

Mental Wellness for People with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

What is Wellness?

When we think about how to support people with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD) who are having a difficult time, we think about how the disability impacts the person's life, or we look at what support to use to make things better. For people with problem behavior (also referred to as *interfering* behavior in MN statute), we often consider why the person has difficulties. In other words, we are often focused on what is "wrong" with a person's life. Sometimes we miss asking whether people are "well." Are we thinking about how to support the person in engaging in a healthy lifestyle that will promote mental wellness and having a good life?

There are day-to-day factors that make up what we call *wellness*. Think about this in our own lives; when we are not feeling ourselves or feeling stressed, we may have many ways of coping. We also have our own ways of living a life that is meaningful to us. We can take actions such as: taking a new and better job, having the ability to be spontaneous and splurge, take a day for ourselves, enjoy a relaxing bath, hit the gym, or get lost in our favorite hobby. This is how we take care of our own mental wellness, but we tend to forget this important dimension when we start planning, especially in the area of behavior support.

Can we promote wellness as part of supporting a person with IDD?

Mental wellness is an important part of a positive supports framework. While there are different ways to think about wellness, we will consider the research-based framework of wellness developed by JoAnn Cannon, Ph.D. Her research is described in her book "Embracing the Good" (2005, Inward Bound Ventures). With help from a MacArthur Genius Grant, Dr. Cannon did an exhaustive study of over 600 people whose lives were "together," from all continents except for Antarctica, and she found that these **15 factors** were traits often seen in this group. Below each one of these wellness factors, we added a number of different ideas for how somebody's wellness in that area could be improved. *When we use the word "you" below, it refers to the person with IDD.*

CONTACT WITH NATURE

- Walking in a neighborhood park or nature center
- Sitting on porch/deck
- Fishing, birding, playing with animals
- Gardening, taking care of a house plant
- Wading or swimming at the beach

- Watching wildlife shows
- Decorating with natural objects
- Looking for the space station
- Making a checklist of wild plants and animals
- Tracking phases of the moon
- Playing in the snow

- Star gazing
- Having a pet
- Collecting interesting rocks
- Going to the zoo
- Feeding birds or squirrels

BALANCED NUTRITION

- Learn how to make a variety of healthy, preferred recipes
- Use smaller plates
- Change favorite recipes gradually to include healthier ingredients
- Drink water
- Mix in veggies like chopped spinach and kale to sauces and casseroles
- Make healthy drinks

- Celebrate eating well
- Teach and model making healthy meals or snacks
- Reduce salt intake (most people don't even notice)
- Give choices of veggies and fruits to buy
- Save favorite recipes with pictures in a recipe box
- Teach and model meal planning

OPTIMISM

- Start meetings with positives
- Give thanks, appreciation, or encouragement for little things
- Support decision making
- Talk and think positively
- Don't say "it can't" - say "how can we"
- Talk about what is done right, not wrong
- Celebrate good days
- Teach how to look forward to fun future events

- Print pictures of you doing great things
- Plan small, special events that feel like bigger experiences
- Talk about what is right in life and the world
- Teach and model how to "collect" things that are good or funny
- Make personal mottos even if they are 2 words

GOAL ACCOMPLISHMENT

- Make accomplishments visible (make a checklist and cross things off as they get finished)
- Prioritize 1 or 2 achievable changes while not messing with what is working
- Phrase goals so that they can be accomplished daily or weekly (e.g. "will use learned strategies to have more good days")
- Print pictures of you achieving goals
- Make a calendar of goals, especially fun ones

- Learn fun skills
- Make sure written plans have fun items
- Share achievements with friends
- Encourage others about their goals
- Use person centered tools to communicate accomplishments ("Good Day/Bad Day" worksheet)
- Avoid giving feedback in documentation-type terms (e.g., **Don't** focus on the exact number of sessions the person attended, just whether it improved or not)

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- Give feedback on goals at least daily!
- Let all people know what they are doing well at least daily!

