



THE  
PERMAH  
WELLBEING  
SURVEY  
FOR YOUTH

YOUR  
WELLBEING PLAN

THEWELLBEINGLAB

A MICHELLEMCQUAID PROGRAM

# WHERE SHOULD YOU START?

Before you create your Wellbeing Plan, we want to help you get clear on what caring for your wellbeing might look like. If you need assistance with your plan, be sure to reach out to a trusted adult or your school's wellbeing support services.

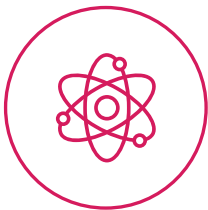
Your wellbeing is meant to ebb and flow, so setting out to constantly improve your wellbeing isn't necessarily a healthy goal. Instead, our research suggests that as you playfully experiment with the different wellbeing tools on the following pages your goal should be to try to care for your wellbeing through improving your:



## ABILITY

Often when people try to change their behaviors, they go too big, too hard, and expect results too fast. The good news is that when it comes to changing your wellbeing behaviors, tiny is mighty. As you reflect on your PERMAH Wellbeing Survey for Youth results, tune back into how you felt about your scores and which PERMAH wellbeing factor you might want to prioritize when it comes to finessing your wellbeing abilities. Note down the one or two PERMAH factors you'd most like to care for on the following page.

*Which PERMAH wellbeing factor(s) would you most like to focus on?*

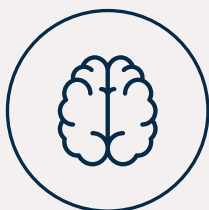


## MOTIVATION

Caring for your wellbeing is never won-and-done, just like going for one run won't suddenly make you fit or eating one piece of broccoli won't suddenly make you healthy. This is why caring for your wellbeing works best if you choose the behaviors you want to do, rather than those you feel you have to do, should do, or are expected to do.

With this in mind, as you look at the wellbeing behaviors on the following pages for the PERMAH factors you've chosen, choose the tiny actions you would most like to try first. Note these down below when you're ready, on the following page.

*Which wellbeing behaviors would you most like to begin playfully experimenting with?*



### PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Caring for your wellbeing is not a solo adventure. Studies show you are far more likely to stick with your chosen wellbeing behavior if you have a buddy – a friend, a family member, or group – who you can share your playful experiment with. And if you believe you may benefit from the extra help of a trusted coach, psychologist, or doctor we strongly encourage you to seek their support.

Choose someone who you feel safe to talk with about what is working well, where you're struggling, and what you're learning about caring for your wellbeing. You might want to share your wellbeing plan with them or simply let them know that you want to prioritize caring for your wellbeing over the coming weeks and you would like them to be your check-in buddy every now and again (we've even included a little wellbeing check-in guide to help you both at the end of this plan if you need it).

*Who can be your wellbeing buddy – your safe space – to share what you're learning about caring for your wellbeing?*

Collectively we call these three wellbeing levers your Wellbeing AMPlifiers.



### PROMPT

Every successful behavior change also has a clear prompt that nudges you to do your desired action. It can be an audio prompt (an alarm), a person prompt (your buddy), a time prompt (when you wake up), an environmental prompt (eating from a smaller plate), or a visual prompt (a Post-It note or a poster like the one below).

*Which nudge will you choose for your wellbeing behavior?*

# MY WELLBEING PLAN

## MY FIRST WELLBEING EXPERIMENT



ABILITY: MY PERMAH  
WELLBEING FACTOR:

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MOTIVATION: MY TINY  
WELLBEING BEHAVIOR:

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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY:  
MY WELLBEING BUDDY:

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PROMPT: MY WELLBEING  
BEHAVIOR NUDGE:

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## MY SECOND WELLBEING EXPERIMENT



ABILITY: MY PERMAH  
WELLBEING FACTOR:

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MOTIVATION: MY TINY  
WELLBEING BEHAVIOR:

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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY:  
MY WELLBEING BUDDY:

