

The *Five Ways to Wellbeing* are based on scientific evidence about individuals' behaviour. If people incorporate more *Five Ways*-type activities into their daily lives, this evidence suggests that their wellbeing will improve.

However, rather than only thinking of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in terms of individual behaviour change, they can also be used to help understand the external opportunities and barriers that influence how people act. Interventions at group / community, organisational and strategic levels can use the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in order to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes across whole populations. This can be thought of as moving from the "left" to the "right" of the framework presented on the previous page.

In many instances, there is also scope for moving from the "top" half of the framework to the "bottom". This means thinking about how wellbeing benefits can flow *indirectly* from initiatives that are aimed primarily at achieving different objectives. In this way, the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* can be used as a means of encouraging diverse stakeholders to reflect on whether and how their activities or services improve wellbeing.

If you are using the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in your work, we would like to hear from you. Send us an e-mail at well-being@neweconomics.org.

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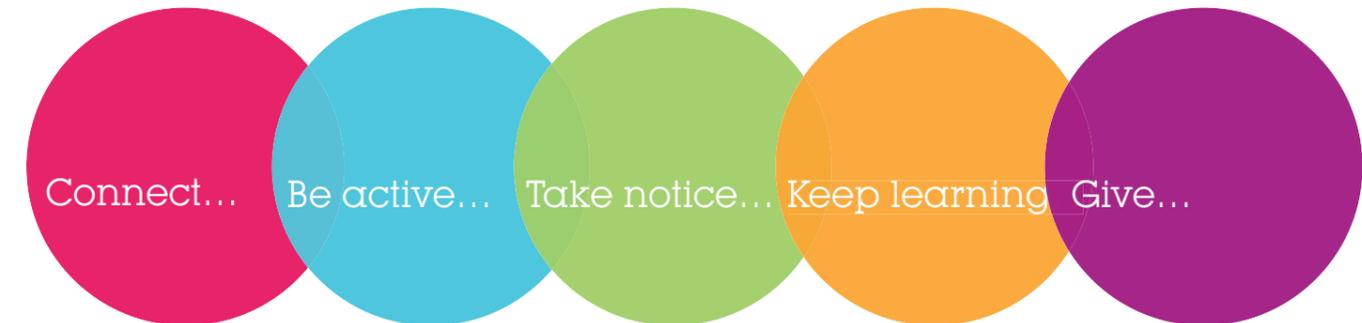
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Five Ways to Wellbeing: New applications, new ways of thinking

The *Five Ways to Wellbeing* are a simple and accessible means of communicating the evidence about activities that can improve and maintain mental health and wellbeing. They were created by **nef** (the new economics foundation) for Foresight, the UK government's futures think-tank, as part of the *Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing*.

The *Five Ways to Wellbeing* are intended to be positive and engaging, flexible and non-prescriptive, yet firmly grounded in the extensive scientific evidence that was collected by the Foresight project. They are:

- **Connect...** e.g. build social relationships, spend time with friends and family
- **Be active...** e.g. engage in regular physical activity
- **Take notice...** e.g. be mentally "present", focus on awareness and appreciation
- **Keep learning...** e.g. maintain curiosity about the world, try new things
- **Give...** e.g. make a positive contribution to the lives of others

Since launching in 2008, the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* have proven extremely popular. Groups as diverse as GPs and other healthcare professionals, mental

health commissioners, arts practitioners, faith groups, community and voluntary organisations and local authority departments have incorporated the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in their work. Strikingly, the range of uses has been broad, going well beyond just thinking of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* as a set of health promotion messages.

In order to explore more systematically how the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* have been used by different groups, the NHS Confederation and the National Mental Health Development Unit (NMH DU) commissioned **nef** to conduct a survey. Although not completely comprehensive, this provided a wide-ranging overview of how the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* are being used in the UK.