EXPERIENCED CREATIVITY

- Listening, making, dancing to music
- Cooking
- Doing art/hobby projects (model/kit sets, painting, coloring, cards, ceramics)
- Working on charity projects (tie blankets for charity)
- Making gifts for people
- Collecting things you like
- Enjoying art and going to art events
- Develop a sense of humor
- Look for ideas on craft websites, and then make them
- Get craft kits or take classes at craft stores
- Home improvement projects
- Journaling/Scrapbooking
- Giving the space and time to solve a problem
- Design and decorate your space

INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION

- Provide opportunities for the person to learn about what they are interested in
- Engage in conversations that are meaningful (not just need to know)
- Spend time with people who have similar interests
- Go places where interesting things occur
- Explore new things in community environments where it is okay if you don't like it
- Play puzzles, mazes, and games
- Give time and space to solve problems

WORK SATISFACTION

- Schedules and positions that fit with the person's interests, abilities, passions, and tolerance for work
- Coordinate with the team for planned "mental health days"
- Allow for breaks in routine once in a while
- Recognize contributions at work
- Help connect with co-workers outside of work environment
- Have a reasonable commute to and from work
- Figure out why if job dissatisfaction occurs (even if you simply don't "like" someone)
- Provide opportunities and education to work towards more pay or better positions
- Consider volunteerism

REST AND SLEEP

- Sleep in a quiet room with a lower temperature
- Provide room darkening shades
- Use a weighted blanket or heavier blanket
- Go to bed and wake up at regular times

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- Participate in relaxing things before bed (bath, deep breathing; mindfulness)
- Use white noise overnight
- Check to make sure indigestion is not keeping them awake
- Be physically active during the day
- Avoid stress or emotional upset before bed time
- Provide opportunities for stress relief before bed
- Recognize that trauma can affect sleep and seek professionals who can help

ECONOMIC ESSENTIALS

- Budget
- Shop wisely (Goodwill, Dollar Store and thrift are really trendy now!)
- Give choices for how to save money
- Don't judge (treasure or junk is in the eye of the beholder)
- Sign up for formal money saving programs
- Ensure reasonable access to their money
- Provide opportunities to reduce stress on money issues
- Teach about recycling and reuse
- Make planning for big goals visual so you can see progress

TIME AND SPACE ALONE

- Figure out how this can be done safely
- Use a "person-centered approach to risk" to develop action steps
- Implement gradually
- Use technology to provide safety and security with permission
- Look at the physical space that is available to provide privacy (can a curtain help?)
- Staying alone in a room may be a request to have space
- Many people just need some time to themselves to calm down
- Teach how to properly use alone time
- Teach games or activities done solo
- Ensure proper mobility supports so the supervision in the shower/toilet, etc. isn't needed

COPING WITH STRESS

- Some of the most effective stress management strategies are deep breathing, visualization, long walks with deep breathing, aquatics, and listening to music.
- Many people have their own, unique calming activities.
- Use the 2 minute drill (from person-centered planning) to listen to the person
- Develop a person centered description, and use it to inform your supports)
- Provide opportunities for enough sleep, physical activity, and good nutrition
- Don't get into power struggles
- Give choices for how to deal with stress
- Make sure stress reducing items are available out in the open
- Some people will need supportive psychotherapy to learn how to cope with stress
- Always teach, model, and encourage use of stress management strategies. Never turn it into a power struggle.

