



Caregivers Guide to Wellbeing





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Introduction

Are you responsible for the care and wellbeing of others?

If you are a foster/adoptive/birth/grandparent raising young people, or an adult looking after aging loved ones, or in the sandwich generation responsible for both, this guide to wellbeing is for you. If you work closely with children and families and their wellbeing is dependent on the decisions you make, this guide to wellbeing is for you, too.

Your health and wellbeing as the caregiver are essential to the health and wellbeing of those looking to you for care. You already know that, but it's so hard to do! The goal of this mini-guide is to offer quick, everyday, practical techniques and encouragement for building your own wellbeing habits.

Focusing on your wellbeing can reverse burnout and reduce stress, making your life more manageable and enjoyable. Investing in your wellbeing also gives you the capacity to invest in those who look to you for care.



Overview

The goal of this mini-guide is to offer every day, practical techniques to increase not only caregivers' knowledge about creating a wellbeing-focused lifestyle, but also their ability to engage in wellbeing-focused practices for improved results in their day-to-day living. A healthy self is essential to healthy and improved outcomes in relationships. Learn it, practice it, and see the outcomes change! Know better, Do better, Be better. A focus on individual wellbeing can help reverse burnout and reduce stress. After reading this guide, you'll understand why you should focus on wellbeing, you'll know the factors of wellbeing, and you'll learn actions you can take to improve wellbeing, NOW.

Wellbeing is a holistic understanding of someone's physical, emotional, mental, and social state. It's more than wellness, which typically focuses only on a person's physical health. When people are in a state of wellbeing at work, they're able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build positive relationships with others, cope with the normal stresses of life, and make a meaningful contribution.

<https://hello.cultureamp.com/hubfs/Wellbeing/cultureamp-wellbeing-guide-na-1.pdf>

The following pages include activities organized into five areas where our wellbeing as caregivers is often challenged: *balance, connection, loss, change, and anti-racism.*

You can start anywhere. Stay on one page, question, or activity as long as it serves you. The only goal here is increase the moments where you experience a sense of wellbeing, the process is up to you.

Five key principles of a wellbeing focused culture

Balance – It is so important to balance your needs with the needs of others; they need you to be okay.

Connection – It is vital to our physical and mental health, and the wellbeing of our society to have connection with others.

Loss – We may not choose the “growing pains” that come with loss but we can recognize loss as a catalyst for our own restoration, healing and transformation.

Anti-racism – It is important that those in our care see that issues of race and culture will be acknowledged, difficulties will be addressed, and racist practices will be dismantled.

Change – An upside to change is the strength you gain in adaptability, and by definition, you only need to adapt when there is change!

Key Questions

Do you take breaks when you need them?

Do you take time for your passions/hobbies?

Do you seek outside support?

Do you get enough sleep?

Do you have friends with whom you can play?

How do you manage your time?

Do you meet your spiritual/cultural needs?



balance? really??

Balance? In 2021? Good one, right? This year and the year before it has both amplified and challenged the need for balance, especially for caregivers. This is your friendly reminder: you are worthy of having your needs met, too! It is so important to balance your needs with the needs of others; they need you to be okay. You can't give out from an empty well. Time and/or guilt often get in the way, but by creating balance and meeting your needs you establish a healthy habit for yourself and others. Try giving yourself physical cues as reminders to remain balanced.



Things to think through

Think about the behaviors you reward in those you care for. Pay attention to the things you praise. Increase acknowledgment for good boundary-setting and self-care, and reward vulnerability.

As the caregiver, you set the tone through your own self-care, boundaries, and balance-setting. How do you ensure your own wellbeing (or not), and how do you share your efforts? What changes can you make to model healthy lifestyle balance to others?