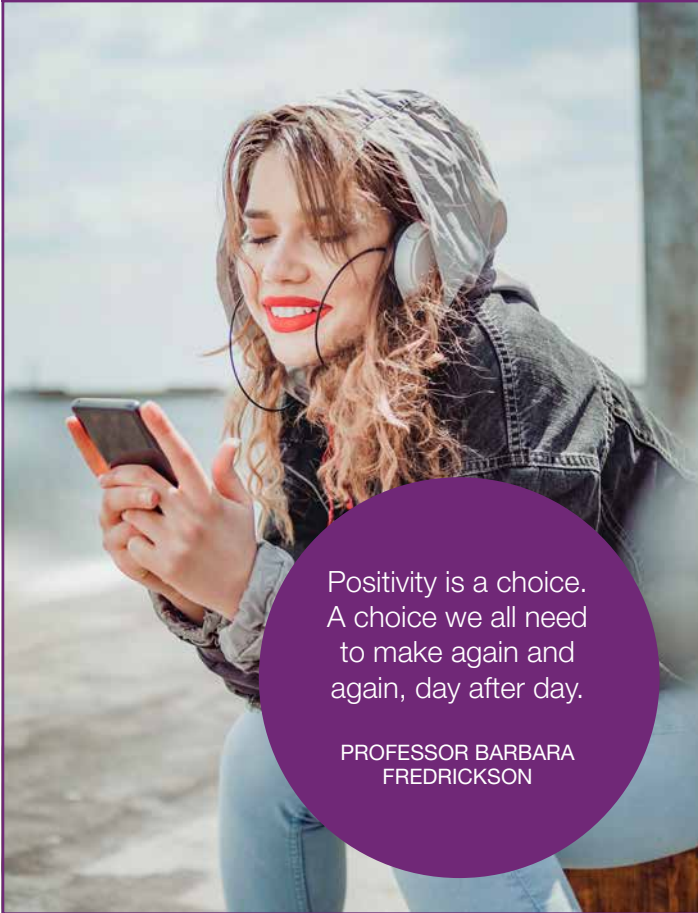
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PROMPT: MY WELLBEING  
BEHAVIOR NUDGE:

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# POSITIVE EMOTIONS



Positivity is a choice.  
A choice we all need  
to make again and  
again, day after day.

PROFESSOR BARBARA  
FREDRICKSON

## CULTIVATING GRATITUDE

Gratitude is much more than being glad for a gift or kind act, it's also experiencing a sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life. It involves noticing and appreciating the good things in and around you. Consistently feeling grateful for the good things in your life and what makes them possible has been found to improve your relationships, boost your levels of energy and positivity, and help you deal with negative emotions and adversity.

- **Counting your blessings:** Once a week, take a few moments to write down 5 things that happened that week for which you are grateful and what made each of these things possible.
- **Having a gratitude moment:** Take the time to genuinely thank one person for how they made your day a little better or a little easier. Do it face-to-face if you can, but if not, a call or text is fine. Be specific about what you appreciated and why.
- **Carrying a Gratitude Scrap:** Each morning before leaving for school, spend a few minutes writing down 3 things you're grateful for and carry that scrap of paper all day, glancing at it when you need some positivity in your day.

To learn more about gratitude from Robert Emmons click here.

## PRACTICING KINDNESS

Acts of kindness help to highlight your abilities, your resources, and your expertise and can give you a sense of confidence, optimism, usefulness, and meaning. What's more, the positive emotions you receive from giving to others have been found to create a positive feedback loop because kindness is contagious – people who witness your kind act are more likely to be kind as well. For ideas and inspiration to build your kindness muscles visit the Random Acts of Kindness website: [www.randomactsofkindness.org](http://www.randomactsofkindness.org).

