



Wellbeing & Flourishing: What does it really mean?

By Trevor Eddolls

Working as Solution Focused Hypnotherapists, we see clients looking to make one small change in their life, as well as clients looking to make major lifestyle changes, and everything in between. However, no matter what their reason is for coming, they are all looking to improve their wellbeing one way or another.

So, what do we mean by 'wellbeing'? According to the UK Department of Health, "wellbeing comprises an individual's experience of their life, and a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values".

Wellbeing exists in two dimensions:

- Subjective wellbeing asks people directly how they think and feel about their own wellbeing and includes aspects such as life satisfaction (evaluation), positive affect (hedonic), and a judgement on whether their life is meaningful (eudemonic).
- Objective wellbeing is based on assumptions about basic human needs and rights, including aspects such as adequate food, physical health, education, safety, etc. Objective wellbeing can be measured through self-report (e.g., asking people how they view their health), or through more objective measures (e.g., mortality rates and life expectancy).

Mental wellbeing is part of overall wellbeing and is more than just the absence of mental illness. It is a positive state of mind and body, underpinned by social and psychological wellbeing. It enables and supports good relationships, improved resilience, improved health, meaning, purpose, and control. It is predictive of improved healthy life expectancy, quality of life, and life satisfaction, and is inextricably linked with physical health and living with, and recovering from, both physical and mental illnesses.

Mental illness or mental disorder is a range of mental health problems that can cause marked emotional or cognitive distress and interfere with daily functioning.

Perhaps an easier way to talk to clients and help them to picture the characteristics of wellness or wellbeing is to use the model with eight dimensions created by Peggy Swarbrick. This not only helps individuals to understand the significance of each part of their life, but also provides a way for clients to visualize what areas of their life need improving to enhance their overall wellness. These dimensions were popularized by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and are widely used. The dimensions are interconnected and neglecting one can have an impact on the others. Balancing these dimensions helps improve a person's overall wellbeing, resilience, and life satisfaction.

The dimensions are:

- Physical wellness, which involves maintaining a healthy body through exercise, nutrition, sleep, and preventative healthcare.

- Emotional wellness, which involves understanding and managing emotions, coping with stress, and developing resilience.
- Intellectual wellness, which encourages lifelong learning, creativity, and critical thinking.
- Social wellness, which emphasizes the importance of healthy relationships, social support networks, and a sense of belonging.
- Occupational wellness, which relates to job satisfaction, work-life balance, and personal growth in an individual's career.
- Financial wellness, which focuses on managing finances responsibly and reducing money-related stress.
- Environmental wellness, which involves living in harmony with one's surroundings and promoting a healthy planet.
- Spiritual wellness, which involves finding purpose, meaning, and inner peace, whether through religion, meditation, or personal values.

Helping clients to recognize where they are in each of these dimensions can help them to recognize what part of their life requires work in order for them to improve their overall wellbeing. They can also recognize how ignoring any dimension could negatively impact their overall wellbeing.

The window of tolerance

Solution Focused Hypnotherapists will have noticed that some clients seem better able to make changes in their life, whereas others find it very difficult. The idea of the 'window of tolerance', developed by Dr Dan Siegel, is a psychological concept that describes the optimal zone of emotional and physiological arousal in which a person can effectively process information, manage emotions, and function well. The idea is used to understand how individuals respond to stress and regulate their nervous system.

Understanding their window of tolerance can help clients to navigate stress, trauma, or daily challenges with greater ease. It empowers them to recognize when they are dysregulated, and to take steps to return to a balanced state, improving their mental health and resilience. It can explain why, in the past, they have not been their usual selves.

The window of tolerance aligns with the eight dimensions of wellness by emphasizing emotional regulation (emotional wellness), physical grounding (physical wellness), and the role of supportive relationships (social wellness). Staying within the window enhances an individual's overall wellbeing, while dysregulation can disrupt multiple dimensions.

According to the model, when an individual is within the window, they feel balanced – they are able to handle challenges without becoming overwhelmed or shutting down. They can most easily make positive

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changes to their life. But when stress pushes them outside this window, they may experience dysregulation, either through hyperarousal (fight/flight) or hypoarousal (freeze/collapse).

