

# Five Ways to Wellbeing

A best practice guide



A full-page background image with an orange tint. It shows three children jumping from a wooden pier into the ocean. One child in a dark swimsuit is in the air with arms outstretched. Two other children are also jumping. The background shows a line of trees under a sunset sky.

# Five Ways to Wellbeing is a set of five simple, evidence-based actions which can improve wellbeing in everyday life.

## Background

The Five Ways to Wellbeing was introduced to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2009 as part of Mental Health Awareness Week, building on work done by the new economics foundation (nef) for the UK Government.

This paper aims to develop confidence in organisations and workers that their communication of the messages is supported by best practice, built upon good understanding of the evidence and reflects a consistent national approach. The Mental Health Foundation has commissioned a review of how the Five Ways to Wellbeing has been implemented in Aotearoa since 2009. Further information and practical tips on how to use the Five Ways is available on our [website](#).

## Wellbeing

The Mental Health Foundation believes one of the key aims of a democratic government is to promote the good life: a flourishing society where citizens are happy, healthy, capable and engaged. In other words, a society where people have high levels of wellbeing.

Recent years have seen a shift away from a focus on illness alone, to more attention on wellness, both in policy and health practice. In a New Zealand context, this has included better integration of Māori and Pacific concepts of health, including holistic models such as Te Whare Tapa Whā and Fonofale. Illness and wellness are now considered to be more than simply two ends of a continuum, but separately operating dimensions.



## Give

Your time.  
Your words.  
Your presence.



## Be Active

Do what you can.  
Enjoy what you do.  
Move your mood.



## Keep Learning

Embrace new experiences.  
See opportunities.  
Surprise yourself.



## Take Notice

Appreciate the little things.  
Savour the moment.



## Connect

Talk and listen.  
Be there.  
Feel connected.

Giving is more than just the sharing of material things with others. It is about cultivating a spirit of generosity and promoting active participation in social and community life.

Volunteering and community involvement has been strongly linked with positive feelings and functioning. Helping others, sharing one's skills and resources, and behaviours that promote a sense of purpose and team orientation have been found to help increase self-worth and produce a positive emotional effect.

Giving is important for all age groups. It helps develop strong social cognition in children, a sense of purpose and self-worth in adults and particularly older people who have left the workforce and have time to offer.

Research shows a strong correlation between physical activity and increased wellbeing, as well as lower rates of depression and anxiety. It is now viewed as essential for people of all ages and has been shown to slow age-related cognitive decline.

Evidence suggests that physical activity can increase self-belief, the ability to cope with difficult situations and provide a sense of mastery. It can also have the benefit of encouraging social interactions.

Physical activity does not need to be particularly energetic to be of benefit. Moderate exertion three to five times a week can significantly reduce symptoms of depression, but improvements can also be seen from single bouts of exercise of less than 10 minutes.

Learning, remaining curious and setting goals is important for all ages. For children, it leads to positive cognitive and social development, while for adults it can lead to improvements in self-esteem, social interaction and a more active and involved life. It has also been shown to be effective in preventing depression in later years.

Adult learning in particular includes elements of goal-setting, which is strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing. This is particularly true when goals are self-generated, positively focused and align with personal values.

Learning is more than just an activity for formal education. It can include any approaches to maintaining curiosity and an enquiring mind.

Developing skills that increase awareness of what is immediately happening – both physically and mentally, within and around us – can improve wellbeing. Even short courses teaching simple techniques can enhance wellbeing for several years.

Much research has been done on mindfulness, which has been shown to have positive effects that include heightened self-knowledge. It suggests that an open awareness is particularly valuable for choosing behaviours that are consistent with one's needs, values and interests. Alignment to one's values is also an effective way to ensure that behaviour change becomes embedded over time.

Specific approaches that have been shown to enhance wellbeing include gratitude, forgiveness, reflection and the development of meaning.

Feeling close to other people and valued by them is a fundamental human need. Across all ages, relationships and participation in a social life are critical for mental wellbeing and effective buffers against mental disorder.