- **Tracking your kindness:** Keep a journal and note down the acts of kindness you give and receive. These acts might differ in size, but the goal is to increase your awareness of the good you're doing and receiving in everyday life.
- **Having a kindness day:** Choose one day of the week and set yourself the challenge of doing five kind things for others. It could be holding the door open for someone, helping someone with directions, thanking a friend or peer, or buying a pay-it-forward coffee.
- **Trying loving-kindness meditation:** This is a powerful way to send goodwill, kindness, and warmth to others by silently repeating a series of mantras. Find a guided meditation to suit you at [www.positivityresonance.com/meditations](http://www.positivityresonance.com/meditations).

To learn more about kindness from Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky click here.

## GETTING COMFORTABLY UNCOMFORTABLE

Feelings of rejection, failure, self-doubt, loss, boredom, anger, or frustration are a normal part of life. While it can be tempting to suppress or distract yourself from these feelings, researchers have found that developing distress tolerance – being able to shift to the upside or the downside of your emotions to get the best possible outcome for the situation – can help you become a better learner, be more successful, and experience the deepest sense of wellbeing in life.

- **Naming your emotions:** When you experience emotional discomfort, take a few moments to notice what's happening in your body, then try to identify and name and gently observe the specific negative emotions you are experiencing and how it passes through your body.
- **Slowing down your responses:** When you experience a strong emotion such as anger, take a few moments to breathe deeply, and slow down your response. Then choose a response that is appropriate, respectful, and helpful for the situation you're in and the outcome you want.
- **Controlling the controllables:** If a situation or person is consistently triggering your negative emotions, make a list of what you can control and identify the actions on which you want to focus your attention, energy, and efforts.

To learn more about emotional agility from Dr. Susan David click here.

# ENGAGEMENT



Enjoyment appears at the boundary between boredom and anxiety.

PROFESSOR MIHALY  
CSIKSZENTMIHALYI

## CREATING MOMENTS OF FLOW

Flow is the feeling you get when you're fully absorbed in what you're doing. It's that feeling of "being in the zone" or "one with the music" that comes when time seems to stop, and you lose all sense of consciousness. In these moments your strengths are fully utilized, stretched to a manageable limit so you're learning, growing, improving, and advancing. Opportunities for flow leave you feeling more involved in your life, having a stronger sense of control, and higher levels of confidence.

- **Meet your best possible self:** Spend 15–20 minutes journaling about what might be possible in the year ahead if you were using your strengths regularly in moments of flow at school.
- **Craft your schoolwork:** Note down all the tasks in your schoolwork and divide them into those you enjoy and those that drain you. How could you change the type and number of tasks you undertake, who you spend your time with, or how you think about different tasks to create more opportunities for flow in your schoolwork?
- **Weekly strengths plan:** Note down what might be possible this week if you were able to regularly use your strengths in a state of flow and try to prioritize these tasks.

To learn more about job crafting from Professor Amy Wrzesniewski [click here](#).

## DISCOVERING YOUR STRENGTHS

Studies find that when you have the opportunity to use your strengths (those things you are good at and actually enjoy doing), you are likely to feel more confident, creative, engaged, and satisfied with your work and your life. A strength represents the way your brain is wired to perform at its best, so as you've practiced particular thoughts, feelings, and behaviors so often, you've built up neural pathways that make it easier, more effective, and more enjoyable to work in these ways.

- **Naming your strengths:** Use one of the easy-to-use online strengths assessment tools. Gallup Strengths Finder ([gallupstrengthscenter.com](http://gallupstrengthscenter.com)) and the Strengths Profile ([strengthsprofile.com](http://strengthsprofile.com)) are paid assessments, or we like the free 10-minute VIA Survey ([viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)).
- **Reflecting your best self:** Ask at least five people from different contexts in your life to note down a story about a time when they've seen you really engaged, energized, and enjoying what you were doing. Look for common themes of how your strengths show up in your best moments.
- **Daily strengths reflection:** At the end of each day take a few minutes to journal about what you discovered about your strengths. Which strengths did you use well? Did you underplay or overplay any of your strengths?

To learn more about strengths from Dr. Ryan Niemiec [click here](#).

