

The Concept of Total Wellness---for the Caregiver

Northwest Health Connections

A Division of  **milestone**
CENTERS FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL & BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES

As we take care to meet the needs of others and promote a better and healthier life for them, we often neglect to care for our own needs. Total wellness includes a healthy lifestyle around our physical, mental, spiritual, emotional and social needs. We can so lose touch with who we are and what we need that we have no time or energy to identify what our needs are or how to get them met. Wellness is defined by Merriam Webster as “a state of being in good health especially as an actively sought goal.” We often only consider physical health when deciding whether or not someone is “well.” Eating nutritiously and exercising are necessary for a healthy lifestyle but they make up just a part of total wellness. Wellness has many components; it is often depicted as physical, mental, spiritual, career, social, family, and financial health. If areas of one’s wellness are under-developed or neglected, wellness will be off balance. Wellness is when there is a degree of balance among the areas. What one considers “optimal wellness” is based on their needs, experiences, and circumstances. As we go through life’s challenges and joys, the difference aspects of wellness will fall in and out of balance and some areas may need more attention than other areas. Let’s take a look at these five keys to wellness.

PHYSICAL. Our bodies are wonderfully made and require care to feel and be healthy. We need proper food for fuel and energy. We need fitness and exercise to elevate our mood, decrease anxiety, and cope with stress. Hydration is important to keeping our bodies working effectively. When we fail to eat, drink, exercise or get adequate sleep, we are depriving our body of the requirements to keep it functioning in a healthy manner. Practice safe behaviors, such as wearing seatbelts whether you are driving or are a passenger in a vehicle. Avoid drinking and driving situations. Be careful in your sex life. Take responsibility for your health by having regular physical exams. Take care of your heart by maintaining a healthy blood pressure and cholesterol levels. If you are a diabetic, take care to follow diet, exercise, and appointments. Develop healthy routines and avoid destructive habits such as smoking, drug use, or alcohol abuse. Good sleeping habits are a key way to feel healthy. A good night’s sleep can improve energy. **Put your own self-care at the top of your priority list.** You will be absolutely no help to someone else if you fall apart. Stick to your exercise routine, don’t skip meals, fuel yourself

with healthy foods and get the sleep you need. Do not let yourself feel guilty for taking care of yourself. In the area of our physical health, it is about progress---not perfection.

Important steps to take:

1. Eat well
2. Sleep well
3. Keep Hydrated
4. Exercise
5. Go for checkups and exams
6. Know your body

As we care for others and promote steps toward physical wellness, we must encourage others to follow the same important steps. These steps apply to everyone. When we feel better physically we act and respond to life situations differently than when we are not at our best. Our job as caregivers can be much easier if we take the time to talk and promote physical wellness to those we serve. Role modeling self-care in the area of physical health speaks volumes when others see we take our health seriously and we want them to take care of themselves, too.

MENTAL. Mental Wellness enables you to take in new information quickly and encourages creativity. When you are taking care of someone else, it can be difficult to focus on your thoughts, needs, or feelings. Manage your time wisely and take positive steps to minimize stress. A daily run or walk can help alleviate stress and give you a welcome break from attending to the needs of someone else. It can leave you feeling in control and energized. Have a positive outlook---don’t dwell on things you can’t control; concentrate on the things you can. Choose a mental activity that will engage the mind. Puzzles, games, art, hobbies help us to keep our minds sharp, allow for us to brainstorm and solve challenging situations or look for solutions outside our limitations. Recognizing and meeting your individual needs and goals will allow you to know when you need to ask for respite or help. Avoid the guilt trap of not being able to “do it all” like you once did. Worrying about falling behind in your work and responsibilities will cause extra stress. Try to stay organized and on top of what you must accomplish. Talk to your supervisor if you are feeling overwhelmed in the tasks of your job and see if there are recommendations that can be made. Spend time doing something for yourself. By switching out of the caregiver



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role and into something more personal, you give your brain a break and allow yourself to relax.

Important steps to take:

1. Mentally unwind
2. Laugh and have fun
3. Let go of stress
4. Challenge your brain
5. Eat, drink water, sleep, exercise

People we work with also face mental challenges and need to stay healthy in this area. Helping people focus, take their medications, or follow healthy lifestyles promotes mental wellness. The steps caregivers are encouraged to take for maximum health are good steps for those for whom we care. Being a role model and example on how to take good care of your mental health doesn't go unnoticed.