Guided Reflection

Antidotes to enliven and renew your spirit

Incorporate one or more of the following into your life every day:

- **Introduce novelty**—Try something new like listening to a new genre of music, rearranging furniture, or driving to a new place.
- **Play, laugh, and create**—Watch a comedian, play board games from your youth, play with playdoh, or take up a new instrument.
- **Sleep and rest**—Do whatever you need to do to get your sleep! Find ways to rest even when you are awake.
- **Get physically active**—Movement gives us the natural endorphins we need to renew our sense of wellbeing.
- **Be in nature**—Get outside as much as possible, even just to walk around the block. Sunshine and fresh air enliven a droopy spirit.
- **Spend time with loved ones**—Even virtual time can do the trick. There's nothing more powerful than love; it's the antidote to nearly everything that ails you!

Guided Reflection



Sleep: harder than it sounds, but oh so important!

Caregiving of any kind is super challenging without adequate sleep. Sleep is one of the pillars of the 3-legged stool of health: Eat (nutrition), Move (exercise), and Sleep. Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night. With one leg of the stool weak or missing, it's wobbly and balance becomes harder to find.

ways to get a solid night's rest

Try these quick tips on getting to sleep:

- Keep a set bedtime and a regular bedtime routine to tell your brain “it’s time for sleep” and eliminate screen time at least 30-min before bedtime to begin to relax your brain
- Clear your mind before bed—keep paper at your bedside and write down what’s on your mind, take a warm bath, meditate or listen to a sleep app like CALM

Try these to help you stay asleep:

- Keep your room cool; between 60-67 degrees is ideal
- Avoid eating or drinking (especially caffeine or alcohol) 2 hours before bed (or consider giving them up altogether!)
- Keep your sleeping space DARK. Use an eye mask, room-darkening shades, and cover glowing lights with electrical tape.
- If you wake up, stay quiet and still, without touching your phone; keeping it out of reach can help





Key Questions

Do you spend intentional and quality time with those in your care?

Do you have vulnerable conversations?

Do you take time to connect with others on a personal level – have fun together? Do you know and can you articulate the joy those in your care bring and the value they add?

Do you collaborate with other caregivers in your environment to share the weight?



Things to think through

A fundamental human need

Connection is vital to our physical and mental health, and the wellbeing of our society. Prior to the pandemic, many of us became more conscious about trying to have in-person connections rather than seem detached with technology. However, with the need for continued social distancing, it's okay to reframe that idea and creatively use technology to our advantage.

More than Zoom

While many of us have screen fatigue, there are a lot of options for using technology to connect with others as a household outside of Zoom.

- Play online games with friends or other families using apps, such as Words with Friends or GamePigeon.
- Call or video-chat with friends while taking virtual tours together of museums, national parks, and more from Google Arts & Culture.
- Move together: plan walk-and-talk phone conversations for when you walk around your respective neighborhoods, or plan to attend the same online workouts.
- Tune in to live-streamed concerts and other events together.



Guided Reflection

Family connections

Biological, chosen, aging, just-introduced, far away, or next door - we know family when we FEEL it. The feelings we get from being with family change everything. How can we create experiences that keep us connected to family even when we are unable to physically be together?

"So glad we're family"

Draw your attention to those you make you feel like family and create a plan to stay connected. Cut out twelve, 1" x 4" rectangle-shaped pieces of paper. Put the name of one person you call family on each piece. Staple them together, hook-and-loop, until you have a 12-link paper chain. For the next twelve months, take down one of the paper chain links and reach out to the person you wrote down. Send a text that simply says, "So glad we're family."