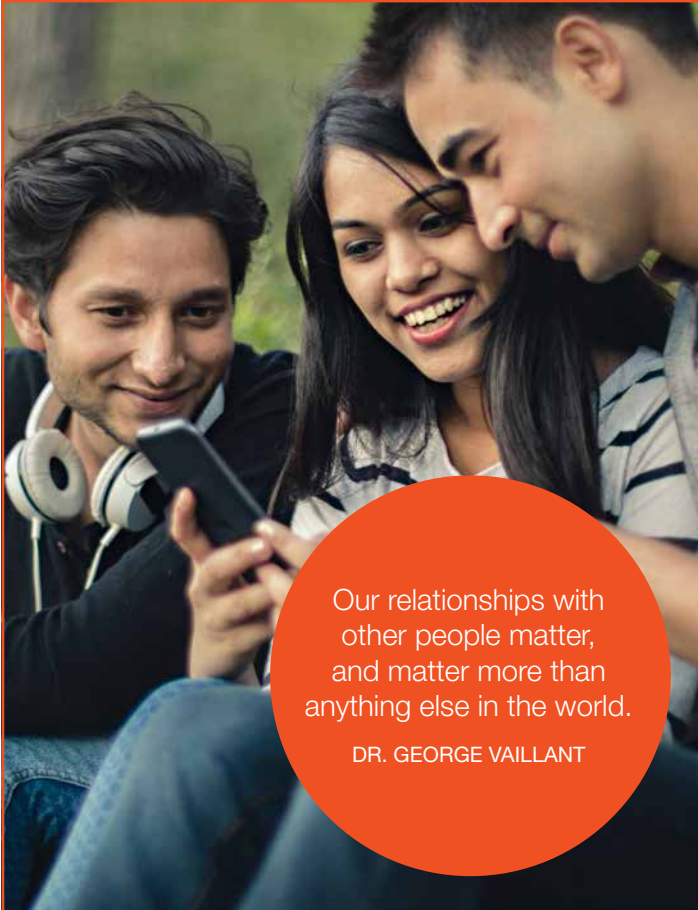
## STAYING PLAYFUL

We are built to play and built through play, as it allows you to see things in a different way and explore new behaviors, thoughts, strategies, and ways of being that stimulates your brain for learning, growth, and creativity. Give yourself permission to surrender to your curiosity as you improvise and explore new ways of doing things, losing track of time and any sense of self-consciousness in the process. Enjoy the fun of feeling actively engaged in what you are doing without the need for any bigger outcome.

- **Creating your play history:** Spend time remembering what you did as a child that really got you excited and gave you joy. Note down ways you might be able to recreate these feelings in your life now.
- **Being playful:** Every day find a way to play. It could be sharing a joke with someone, creating something new, or just letting loose for a while. Make time to play, knowing it is a great path to learning, creativity, and innovation.
- **Getting active:** One of the quickest ways to jump-start play is to start moving. Consider setting up a play area at school that involves physical activities – like throwing a ball, Velcro darts, or skittles.

To learn more about play from Stella Grizont [click here](#).

# RELATIONSHIPS



Our relationships with other people matter, and matter more than anything else in the world.

DR. GEORGE VAILLANT

## LETTING GO & FORGIVING

Unfortunately harm, trauma, and injustice are common occurrences in school and life that can lead to retribution, condemnation, victimization, and revenge, and as a result individual performance and wellbeing almost always deteriorate. Research has found that learning to forgive and letting go can help you be less hateful, hostile, and anxious. Studies suggest you can do this by practicing compassion and looking for what you've learned and how you've grown from the experience.

- **Finding meaning:** Spend 20-30 minutes writing about a recent argument or conflict you have personally experienced. Consider how this event could be an opportunity to grow and move forward. Is it really worth holding onto and not forgiving the other person?
- **Building forgiveness muscles:** Make a conscious effort to not talk badly about those who have hurt you. You don't have to say good things, but if you refrain from talking negatively, it will feed the more forgiving side of your mind and your heart.
- **Gifting of mercy:** If you are holding a grudge toward someone who has wronged you, try to see them as a person who behaved badly and forgive them this moment of human learning. We all have them.