Inside the window of tolerance, individuals can think clearly, feel emotions appropriately, and respond to situations in a balanced way. They are able to engage in relationships, problem-solve, engage in coping strategies, and manage daily life effectively. Everyone's window of tolerance is different. It's influenced by factors such as past experiences, neurobiology, genetics, coping skills, mental ill health (anxiety, depression, ADHD), and social support.

When experiencing hyperarousal, individuals may feel overwhelmed, anxious, panicked, or irritable. Their body might be in a state of fight-or-flight, with racing thoughts, hypervigilance, and feelings of being unsafe.

On the other hand, hypoarousal can manifest as under-arousal, feeling numb, disconnected, withdrawn, zoned out, depressed, lacking motivation, or even frozen. This state can be a response to overwhelming stress or trauma.

An individual can expand their window of tolerance by developing self-awareness, practicing self-regulation techniques, and finding support when needed. This can improve their ability to manage stress and emotions. Techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, sensory exercises (e.g., the 5-4-3-2-1 method), or visualization can help a person stay within their window. Regular sleep, exercise, and nutrition will stabilize their nervous system. Mindfulness and meditation can also help, as will therapy.

Maximizing the size of their window of tolerance makes it easier for clients to stay in control of their lives, and more easily make any positive changes that they want to.

The differences between wellbeing and flourishing

The terms 'wellbeing' and 'flourishing' are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct nuances in psychology, philosophy, and positive psychology. As just discussed, wellbeing refers to a general state of being comfortable, healthy, and content. It encompasses various dimensions.

Flourishing, on the other hand, goes beyond wellbeing, and is often described as the optimal state of human functioning, i.e., going beyond the absence of illness or distress, to living with purpose, meaning, and vitality. Sociologist Corey Keyes argues that flourishing is the pinnacle of mental health – a state where people don't just survive but thrive.

The Global Flourishing Study (GFS) is a multi-year longitudinal data collection and research collaboration between researchers. Results recently published showed the UK at 20th out of 22 countries in terms of flourishing. Indonesia was top.

GFS measures global human flourishing in six areas:

1. Happiness and life satisfaction
2. Mental and physical health
3. Meaning and purpose
4. Character and virtue
5. Close social relationships
6. Material and financial stability

The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, came up with the PERMA model for flourishing. PERMA is an acronym for:

- 1 Positive emotions – experiencing joy, gratitude, love, contentment, and other positive feelings. This dimension emphasizes emotional wellbeing and the presence of positive affect in daily life.
- 2 Engagement – being fully absorbed or immersed in activities, often described as being in a 'flow' state. This occurs when one is deeply focused on tasks that are challenging yet rewarding, such as hobbies,

work, or creative pursuits.

3 Relationships – strong, supportive, and meaningful connections with others, including family, friends, and community. Positive relationships are critical for emotional and social well-being.

4 Meaning – a sense of purpose and belonging to something greater than oneself, often derived from values, spirituality, or contributing to a cause. This dimension focuses on living a life aligned with personal or collective significance.

5 Accomplishment – achieving goals, experiencing success, and developing a sense of mastery or competence. This includes both intrinsic motivation (personal growth) and extrinsic achievements (recognition or tangible outcomes).

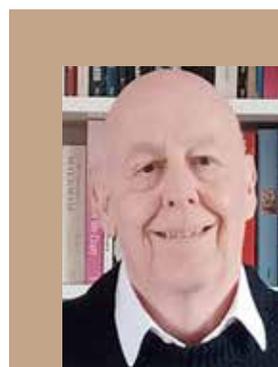
It seems that all flourishing individuals have high wellbeing, but not everyone with wellbeing is flourishing. Flourishing is wellbeing amplified by purpose, growth, and vitality. And, as we want the best for our clients, we can help them to flourish.

Conclusion

Helping clients to understand what areas or dimensions comprise wellbeing can help them to improve those aspects of their own wellbeing – and that can have a knock-on effect of increasing the size of their window of tolerance. And understanding what can happen when they are pushed out of their window of tolerance can explain to them why they may have felt the way they did in the past. It may even motivate them to improve their wellbeing in order to increase the size of their window of tolerance, which will make it easier for them to make positive improvements in their life in the future. Putting these all together during a session may help our clients to thrive, which, I guess is what we want for them!

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About the writer:

Trevor was made a Fellow of the AfSFH in 2022 for his work to spread the word about SFH as a therapist, Supervisor, CPD provider, blogger, writer and podcaster, and for his long-standing contribution to the AfSFH Committee.