EMOTIONAL Know how you feel, and accept your feelings. When your mind is frazzled and stressed, and your emotions are taking over your thoughts and affecting your everyday activities, it is time to take a step back, take a deep breath, and relax. Focusing on your physical health is crucial, but so is treating your mind and spirit to the same attention. Your happiness goes a long way in protecting your overall well-being. Emotions are one aspect of a person's health that often get neglected. But if your emotional health is suffering, your physical health will too. Your emotional health is just a term for how you feel—your overall happiness and well-being. Are you stressed? Unhappy? Unsatisfied? Worried? Anxious? Then your emotional health needs some serious attention, or your body will start paying the price. Do not feel guilty when away or attending to your own life. You can only do the best you can. If we do not care for ourselves, frustration, tension, anger, and poor health can develop. Even when you know how important it is to take good care of our emotions, it can still be a tall order. It can be tough to find time for yourself, and some people feel guilty about pampering or spoiling themselves from time to time. Remind yourself that you are being a loving and caring individual, but you must also love and care for yourself. Express your feelings appropriately. Smile, even if you don't feel like it. Look for the humor in things; even small bits of laughter can change your mood and boost your health. Keep balance in your life. Maintain a sense of well-being during times of adversity. At some point, unaddressed emotional problems often result in serious consequences, from illness to relationship problems to

harmful behavior. When you're caring for someone, you have their needs on your plate as well as you own. There can be a blurred line of vision of what is their problem or task and what is your own. Focusing on our emotional health isn't hard, but it may be an adjustment for you. Some simple—and really enjoyable—changes are all it takes to boost happiness and well-being.

Important steps to take:

1. Learn about good nutrition and hydration and practice it
2. Exercise to relieve stress and lift your mood
3. Spend some time in the sun (with sunscreen of course!)
4. Deal with your emotions
5. Treat your senses (candles, fresh-cut flowers, a massage, a treat, little things)
6. Sleep (get enough rest)
7. Be creative

Emotional well being is a process for those for whom we care. They have physical, mental and emotional challenges as well. Taking steps and providing emotional health and support to those we serve without being a crutch or making excuses encourages them to make good emotional choices. Following the easy steps above brings about wellness. Often it is easier to see the needs of others and care for their needs and neglect ourselves. Providing joy to others can bring joy back to ourselves ten-fold and our happiness and emotional health increases.

SOCIAL Find and develop close relationships. Social wellness is how you relate to others. Know your needs. We all have unique needs. What one might find important may seem irrelevant to you and visa versa. Learn to identify what your needs are so you don't feel the pressure to perform in an environment you don't care about. Friendship is a first step to social wellness. Without this initiative, it will be difficult for you to take advantage of potentially productive relationships. Choose your relationships. Some relationships take a toll on people. Know when a relationship is causing unnecessary strain on your emotional state and affecting your ability to function socially. Learn to build and stay in healthy relationships—these relationships involve people you care about and who care about you and your well being. When there is trust and compassion in a relationship, you feel safe and satisfied, two vital ingredients for social wellness. Don't feel the pressure to conform. Conformity is required in the society in which



we live. Everybody's different and it's our job to accept that. If you try to conform, you'll find that the pressure to change yourself will affect you in many ways, all of them being negative to who you

are. Being socially well enables caregivers to look beyond themselves with a greater interest in their community. When people are socially well they are able to open up and act assertively, with courtesy and respect. Interact well with others. Learn to communicate effectively. You can only do so much about hiding your feelings and thoughts. Being able to communicate well is a vital component of social wellness because this is generally how you initiate relationships in the first place. Make it a practice to constantly work on your social connections and soon you will have an abundance of what we call "social wellness." The bottom line is pretty simple: take time for happiness. Allow yourself to enjoy life, fun, and relaxation. Be thankful for what you have, and enjoy it.