**To learn more about forgiveness from Fred Luskin click here.**

## PRACTICING COMPASSION

You can safely assume that there is pain in every class in your school. Studies are finding that when compassion – your desire to reduce suffering – is practiced, you're likely to improve your resilience and be more engaged and committed to your schoolwork. Increasing compassion involves being attuned to the suffering of others, not blaming or judging them, showing empathy and concern, and taking practical actions to provide support. Any small thing you can offer may make a big difference to a person's sense of belonging, support, and self-worth.

- **Being available:** When someone talks to you, give them your full attention. Put aside your tasks, turn away from your computer, and listen carefully to what they're saying.
- **Listening empathetically:** When someone is telling you about a difficult situation or challenge, give them your full attention without interrupting or feeling you need to jump in with advice or to try to fix their problem. Try to be aware, non-judgemental, and curious about their story.
- **Offering micro-moves:** Take small actions or gestures to help the person feel like their suffering is acknowledged. It might be offering to help with their schoolwork or checking in with them regularly to see that they're managing ok.

**To learn more about practicing compassion from Monica Worline click here.**

## SHARING GOOD TIMES

One conversation, one text exchange, or one moment of connecting in the hallway can leave you and the person you've connected with, with a sense of vitality and can benefit the wellbeing and performance of you both. Studies have found that you can create high-quality connections by engaging respectfully with others by being present, listening actively, being genuine, and practicing kindness. You can also help to engage others more in tasks by sharing information, advocating for others, being patient and encouraging with their performance, and helping them believe in their success.

- **Prioritizing friendships:** Identify three relationships you would like to invest more time in. For each of these, create a ritual (to perform on a daily, weekly, or fortnightly basis) that ensures you are regularly in touch.
- **Responding actively:** When someone shares good news with you, slow down and take a moment to ask them some active and thoughtful questions to help them expand and savor their good fortune.

**To learn more about quality connections from Professor Jane Dutton click here.**

## MEANING



The single strongest predictor of meaningfulness is the belief that our actions make a positive difference for others.

PROFESSOR ADAM GRANT

### CREATING PURPOSE

Your purpose is the driving force behind who you are; it's the internal compass that motivates you to keep heading in the direction of how you want to live your life. It involves tapping into your deepest desires to contribute and to make a difference to something bigger than yourself. Without purpose, you can drift through life aimlessly. But with it, studies have found you'll be more motivated to accomplish the goals that matter most to you, and be resilient in the face of challenges.

- **For the sake of what?:** Spend ten minutes writing about what you are willing to get out of your comfort zone for, to risk failure, to put your ego aside and truly show up for. How can you start right now?
- **Making the mundane meaningful:** Write down a task that feels devoid of meaning. Then, draw an arrow to the right and ask: "What's the purpose of this task?" "What will it accomplish?" And write down your answer. Keep repeating this step until you see the bigger value of a little task.
- **Outsourcing inspiration:** Gain inspiration and meaning by connecting to the people impacted by what you do. Learn more about the challenges they face and the differences you can make in their lives.

To learn more about purpose from Emily Esfahani Smith [click here](#).

### MAKING PASSION HARMONIOUS

Feeling passionate about key activities can become a defining feature of who you are and what makes your life worth living. But over time a passion can become obsessive if it takes control of your life, damages your relationships, and harms your wellbeing. Instead, when your passions are harmonious – kept in balance with other parts of your life – studies suggest you'll experience higher levels of health and job satisfaction. Choosing which passions you engage in, how you engage in them, and how you balance them can keep them harmonious.

- **Restoring balance:** After a short burst of obsessive passion to reach a milestone, it's important to rebalance your life and put your passion back into perspective. Remind yourself of the other things you love. Go back to your normal schedule. Revert to who you really are when life is harmonious.
- **Cultivating alternative passions** Having more than one passion in your life will help you keep a passion from getting out of control. What would you like to pursue purely for the joy of the activity? What lights you up outside of school?
- **Setting boundaries:** Whenever you can leave your computer, and limit checking your phone for messages. You are worth a break.