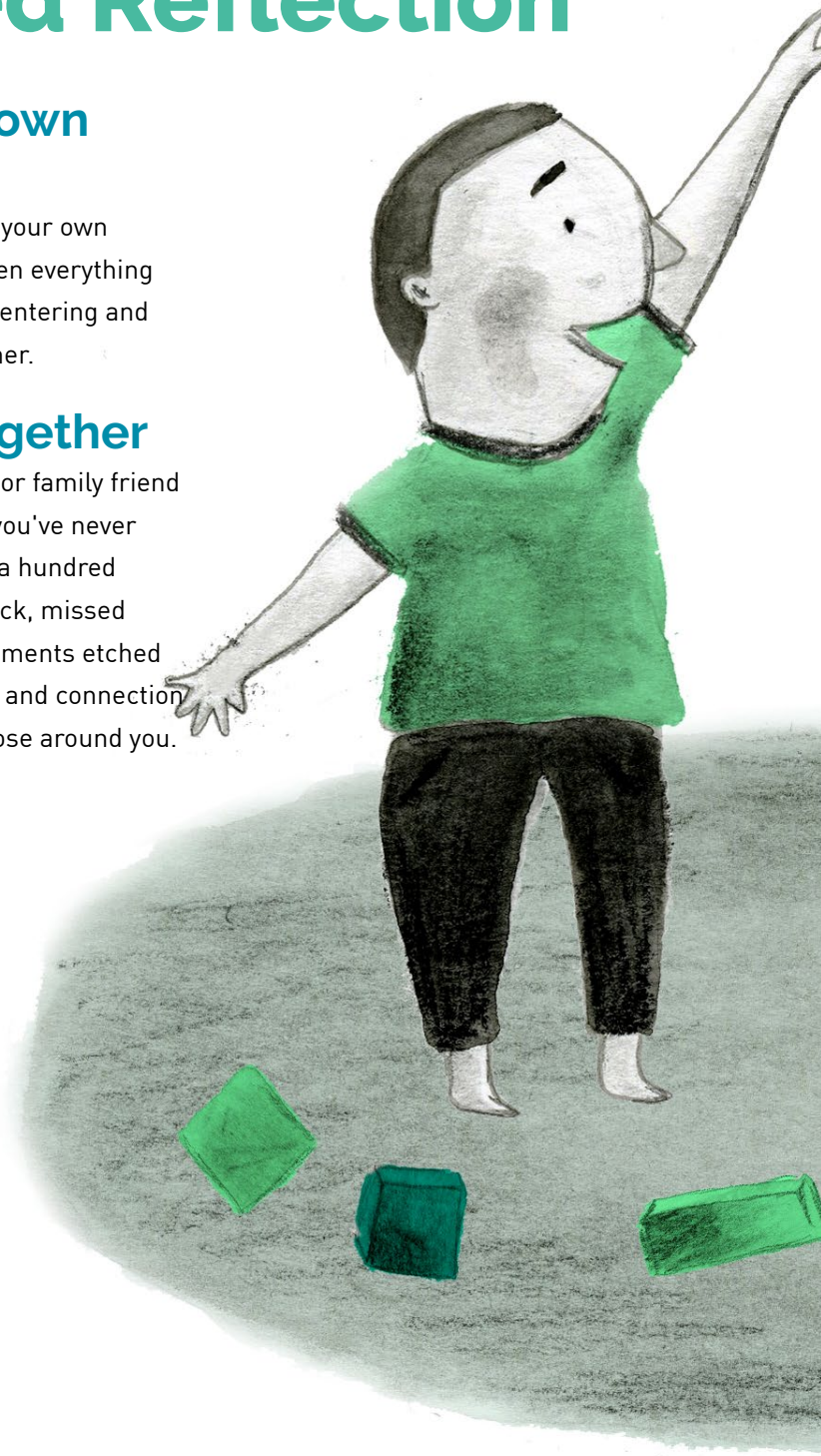
Guided Reflection

connect to your own history

Get grounded on the timeline of your own history through storytelling. When everything feels off kilter, story sharing is centering and reminds us we are rooted together.

telling stories together

Get on the phone with a relative or family friend and tell stories! Ask for a story you've never heard or share ones you've told a hundred times. Tell stories about good luck, missed opportunity, or the mundane moments etched in your memory. Your grounding and connection through story will cascade to those around you.







Key Questions

Have you experienced loss in your family as a result of COVID?

Has your job changed or ended?

Has your daily routine experienced drastic change?

Do you feel isolated from your spiritual/cultural practices and/or community?

Have you had to give up some authority as a caregiver?



