



A FaithAction Briefing on: Five ways to Wellbeing

A New Economics Foundation report

These are briefing notes for FaithAction members on the document produced by the New Economics Foundation on the Five ways to Wellbeing

1. **Connect**
2. **Be active**
3. **Take notice**
4. **Keep learning**
5. **Give**

A review of the most up-to-date evidence suggests that building the following five actions into our day-to-day lives is important for well-being:

Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active...

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness

Take notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Keep learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

Introduction notes

The concept of well-being comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. Feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity and engagement are characteristic of someone who has a positive experience of their life. Equally important for well-being is our functioning in the world. Experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one's life and having a sense of purpose are all important attributes of well-being.

FaithAction briefing notes on the Five Ways to Wellbeing. The full document can be found:
<http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/five-ways-well-being-evidence>

In recent years, there has been a discernible shift of focus in the field of psychology from illness to well-being.

The first study in the UK to measure well-being estimated that only 14% of the population has a high level of well-being, referred to as 'flourishing'. A further 14% has very low well-being, notwithstanding individuals with a diagnosed mental disorder.

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Evidence

National surveys of psychiatric morbidity in adults aged 16-64 in Great Britain show that the most significant difference between this group and people without mental ill-health is social participation. Furthermore, a primary social network (defined as the total number of close relatives and friends) of three or less predicts the probability of common mental health disorders.

Data from the 2005 British Attitude Survey shows that since 1989 there has been a sustained increase in the numbers of both men and women who prefer to spend more time with family and friends and less time at work. Similar finding from the Work Foundation Survey show that after time for leisure activities, time with partner, children, friends and family were the most cited reasons for employees wanting to work less.

Research has also found that happy people have stronger social relationships than less happy people.

A recent study using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Survey showed that life goals associated with a commitment to family, friends, social and political involvement promoted life satisfaction. In contrast, life goals associated with career success and material gains were detrimental to life satisfaction.

Be active...

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Evidence



Regular physical activity is associated with a greater sense of well-being and lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups. It is not clear, however, if regular exercise has a direct influence on feelings of well-being or whether well-being is a determinant of regular exercise behaviour. However in the case of children, at least, it has been argued that 'action is central to cognition'.

Longitudinal studies provide some evidence to indicate that physical activity protects against cognitive decline in later life and against the onset of depressive systems and anxiety.

Although studies indicate that the physical activity need not be particularly vigorous, at least in the protection of mental capital, not enough is known about what type (aerobic or anaerobic), frequency, intensity or duration of exercise is effective in improving well-being.

Engagement in physical activity is thought to be beneficial to well-being by proving increases in perceived self-efficacy, a sense of mastery and perceived ability to cope. It also detracts from negative thoughts.

Other evidence suggests that public health guidelines for moderate physical activity three to five times a week must be met for existing depression symptoms to be significantly reduced, mood and affect have been shown to be improved by as little as single bouts of exercise of less than 10 minutes.

It seems to be essential for people at all ages, both as a mechanism for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being.

Take notice...

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Evidence

Research has shown that being trained to be aware of sensations, thoughts and feelings for 8 to 12 weeks has been shown to enhance well-being for several years.

Being in a state known as mindfulness ('the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present') has also been shown to predict positive mental states, self-regulated behaviour and heightened self-knowledge.

Reminding oneself to 'take notice' is a step in the right direction towards strengthening and broadening awareness on an intrapersonal (within person) level.

Keep learning...

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Evidence

For children, learning plays an important role in social and cognitive development. The continuation of learning through life has the benefits of enhancing an individual's self-esteem, encouraging social interaction and a more active life.

Adult learning has been correlated with positive effects on well-being, reports on life satisfaction, optimism and efficacy. While it is unlikely that this relationship works in only one direction, fieldwork studies indicate that participation in lifelong learning serves to positively impact on an individual's well-being and resilience. These effects are mediated by self-esteem, self-efficacy, a sense of purpose and home, competences and social integration.

The practice of setting goals, which is related to adult learning in particular, has been strongly associated with higher levels of well-being.