Based on the results of the survey, we developed a framework for thinking about different applications of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*. We also highlighted some case studies that illustrate innovative uses of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*, and drew out a number of learning points that will be of interest to those who are already using, or thinking about using, the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* in their work.

This briefing summarises our findings. It is drawn from a larger report, *Five Ways to Wellbeing: New applications, new ways of thinking*, which is available for download at www.neweconomics.org and www.nhsconfed.org

The framework opposite is derived from examples of real practice gathered in the survey. By drawing-out characteristics of different approaches, it illustrates the potential of the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* to be used at various levels of intervention and in the context of initiatives that are not explicitly focused on wellbeing.

The framework has two dimensions, as follows.

Dimension 1: Point of Intervention

Evidence suggests that people who incorporate more *Five Ways*-type activities into their daily lives will improve their wellbeing. But how can we encourage this to happen?

Broadly, there are two approaches. The first is to motivate **individuals** to make lifestyle changes because they see it is in their best interests to do so. For instance, we might run a campaign to increase understanding of good mental health, or educate people about beneficial activities in the hope that they will decide to incorporate more of these into their day-to-day lives.

But external conditions are also an important influence on behaviour. Someone who lives in an isolated rural area may find it difficult to connect with friends regularly. Someone with a full-time job and young family may find their opportunities for volunteering limited by time and financial pressures. In these and other examples, it might be possible to increase the amount of *Five Ways*-type activities by altering the *circumstances* in which people live and the *opportunities* they have, rather than trying to influence their beliefs and motivations directly.

We can therefore intervene at different levels. One approach is for policy makers to take **strategic** decisions about economic, social, and environmental issues in order to remove barriers (e.g. time, money) that prevent some people doing more *Five Ways*-type activities. More locally, decisions can be made that affect all members of a particular **group, community** or **organisation**. For instance, an office manager could decide to limit working hours and so increase opportunities for employees to spend time connecting, being active and so on. A voluntary group could use the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* to tailor its activities, perhaps by emphasising opportunities for meeting new people and skill-sharing, or incorporating physical activity into its programme.

Dimension 2: Principal Purpose

Many of the projects reported in the survey use the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* to improve wellbeing directly. However, there were some examples where they have been used as a means of thinking about the wellbeing implications of initiatives that have other aims.

Imagine a mental health awareness campaign based around the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*, or an adult learning class that teaches people to "take notice" through mindfulness meditation. The main purpose of these initiatives is to improve psychological wellbeing – that is the reason that they are being undertaken. We refer to these and similar initiatives as **promoting wellbeing directly**.

By contrast, knowledge about what improves wellbeing can be applied to initiatives that have other objectives. This is possible because people do not usually forge social connections or take part in exercise activities *because* they are trying to improve their mental health. Rather, someone might "connect" when socialising every day at work, "be active" when taking up exercise to lose weight or improve fitness, "keep learning" when they attend a further education class to improve their job prospects, and so on. In all these areas and more, the people who *design* the interventions can build in opportunities for more *Five Ways*-type activities. We refer to this as **promoting wellbeing indirectly**.

The RNID in Northern Ireland has used *Five Ways to Wellbeing* with deaf and hard of hearing clients to encourage them to take responsibility for looking after their own mental health.

NHS Tameside and Glossop themed their activities for World Mental Health Day 2010 on the *Five Ways to Wellbeing*. Their aim was to "raise the profile in the public consciousness of public mental health".

Paxton Green timebank in South London held guided group activities based on the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* (e.g. "take notice" days out exploring new parts of London; "keep learning" skill-sharing events).

In Rochdale, a partnership including the Metropolitan Borough Council, GPs, Mind and Link 4 Life have used the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* to raise awareness among healthcare professionals about the importance of good mental health.

Liverpool City Region used the *Five Ways to Wellbeing* as a strategic framework for their 2010 Year of Health and Wellbeing initiative. This is now being taken forward into a Decade of Health and Wellbeing.