Things to think through

The inevitability of loss connects us deeply as human beings. The end of a relationship, or loss of a home, job, or loved one can come with great pain, leaving you feeling unbalanced and challenged for even the most basic tasks of living. We may not choose the “growing pains” that come with loss but we can recognize loss as a catalyst for our own restoration, healing and transformation - emotionally, physically, and mentally.



Guided Reflection

secondary and ambiguous loss

Loss has a ripple effect. Grieving a primary loss is often accompanied with the grief of losing other less tangible treasures. The death of a loved one, for example, is a primary loss. Accompanying, secondary losses may include a sense of identity, social circle, or vision of the future. Perhaps you or your loved ones have experienced losses where your dreams for the future can no longer come true in the way you imagined.

imagine how your future feels

Sometimes we don't know exactly what we want to do or have, but we can usually name the feelings we want to feel. Take 60 seconds of uninterrupted time to write down the feelings you want to feel this year. Maybe it's safe, protected, joyful, peaceful, lavished, magnetic, or free - it's up to you.

Next, grab a piece of scratch paper or sketch pad. Draw or cut out (from magazines/junk mail/random papers on your kitchen table) any images, lines, colors, or phrases that match your desired feelings. Visit and add to these often to feel more of what you want to feel in 2021.



Guided Reflection

the 5 C's

Prepare for your recovery from loss with the 5 Cs:

1. Carry your strength. You have weathered tough situations in the past that have prepared you for this challenge.
2. Connect with others. Most humans do their best healing in the context of a connected relationship.
3. Consider ways to honor your loss. There are reasons we utilize rituals; borrow from this idea to honor whatever loss you are going through.
4. Conjure up possibilities to improve or change your life. Capitalize on the opportunity that comes with change.
5. Claim joy by doing something that makes you happy. Doing something to honor or celebrate life can help you sail, even through stormy seas.

Guided Reflection

we've lost so much this year

Have you reflected on what has been taken from you in this continued pandemic? By focusing on losses, we can address the pain that may be negatively impacting our emotional, mental, and physical health. More importantly, by facing our losses we can move forward and begin our healing process. The end of a cycle (year) is a beautiful time to do this. We can grieve over our losses, shed the pain and renew ourselves with the new year that lies ahead of us.

ways to let it all out

Focus on what has been taken from you this year and find the best way for you to GET IT OUT!

- Cry. An Indigenous belief is that if you don't allow the tears to come out, they turn into poison...so let them flow.
- Scream. Grab a pillow and scream into it as loud as you can.
- Sweat. Run, box, dance, wrestle, or just shake your body.
- Write. Put your thoughts down on paper and burn or bury it.
- Get outside. Nature will listen to what you have to say.
- Meditate. Stop, clear your mind, inhale peace and exhale burden.

Caregivers: find your own way to release some of the pain of your losses. The tenderness this brings will be a blessing to you and those in your care.

Guided Reflection

bittersweet celebrations

Losses we've experienced can feel especially potent during times of celebration – for you and for those in your care. This can cause our loving family traditions to be mixed with sadness, isolation, and short tempers, fueling disconnection.

what grief looks like

Maybe you'll recognize some of these undesired behaviors in yourself or others around the holidays - over-purchasing, over-consumption, lethargy, or irritability. These behaviors can be grief in disguise, pointing out where your attention is needed.

try this: time & acknowledgement

Every feeling just wants to be seen and recognized, so ignoring the negative feelings doesn't make them go away. Try scheduling 10 minutes of "holiday blues" on your calendar and make a mental list of what (or who) you and your loved ones may be grieving this year. While it may sound counterintuitive, tending to your feelings of loss can cause them to soften, rather than intensify. This can lead to more space for joy and moments of connection.





Key Questions

Do you know how you handle change?

Do you understand your motivators for change and/or goals you set?

Do you communicate change clearly with those in your care?

Do you stay flexible?