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- Teach problem solving

PHYSICAL PROWESS

- Join a team or club, or start one
- Match staff support to promote physical activity
- Support can be anyone who is interested and willing
- Provide adequate mobility support so activities are done independently
- Introduce new activities by going to events or watching videos
- Pair physical activity with preferred activities (e.g. walking at the mall, gardening, or building)
- Allow independence

SPIRIT AWARENESS

- Find out how people practice their spirituality
- Document preferences in their person centered description so the entire team is responsible
- Engage with communities who practice the same spiritual beliefs during and outside of worship/practice times
- Give time/space at home/work to engage in spirituality
- Be aware of possible biases on the team about spirituality
- Provide opportunities to practice/teach rituals and practices

FULFILLING RELATIONSHIPS

- Start engaging 1:1 instead of in groups
- Send a letter, email, or call an old friend.
- Connect more with family
- Complete a relationship map and see who is in their life
- Don't set limits on who can and can't be a friend
- Romance is for (almost) everyone
- Engage community members
- Train the team to be connectors
- Ensure opportunities for appropriate human contact or touch
- If there aren't opportunities for contact, provide them (a pat on the back, getting hair done, dancing)

POSITIVE SELF-IMAGE

- Make a list/graphic of positive things about the person
- Refer to positive attributes and point out great qualities
- Develop strengths
- Help appropriately address negative people in their life
- Share a positive attitude in meetings
- Remind the person how far they have come
- Say and do encouraging, nice things
- If a problem that a person faces is a problem all people face, say so!

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- Allow the person to try and to fail (just debrief after and make a new plan!)
- Take and print pictures of the person doing exciting things
- Take videos of the person accomplishing things

Look at those for yourself. Do you do a lot of these things? Do you do very few of these things? If a typical person feels like s/he are low in some areas, that person can try to change some of these. Let's say that I feel that I am not coping with stress well. I can try to do things to change that. Maybe I can read a book about how to manage stress better. Some, of course, are tougher to change than others (for example, economic essentials) are.

The difference for a person with IDD, is that s/he might not have the opportunity or skill to make changes without support. If the person can't read, then the book about stress management won't be helpful. That is where we can fit in as support providers. Can you think of how these factors influence a person's behavior? Do people with IDD whom you support get to experience these factors on a regular basis? Do they have a choice in how they engage in these factors?

How is wellness relevant to support planning?

An essential principle of support planning is that when a person is happy about life, they are less likely to have difficult times or even engage in challenging behaviors. Including activities to make a person feel more "well" is important. We know what makes people well, and we should promote this as part of our support plan, behavior plans, and informal support strategies. Promoting mental wellness for people with disabilities requires us to empower the person to engage in mental wellness, and encourages us to make sure where the person lives supports wellness. Mental wellness is a part of the many things that we consider when creating a support plan. Mental wellness is essential for EVERYONE. Direct support people must also engage in these lifestyle habits: for their own well-being, to be a role model; to prevent caregiver fatigue.

How might wellness be considered?

- Consider the "15 Factors of Wellness" when creating support plans.
 - Does the person have a chance to engage in each of these factors?
 - Can we provide assistance in working to better the person's life with respect to these factors?
- If somebody is having challenging behaviors, look at wellness as part of the assessment process. Giving a simple thumbs up or thumbs down to each factor noted above can be helpful.
- If a team of care providers looks at that list and doesn't know how the person is doing on them, the first step is to learn more about how the person sees his or her life.
- Support wellness to ensure that you are not only meeting the person's immediate needs, but also the things that will increase the quality of life.

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Are these included in your support plans?

- Are wellness factors taken into account in what is important “for” the person?
- We also know that in order to meet the important for/immediate needs of a person, the individual has to recognize that an important to is also being met. There has to be in internal motivation/emotional hook or they won’t participate or the participation will be short lived – only until the external reward is no longer rewarding
- Who is providing access to wellness factors, when, and how often?
- Is access to wellness factors limited to specific opportunities, or can the person engage in wellness factors when they wish?
- Are the uses of wellness factors recorded and documented?
- Behavior Support Plans often ignore these types of considerations. Promoting wellness can be a critical behavior support strategy.

For more information about wellness

<http://www.inwardboundventures.com/>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/wellness-initiative/wellness-resources>

<https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

<http://rtc.umn.edu/rtc/index.php?topID=9&subID=62&content=products>

For more information about available supports in MN

<https://mn.gov/disability-mn/>

<http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c36.pdf>

<https://www.minnesotahelp.info/>

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