To learn more about harmonious passion with Professor Robert Vallerand [click here](#).

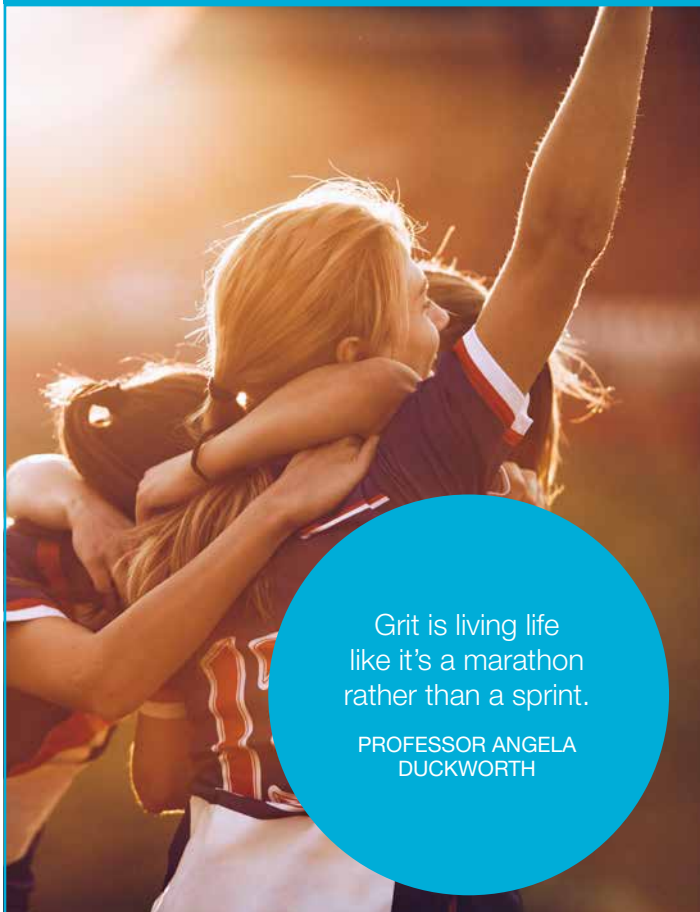
### ALLOWING TRANSCENDENCE

Transcendent states occur when your sense of self washes away, along with all your petty concerns and desires and you feel deeply connected to other people and everything else that exists in the world. It is the feeling of awe that comes when you notice and engage with something so grand and vast that you can't comprehend it. The result is that your anxieties lessen, your generosity and concern for others increases, life finally seems to make sense, and you experience a deep state of peace and wellbeing.

- **Being awed by nature:** Find ways to regularly be inspired by the awe of nature. Use mindfulness to be curious and open to the experience – use all your five senses to notice your surroundings as if it was the first time you had experienced them.
- **Finding a spiritual practice:** If you feel there is a higher power guiding you, then make time to connect, to reflect, and to absorb the sense of wonder, love, and purpose that this offers.
- **Getting perspective:** As you are experiencing a sense of awe, try to answer the question: "Who am I?" Write 20 sentences, each beginning with "I am" and allow this to intensify your experience of awe.

To learn more about transcendence with David Yaden [click here](#).

# ACCOMPLISHMENT



Grit is living life like it's a marathon rather than a sprint.

PROFESSOR ANGELA DUCKWORTH

## PRACTICING A GROWTH MINDSET

People with a “growth mindset” believe that while you’re born with a certain amount of talent and intelligence, with learning and effort you can always improve – and neuroscience validates this belief. As a result, people who practice a growth mindset have the confidence to take on new challenges, re-frame failure and criticisms as teachable moments, and are able to achieve increasingly higher levels of success as their skills improve as a result of these experiences.

