, reduced social isolation and exclusion

Stability

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

Related concepts: resiliency, permanency, certainty

Safety

The degree to which a person can be her or his authentic self and not be at heightened risk of physical or emotional harm.

Related concepts: security; absence of harm, risk or danger

Mastery

The degree to which a person feels in control of her or his fate and the decisions she or he makes, and where she or he experiences some correlation between efforts and outcomes.

Related concepts: control, choice, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, empowerment, applying knowledge

Meaningful Access to Relevant Resources

The degree to which a person can meet needs particularly important for her or his situation in ways that are not overly onerous, and are not degrading or dangerous.

Related concepts: having knowledge, meeting "basic" needs, cultural competence (of resources), utilization rates, service integration/defragmentation, reduced barriers, information and referral, navigation

The Full Frame Initiative believes that everyone needs and has a right to wellbeing. Our mission is to change systems so that people and communities experiencing poverty, violence and trauma have the tools, supports and resources they need to thrive.

We hope our materials are useful to you. If you would like to reproduce them or use them for your own work, please contact us first. Using these materials without our consent is not permitted.