Things to think through

One of the most challenging things about change is the unknown. Not knowing what will happen next is a fear we often experience and causes us to stay stuck, immobilized. But let's give this a reframe. One thing to consider about change is the opportunity for growth. An upside to change is the strength you gain in adaptability, and by definition, you only need to adapt when there is change!



Guided Reflection

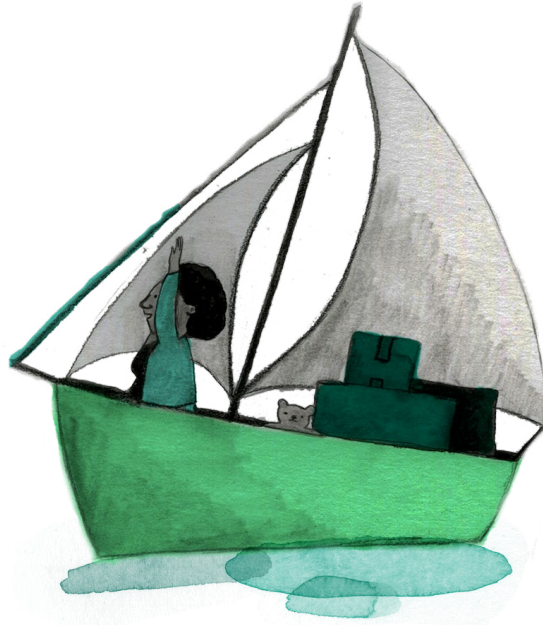
"I think everything in life is art. What you do. How you dress. The way you love someone, and how you talk. Your smile and your personality. What you believe in. The way you drink your tea. How you decorate your home. Or party. Your grocery list. The food you make. How your writing looks. And the way you feel. Life is art."

- Helena Bonham Carter

your life is your art, your message

Mahatma Gandhi was asked by a reporter, "What is your message to the world?" His answer, "My life is my message."

Hear this today, Dear Caregiver: the change you make, the change that you are, the transformation you nurture in others: this is your message to the world. You are an artist and your life is your art. Live in that truth today.



Guided Reflection

3,2,1 activity - 3 changes, 2 steps, 1 need

Once you've recognized that change can lead to growth, get excited about where that might lead you and plan on making your OWN changes:

Write down the following as a way to get started:

- 3 things you want to change in your lifestyle. Is it your thinking? Your morning routine? How you respond to interruptions? Pick one.
- 2 concrete, possible steps for the thing you want to change. Set an alarm? Write a new thought script?
- 1 need you have in order to start. A phone app? 20 minutes to focus? To set expectation with those around you?

Now, go for it!

Guided Reflection

Stress eating

It seems like things are always changing – our schedules, social expectations, current events, and our diets shift. Unfortunately, the food we reach for first is often the least healthy. This taxes our physical stamina, making stressful transitions even more difficult to endure.

fuel up...literally!

Although change can feel overwhelming, chaotic and out of our control, change brings opportunities to double down on our wellbeing habits. Replace an old habit with a new one this week starting with.... vegetables! Give your body the energy it needs to take care of yourself and others.

opportunities to "veg"

Abstaining can be hard, so focus on adding.

- Add a bowl of baby carrots to the table, you'll probably pick at them just because they're there!
- Add some steam-in-a-bag frozen veggies to your meals; it's cheap and easy.
- Add a handful of spinach to your favorite smoothie.

Guided Reflection

change is hard

Especially for caregivers, change can be overwhelming. On top of transitions in your own life, when those you care for go through change, you are right there experiencing it with them.

reframe

On the flipside, change can be as beautiful as it is messy. Mother Nature illustrates this in the fall, as the trees begin changing into vibrant and beautiful colors. They shed their leaves and let go of today, unafraid of growing into what will be.

three-minute activity

Take this time of change as an opportunity to reflect on what you can and can't control. Make a list and keep it close.

Hint: you can control the food you eat, how often you exercise and how you talk to yourself; you can't control when schools reopen, what's in the news and what other people think about you.



Key Questions

Have you addressed your own racial awareness and attended to your own growth as an element of your caregiving?

