

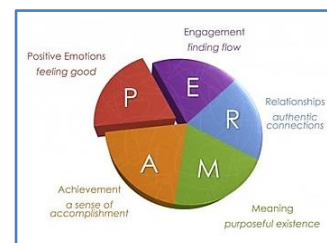
PERMA

Self-Coaching Guide

How can I understand my wellbeing?

Wellbeing is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.” It will vary between us significantly as we’re all different, e.g. personalities and ambitions. It’s a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness and includes how satisfied we are with our life as a whole, our sense of purpose, and how in control we feel.

Martin Seligman has developed his theory of wellbeing (PERMA) that goes beyond the goal of happiness and life satisfaction, and aims to increase the amount of flourishing in a person’s life and in the world. PERMA, shown in the diagram opposite, has five, equally-important, measurable elements, and each element contributes to your wellbeing.



- 1) **Positive emotion:** Range of positive emotions, includes optimism, pleasure and enjoyment.
- 2) **Engagement:** Fulfilling work/hobbies, that absorb us and create ‘flow’, and working to our strengths.
- 3) **Relationships:** Authentic social connections, love, intimacy, emotional and physical interaction.
- 4) **Meaning:** Purpose and meaning that give us a sense of direction in life.
- 5) **Accomplishment:** Realistic goals/ambitions, achievements/pride that give us a sense of success.

The PERMA model helps us know what we need in life to improve wellbeing. It’s been shown that small improvements in wellbeing help to decrease some mental health problems and help us to flourish.

Some barriers to our wellbeing

- **Negativity bias** – Giving more attention to negative emotions, experiences and information than positive ones. Healthier to make a conscious effort to notice and focus on the good things in our life.
- **Duration neglect** – Evaluating our experiences based on (a) the intensity of the peak emotion, and (b) how it ends. Healthier to try to ensure that negative events and experiences end on a high note.
- **Social comparison** – Making comparisons with our friends and neighbours. Healthier to deliberately remember those who are much worse off than us, appreciate what we do have, and be grateful.
- **Hedonic treadmill** – Expecting ‘things’ to make us feel better in the long term. Healthier to expect the novelty from ‘things’ to wear off quickly and look for more sustainable ways to improve wellbeing.
- **Lack of self-control** – Giving in to our natural desires. Healthier to find ways to increase our self-control; like a muscle, it improves with practice. Developing it in one life area, strengthens other areas.

Understanding some of the barriers which can have an extremely unhealthy effect on our wellbeing, and using the strategies to help us overcome those barriers listed above, can greatly benefit our wellbeing.

Further reading:

Positive Psychology: A Toolkit for Happiness, Purpose and Well-being by Bridget Grenville-Cleave (2012).

“Wellbeing is attained by little and little, and nevertheless is no little thing itself.”

Zeno of Citium

More Information

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