Important steps to take:

1. Become active in a club, group, or organization
2. Call or write to far-away friends or family
3. Cultivate new friendships
4. Turn off the TV/computer and interact with people
5. Maintain regular contact with a lonely person
6. Choose your own healthy habit in this category

We are social beings and those we work with also enjoy being social. Help them find a new activity or hobby that will enrich their life. Even going for coffee, tea, or pop with someone and sitting together at a table or booth increases our socialization and encourages our social health. Promote wellness in this area to those we care for as well as ourselves.

SPIRITUAL Find purpose in life. Find the beauty. No matter what your religion, there is great comfort in reflecting on things unscientific and insightful. Spiritual wellness is a personal matter involving values and beliefs that provide a purpose in our lives. It is important for everyone to explore what they believe is their own sense of meaning and purpose. The path to spiritual wellness may involve meditation, prayer, affirmations, or specific spiritual practices to a higher power or belief systems.

Yoga and meditation can also help you develop spiritual wellness. Having compassion, the capacity for love and forgiveness, altruism, joy and fulfillment help you enjoy your religious faith; values, beliefs, principles and morals define your spiritually. Step away from the tension of the job and contemplate the world around you and all its miracles. Serenity comes from removing the focus from what is bad to what is good....find the beauty in everything. Determine your values and choose activities and behaviors that are consistent with them. Seek harmony with yourself and with a higher power. If you are a person engaged in the process of spiritual wellness, you are willing and able to seek meaning and purpose in your life and the lives of others.

Important steps to take to evaluate you own spiritual wellness

1. Do I make time for relaxation in my day?
2. Do I make time for meditation and/or prayer or connecting to my higher power?
3. Do my values guide my decisions and actions?
4. Am I accepting of the views of others?

We are all unique creatures and honoring and respecting others' views or wishes are important. Taking time to listen and be in touch with who we are and what we want is important. It is important to encourage others to be in touch with who they are also. It is very important to listen...to allow time for silence....even be comfortable with silence.

As you care for others, be kind and care for yourself. Encourage others to provide self care for themselves. To be as healthy as you can be and experience total wellness, take time to look at and search each of these five areas of your life. You know who you are and what your needs are. Ask for help when you need help. Allow yourself to have fun. Allow yourself to have experiences that will cause growth and joy to be part of your life.



THE CONCEPT OF TOTAL WELLNESS TEST

You must submit your completed test, with at least a score of 80%, to receive **1 hour** of training credit for this course.

To submit via fax, please fax the test and evaluation to 814-728-8887.

To submit via email, please send an email to training@northwesthc.org. Please put "Total Wellness Test" in the subject line, and the numbers 1—5, along with your answers, in the body of the email.

To submit via mail, send the test and evaluation pages to NWHC, 247 Hospital Drive, Warren PA 16365.

1. This training is about total wellness. It includes Physical, Mental, Emotional, Spiritual and _____ Wellness.
2. We can role model total wellness to those we serve. True False
3. It is not important to keep our bodies hydrated. True False
4. It is not important for us to socialize with others. True False
5. If an area of wellness is neglected, wellness will be off balance. True False

Name: _____ Title: _____

Agency: _____ Date: _____

Please provide contact information (email address, fax number, or mailing address) where you would like your certificate to be sent:

NORTHWEST HEALTH CONNECTIONS
 A DIVISION OF MILESTONE CENTERS, INC.
EVALUATION OF TRAINING

Training Title: Total Wellness Date: _____

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| c Direct Support Professional | c Provider Administrator/Supervisor |
| c Program Specialist | c Provider Clinical Staff |
| c Consumer/Self-Advocate | c Family Member |
| c Support Coordinator | c Support Coordinator Supervisor |
| c PCH Staff/Administrator | c County MH/MR/IDD |
| c FLP/LSP | c Other (please list): _____ |

Please circle your PRIMARY reason for completing this home-study training:

- It's mandatory interested in subject matter need training hours convenience

Please circle the best response to each question.

5 = Strongly Agree 4 = Agree 3 = Undecided 2 = Disagree **1 = Strongly Disagree**

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | As a result of this training, I have increased my knowledge. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. | I learned something I can use in my own situation. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. | This training provided needed information. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | The training material was helpful and effective. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. | Overall, I am satisfied with this training. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. | I am glad I completed this training. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

Suggestions for improvement: _____

Additional information I feel should have been included in this training: _____

I would like to see these topics/conditions developed into home-study trainings: _____