

Individual-Level Five Domains of Wellbeing

KEY ASPECTS & MISCONCEPTIONS

Wellbeing

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.

MISCONCEPTION: We either have wellbeing or we don't.

TRUTH: We can have assets in one domain of our wellbeing and be challenged in others, or even have assets and challenges in the same domain.

MISCONCEPTION: Building assets in the domains is all about mindset and thinking "you can do it!"

TRUTH: 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 structure and policies of systems and society give some people greater, easier access to wellbeing than others, based in significant part on these identities.

MISCONCEPTION: Our needs are hierarchical.

TRUTH: There's actually little evidence that our needs follow a fixed hierarchy. In reality, they're in constant interplay. At a given moment, one can feel more important, but it's fluid.

MISCONCEPTION: There are "good" and "bad" ways to meet our needs for wellbeing.

TRUTH: 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.

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.

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

MISCONCEPTION: Stability is about housing, jobs and relationships.

TRUTH: We experience stability through anchors and having "buffers" that keep things from spiraling. We can have stable housing, jobs and relationships and still feel challenged in stability.

MISCONCEPTION: Everything needs to be exactly the same all the time.

TRUTH: A certain amount of stability is necessary to take risks and try new things.

Safety

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

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

MISCONCEPTION: Safety is "objective" and there is only one way to experience it. "We've done everything to make this place safe. They're safe."

TRUTH: What is safe for one person may not be safe for another.

MISCONCEPTION: Being our "authentic selves" is about being able to feel comfortable and not judged.

TRUTH: All of us are different in different environments and sometimes may feel uncomfortable or judged. This is different than feeling unsafe. Safety is us being able to be our core identities without fear of harm.

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.

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

MISCONCEPTION: Only people who support us count as part of our social connectedness.

TRUTH: It's just as important to be needed.

MISCONCEPTION: It's nice to have, but not essential.

TRUTH: Social connectedness is critical for our physical and mental health. Social isolation is linked to serious health issues.

MISCONCEPTION: Only strong and close relationships contribute to social connectedness.

TRUTH: Social connectedness also comes from "weak ties" and a sense of belonging with a group (e.g., religion, fan of a sports team).

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.

- The effort put into something influences the outcome
- 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

MISCONCEPTION: We have to "master" something to feel mastery.

TRUTH: Mastery comes from accomplishment and progress, which can come from making progress or getting better at something even if we're not "the best."

MISCONCEPTION: It's the same thing as self-esteem.

TRUTH: We can have high self-esteem and not have a sense that we can influence people or our world, or that we have the ability to accomplish something 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.

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

MISCONCEPTION: "Resources" are social services

TRUTH: Not everyone needs services to get resources (i.e., food). Sometimes, services are not the best way for getting resource needs met.

MISCONCEPTION: Accessibility is about physical accessibility, proximity and/or language access.

TRUTH: These are important but insufficient. "Meaningful" is the experience a person has in accessing resources (without danger, shame 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.

We hope our materials are useful to you. If you would like to adapt them or use them for your own work, please be in touch with us first. We may have insights or updates to share. ©2015-2020 The Full Frame Initiative