Strong social relationships are supportive, encouraging, and meaningful, and a wider social network is also important for feelings of connectedness and self-worth. The key message of Connect is that giving time and space to both strengthen and broaden social networks is important for wellbeing.

The wellbeing of individuals is bound up in the wellbeing of their communities, so actions that focus solely on individual, inward-looking benefits will not be as effective as those that stress the importance of fostering relationships with others.

## Turn over to find out more about how you can share the Five Ways with others

# Sharing the Concept

## Variety is important

Evidence suggests that repeating activities can reduce their impact – known as hedonic adaptation, so strategies should be promoted that will keep activities ‘fresh’. The Five Ways to Wellbeing offers a range of distinct messages that allow people to take diverse approaches to promoting their wellbeing. While they can be presented as a set, it is not necessary to complete them all at once as people may find such a target overwhelming.

Instead, it is better to emphasise that they represent a range of options that can be tried by anyone and suited to an individual's needs. What is important is that wellbeing begins to be seen as holistic and that we strive for a balance of activities that will support it in our everyday lives.

## Communicating the message

Researcher Lynne Friedli has outlined some key principles for social marketing of mental health messages to be effective and these underpin the rationale behind the Five Ways framework and the best practice for using them in mental health promotion settings:

- Start where people are
- Focus on building emotional connections with the target audience
- Be positive, upbeat and aspirational – selling healthy, satisfied lives as opposed to ‘don’t do’ messages
- Exchange – people must perceive a clear benefit if change is to occur.

Evidence suggests that people do not relate to the term ‘mental health’, so the target aspirations that underpin the messages were chosen as ‘wellbeing’ or ‘flourishing’.

Evidence suggests that if people perceive health promotion messages as portraying something too distant from their own lives, they will be resistant. Modelling behaviours from those communicating the message has also been shown to be effective in making the message seem attainable.

It is vital that all communications of the Five Ways to Wellbeing are accessible within the unique perspectives of the communities that make up Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The Mental Health Foundation believes that to enhance flourishing, particularly within a Māori world view (He Puawaitanga), “core values and concepts need to be supported and embraced to support a sense of belonging, opportunity and choice” (Wayne Blissett, 2012).

# Case Studies

## CHRISTCHURCH

### Catherine Fink, Occupational Therapist (OT)

The Five Ways to Wellbeing has been incorporated in the delivery of private practice rehabilitation services across the Port Hills suburbs of Christchurch. The framework is used for individual patients in rehabilitation action planning and feedback reporting and includes training on mindfulness, daily gratitude reflection, relaxation techniques and positive coping strategies.

Catherine's passion has led her to present her work with the Five Ways to Wellbeing to the OT workers' network and to OTs working in Older Persons Health and Mental Health Services. She has also given keynote presentations to the Australasian Rehabilitation Providers Association Conference and New Zealand AOT Biannual Scientific Conference in 2012.

“When patients undertake reporting feedback, they are saying that it [Five Ways to Wellbeing] makes them feel better and happier.”

– Catherine Fink

## TAURANGA

### Merivale Community Centre


Staff at the centre in Tauranga are leading the way in developing a strategy utilising the Five Ways to Wellbeing as a framework for planning and delivering services. They have named it Puahou, the five-finger tree – the first tree in the forest to come into flower and the first sign of spring. Puahou incorporates best practice community development and links strongly with Māori models of health and wellbeing, including Te Whare Tapa Whā.


The centre has already aligned its forward planning and reporting with the Puahou model and all community events and programmes are planned so they contribute towards the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Staff are also doing what they can to give the people of Merivale an opportunity to practise the five ways of Puahou in various aspects of their own lives.


“The five actions of Puahou (Five Ways to Wellbeing) are evidence-based and map well with the key elements of the Māori models which will support their adoption by the Merivale community.”

– John Fletcher (Puahou - A New Model for Community Development, 2011)

## Contact us

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