Are you attentive to race-related factors? Do you initiate a dialogue as an ongoing commitment to racial self-awareness?

Can you adapt to the racial/cultural needs of the people for whom you provide care?

Can you learn practices and foods that are unfamiliar to you?

How can you adapt your household to meet the racial/spiritual/cultural needs of the youth in your home?



Things to think through

- Encourage the exploration and development of the racial and cultural identity of those in your care.
- Explore your own racial and cultural identity.
- Develop a clear understanding of race and power, and how that impacts your life as a caregiver.
- Initiate dialogue on racial diversity and cultural issues within the community you serve.
- Build cultural awareness through regular conversations in your home. Consider integrating cultural assessments, book clubs, attending presentations together, and using reflective caregiving to explore the impact of race and racism on those you serve.



Guided Reflection

Cultural identity is an essential and important contributor to people's wellbeing. Identifying with a culture and having a strong and positive sense of one's cultural distinctiveness, promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance. Cultural wellbeing helps us be who we are as individuals and is developed by being valued for the differences that define us and our beliefs, our history, and our roots. It includes the opportunity to learn associated teachings and traditions with the ability to pass them on to others. Members of smaller cultural groups can feel excluded from society if larger cultural groups are intolerant or obstructive of their cultural practices

Caregivers that actively support those they care for create open dialogue about racial differences, anti-racism efforts, and how to promote cultural wellbeing. They are mindful about the needs of those in their care, and they both know and honor the differences among them. However, there is evidence to suggest that many caregivers ignore or minimize racial content; largely due to either discomfort with their own racial identity or discomfort with their participation in a racialized society.



Guided Reflection

If you were not taught how to meaningfully integrate racial and cultural variables into practice, your inability to address these needs for those you care for inevitably poses a challenge. When caregivers do not attend to racial issues effectively, those in your care often report a negative relationship where they will withdraw, creating tension and mistrust. It is essential that you address your own racial self-awareness by engaging in reflection on your own personal experience(s) as a racial being. *Without racial self-awareness, caregivers run the risk of engaging in ineffective and even harmful behaviors. Some of the more common of these behaviors include: ignoring, dismissing or otherwise not discussing racial differences with those in your care; being inattentive and insensitive to their insecurities in addressing racism; not attending to or addressing their own racial identity development; and becoming too preachy about racism.

Fortunately, there is also evidence to suggest that, when caregivers attend to racial variables with those in their care, the caregivers alliance is strengthened, and those of color in their care are more likely to engage more openly in the process.

Guided Reflection

Caregivers are encouraged to engage in thoughtful reflection guided by the following questions, taken from various approaches for elevating racial awareness (see Carter, 2003; Mackenzie-Mavinga, 2016; Pendry, 2012; Pieterse, 2009):

- When did I first become aware of my racial group membership?
- How do I identify racially, and what is the identification based on? (e.g., physical features? cultural values?)
- How does my racial background influence my life experiences?
- What beliefs do I have about myself and others based on my racial group membership?
- How do I feel about my racial group membership?
- How do I acknowledge racial difference and similarity when beginning the work with those in my care?
- How do I explore race-related experiences with those in my care?
- Am I comfortable discussing race-related topics? What is my discomfort/comfort level based on?
- How might my racial background facilitate or impede my interactions?
- How am I attentive to potential experiences of racism that those in my care might be experiencing?



Guided Reflection

Caregivers create the climate of the home and can serve as vehicles of change. Therefore, caregivers must believe in the importance of addressing cultural competence, cultural wellbeing, and anti-racism issues. A strong relationship between the caregiver and those they care for is more likely to happen when caregivers are culturally responsive and competent. The caregiver then becomes a resource for those in their care in identifying and alleviating this source of stress and feelings of being overwhelmed.



Caregiving is Universal

“There are only four kinds of people in the world:

Those who have been caregivers,

Those who currently are caregivers,

Those those will be caregivers,

And those who will need caregivers.”

-Rosalyn Carter