- **Setting learning goals:** Each week have at least one learning goal you want to improve upon. As you tackle this goal try to practice your growth mindset as you let go of the outcome, embrace your mistakes, and identify the processes and efforts you can build upon to keep improving.
- **Getting comfortable with failure:** Write down the three biggest mistakes you’ve made in the last year. Now, next to each one list the lessons or insights you gained.
- **Naming your fixed mindset:** Give your fixed mindset voice a name. Start tuning into the stories this voice is telling you when you fear failure or criticism. Try to talk back to it in a growth mindset voice.

**To learn more about growth mindsets with Professor Carol Dweck [click here.](#)**

## BEING SELF-COMPASSIONATE

When things go wrong self-criticism is often our first response but the problem with this approach is it leaves your brain feeling threatened, demoralized, and stuck in a cycle of being hard on yourself and putting things off which makes it hard to take action. Tapping into your self-compassion, however, can help you to break your patterns of self-criticism while still letting you to be honest about your fears, to remember that no one is perfect, and to enhance your motivation, performance, and resilience.

- **Creating a mantra:** Consider what a wise and kind friend would say to you in the moments you want to beat yourself up. For example: “You got this. Just slow down. Take a breath.” Or even: “You’re doing the best you can.”
- **Soothing your pain:** Kind physical gestures have an immediate effect on our bodies. Try putting your hands over your heart or placing one hand over the opposite wrist and take eight deep breaths.
- **Self-compassion bracelet:** Wear a self-compassion bracelet, and every time you notice a self-criticism switch the bracelet to your other arm. Acknowledge this is a moment of suffering, that it is part of being human to experience difficulties and be kind to yourself.

**To learn more about self-compassion from Dr. Kristin Neff [click here.](#)**

## BOOSTING RESILIENCE

Ninety percent of us have a psychological immune system that allows us to be naturally resilient and recover quickly from these experiences. But the strength and speed of our response is often determined by the stories we tell ourselves.

- **Challenging your beliefs:** Write down a story that’s causing you anguish and ask: Is this story true? Is it absolutely accurate? Is there another equally believable story that would serve me better right now?
- **Leaning into the suck:** Rather than trying to rid yourself of painful feelings, know that they are part of your brain’s natural protection and healing systems. Let yourself experience the emotions and you will find they pass more quickly.
- **Banning “always”:** Words like “never” and “always” are signs of permanent mistakes in your thinking. By becoming aware of the absolutes you tell in your stories, you can quickly regain a sense of control and choice.

**To learn more about boosting resilience from Dr. Judith Beck [click here.](#)**

# HEALTH



Small choices about the way you eat, move, and sleep have a big impact.

TOM RATH

## COMPLETING THE STRESS CYCLE

Research suggests that in modern life often our fight-flight-freeze stress response cycle becomes stuck due to lack of a clear signal that the struggle has passed and you are safe. As a result, your neurochemicals and hormones degrade but never shift into relaxation. In order to complete the “stress cycle” we need to signal to our body that the stressor has passed and that we’re safe.

- **Physical activity:** Literally any movement of your body is what tells your brain you have successfully survived the threat and now your body is a safe place to live. Physical activity is the single most efficient strategy for completing the stress response cycle.
- **Affection:** It doesn’t have to be physical affection, though physical affection is great; a warm hug, in a safe and trusting context, can do as much to help your body feel like it has escaped a threat
- **A Big Laugh Or Cry:** By letting it all out with a good cry or encouraging endorphin production through a hearty belly laugh, embodying these emotional extremes allows us to release pent up emotions and complete the stress cycle.

**To learn more about stressing less with Loretta Breuning click here.**

## EATING WISELY

Try to start thinking about food not as calories, but as energy. After all, just about everything you eat is converted by your body into glucose, which provides the energy your body and brain need to stay alert and productive. When you’re running low on glucose, you have a tough time staying focused, your attention drifts and your body becomes sluggish. Eating well not only enhances your health in the short- and long-term, but it can also improve your mood and keep your energy levels high.