Goal-directed behaviour has also been shown to have a positive impact on an individual's well-being, especially when the decision to engage in learning is concordant with intrinsic motivations and values.

Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

Evidence

Professor Kirkwood 'the vast majority of our behaviour is motivated by either obtaining rewards or avoiding punishments which modify behaviour through reinforcement. Appropriate stimulation of this reward system, particularly in early life, contributes to gains in cognitive and social functioning critical for the development of mental capital and well-being. Indeed, the Foresight definition of mental well-being says that it is enhanced when an individual is able to achieve a sense of purpose in society and, thus, contribute to their community'. So helping, sharing, giving and team-orientated behaviours are likely to be associated with an increased sense of self-worth and positive feelings.

Feelings of happiness and life satisfaction have been strongly associated with active participation in social and community life. For older people, volunteering is associated with

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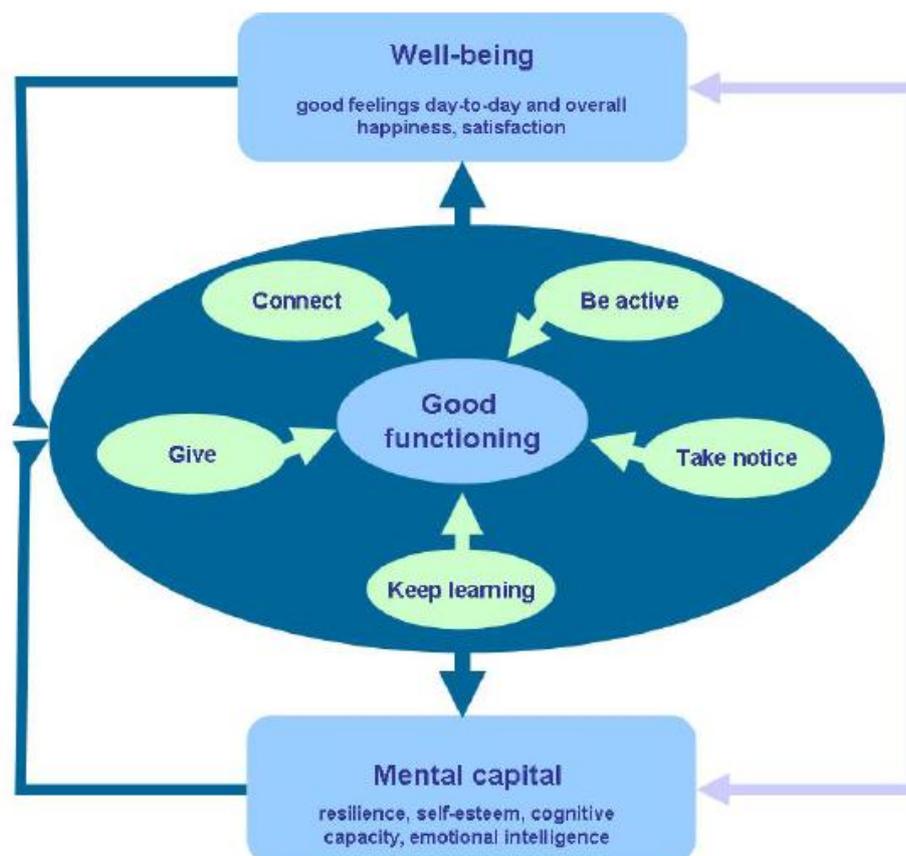
more positive affect and more meaning in life, while offering support to others has been shown to be associated with reduced mortality rates.

Evidence suggests that notions of reciprocity and ‘giving back’ to others promote well-being for people of all ages. For adults, and particularly retirees, giving and sharing are important for defining a sense of purpose in the community and a sense of self-worth.

Well-being at work

Work can be good for us because it promotes social ties and it can provide an arena for meaningful engagement in tasks, from which we derive feelings of self-worth and satisfaction. A while range of factors are necessary to enhance the benefits of work, however, included reasonable working hours and work load, supportive management, autonomy, job security, concordant values, to name a few.

Figure 1: A model describing how the set of actions operates to enhance well-being.





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