- **Planning your diet:** Make your eating decisions before you get hungry. Have something healthy on hand to make good eating choices easier.
- **Eating small and frequently:** Start your day right with a high-protein breakfast, then consume smaller, more frequent meals rather than relying on a midday feast or big evening meal to keep up your energy.
- **Tracking and adjust:** Ask yourself if what you are about to eat is a net gain or a net loss for your energy, based on what you know about all the ingredients. By asking this question, you will make better decisions in the moment and be aware of how you’re tracking across the day.

**To learn more about eating wisely from Tom Rath click here.**

## MOVING JOYFULLY

Being active throughout the day can keep you healthy and offset the chronic inactivity most of us experience. Studies suggest that regular exercise not only improves your physical health generally, it also improves your attention, memory, mood and confidence. The good news is that there are literally hundreds of moments in a day when you can put an extra activity in your routine. The key is to find activities that you enjoy doing and are willing to do on a regular basis.

- **Counting your steps:** Get a Fitbit or phone app to measure the steps you take each day. Start small and boost your number by adding ten minutes of walking per day.
- **Getting up regularly:** Set a timer that goes off every 20 to 30 minutes and take a movement break for at least two minutes to help improve your creativity, productivity, and wellbeing.
- **Starting early:** Just 20 minutes of moderate activity could significantly improve your mood for the next twelve hours. Begin your day with a brisk walk, a stop at the local gym, or a yoga session at home.

**To learn more about joyful movement from Dr. Kelly McGonigal click here.**

# WHAT NEXT? BE GENTLE WITH YOUR WELLBEING

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Caring for your wellbeing is a lifetime's journey. Your goal isn't about improving one score on a survey, but AMPlifying your ability, motivation, and psychological safety so you can better navigate the highs and lows everyone experiences.

Give yourself permission to try, to fail, to learn, and to get up and try again. Remember that signs of struggle are simply an invitation to continue playfully experimenting as you figure out what works best for you and the outcomes you want.

Be honest with yourself about where you are on the journey, knowing now that wellbeing is neither a one-off nor a one-size-fits-all affair. Be open to discovering better ways to care for yourself at different times in your life, knowing that you are worthy of feeling good and doing well.

Just like you, when it comes to AMPlifying wellbeing, we're all learning. It's our heartfelt hope that The PERMAH Wellbeing Survey for Youth and the online tools we've provided help make the journey a little faster, a little easier, and a lot more enjoyable for you.

# BONUS: WELLBEING BUDDY CHECK-IN

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As you playfully experiment with new wellbeing behaviors a check-in with a buddy can help you discover what works best for you. This can be as simple as a five-minute conversation on the phone on the way to school, over a quick coffee or bite of lunch, or even over text to ask each other some of the following questions:

- **WHAT TINY WELLBEING BEHAVIOR HAVE YOU BEEN EXPERIMENTING WITH?**

This is where you'll share what you've tried. Be honest – remember this is your safe space. If you haven't made much progress, that's okay. This is your moment to explore what's getting stuck. If you're kicking wellbeing goals then share what's happening.

- **WHAT'S WORKING WELL?**

We promise that, even in your worst moments, something small will be working. It might only be the fact that you're having this check-in, but it still counts! Identifying these strengths is how you continue improving your wellbeing ability levels and sustain your motivation, so with humble pride, savor your success.

- **WHERE ARE YOU STRUGGLING?**

Even during your best moments it's always worth thinking about what else you could try to improve or sustain your effort – this is how you build mastery and boost your confidence. And if your list of struggles is long, just remember that signs of struggle are your body's invitation to continue playfully experimenting as you figure out what works best for you and the outcomes you want.

- **WHAT ARE YOU LEARNING ABOUT CARING FOR YOUR WELLBEING?**

At the end of the day, remember that your goal is to AMPLify your ability to care for your wellbeing as the world around you changes. While outcomes are great, it is the learning you take from your playful experiments that you will carry forward to new wellbeing challenges.

- **WHAT WILL YOU TRY NEXT?**

You can continue what you're doing, adjust your approach as needed, try an entirely different wellbeing behavior, or even focus on a different PERMAH wellbeing factor. Just keep playfully experimenting and checking in with your buddy about how you're doing.