

Self Care - Signs and Signals

We all have a broad sense of what's happening for us – how stressed we are, or how good we feel - but the more you are able to know what is happening and what you are looking for, the better you can target your self care efforts, and monitor your progress.

Here's a few ways to get a handle on what's going on.

Your general level of stress

You can take into account the amount, the intensity, and the duration, and the level the pressure impacts on you. Remember, stress is your individual response to the pressures you experience.

See **Appendix 1** for a quick stress assessment

How things are going in specific areas of your life

This looks at rating, or sometimes describing, how things are going in different areas of your life, for example, family, health, work. I often ask people to also rate the importance of that area to you, for example you might rate how you are going in your social connections as poor, but it may not be the most important thing to you.

Try the stress and wellbeing wheel at **Appendix 2** – 10 is good , or there is a more detailed example which asks specific questions that can be found here (use Explorer if Chrome doesn't work).

https://inspire.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8vN4sBPKXhoVpv7?Q_JFE=qdg

Pressures and Supports

Appendix 3 is a simple way to map what are the pressures and what are the things that support your wellbeing. Think of both external things as well as personal qualities

Your level of wellbeing

Martin Seligman and others have looked at the key areas that positively input in to your wellbeing. When rating wellbeing in each area you can answer it generally, or you can rate how often you have had a felt positive experience in that area over a period of two weeks. For example, you might rate your relationships with family as high, but be low on experiencing this over the last two weeks which gives an indication of how actively you are receiving nourishment from that area. Try the quiz at **Appendix 4**

Signs and signals

What is specifically happening and what is it indicating. The more you can identify the signals of stress and wellbeing the earlier you can respond to them. What are the signs you are starting to get stressed? What indicates significant stress vs danger signs? What signs and signals would other people notice?

You can also identify the **characteristics of stress and wellbeing**. Some examples are; How caught up in a situation are you? How much flexibility do you have? How constricted do you feel? How able are you in mobilizing your resources or taking action? Knowing the characteristics of stress and wellbeing gives a real time indication of where things are at, and helps look at both immediate and longer term responses.

Appendix 5 gives you some characteristics of stress and wellbeing

You can also identify where you are in the stress process. Are you heading up, down, holding, bottomed out, unsure? Is your current state fragile or strong? Are you in a place that you can take much action or not?

Your ability to take action

As good as your awareness of the specific signals is the vital ingredient required is your ability to respond. Ultimately we need to notice, listen, and act.

We get caught up in our life and doing what we are doing, and it can be difficult to stop, take a breath, and really look at our situation. It's not so important when things are going well, but when you are getting stressed, or noticing the signs of your self care dropping, it becomes more and more advantageous.

So stop, and look at how able you see what's happening from a place where changes can be made. Have a think about where exactly is your self care on your priority list, the degree of action you need to take, and how able you are to take action. You can then respond accordingly

Scroll down for some ways to assess your self care needs.

Appendix 1 - Quick Stress Assessment

Out of 5, with 1 being low and 5 being extremely high what was your level of stress

over the last 2 weeks 1 2 3 4 5

over the last 6 months 1 2 3 4 5

What symptoms of stress do you experience, what happens when you get stressed?

What proportion of your total stress load would you attribute to work? _____%

What are the sources of stress in your work? Think of the daily things and the more major things. (after you've finished you might like to check out the list in appendix 1)

What are the sources of stress outside of work?

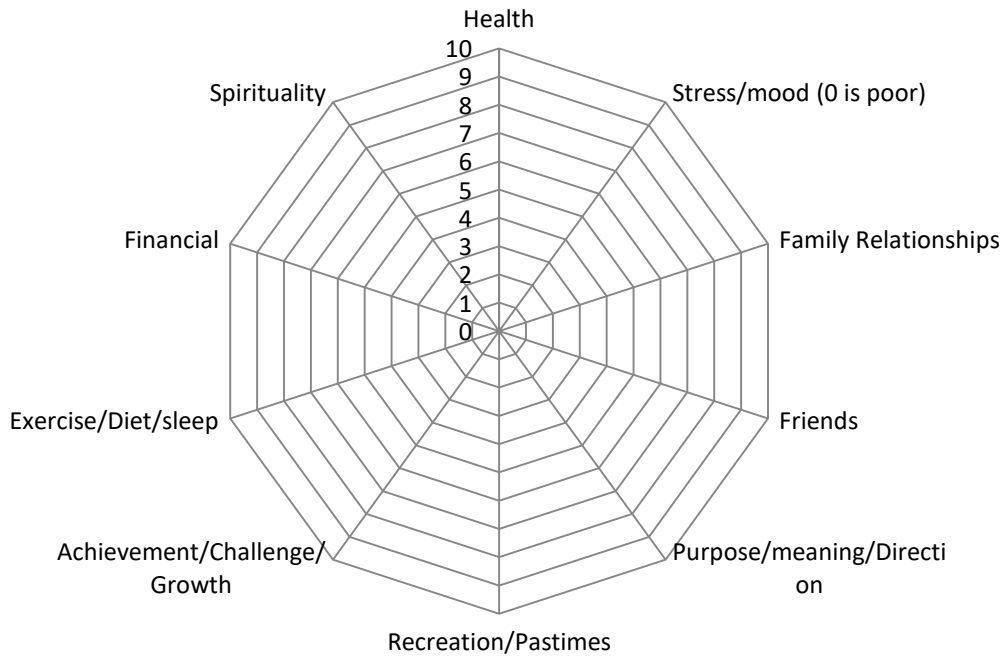
How effectively are you responding to your stress? (1 is low, 5 being high)

1 2 3 4 5

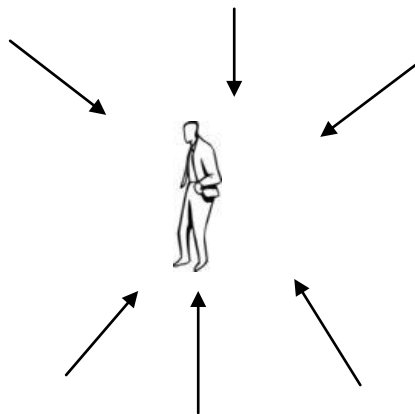
Comment.....

What positive changes would you like to see as a result of reducing your stress?

Appendix 2 Wellbeing Wheel



Appendix 3 – Pressures and Supports



Appendix 4 – Wellbeing Assessment

Wellbeing is often portrayed as being the same as happiness. Whilst wellbeing includes happiness, it is just one of the possible elements.

Martin Seligman describes 5 types of wellbeing, and I've added having a positive connection with yourself. Rate your wellbeing for each of them, with 1 being low. For the first row do a general rating and then on the second row rate according to your felt experience of each one over the last 2 weeks. This gives an indication of how nourishing that area is in your life.

- Happiness
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
- Connection with others
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
- Connection with yourself
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
- Achievement
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
- Meaning and purpose
1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5
- Flow/Absorbed in things
(getting lost in things you enjoy) 1 2 3 4 5
1 2 3 4 5

What is wellbeing to you?

Describe a time you have felt a high degree of wellbeing, a peak experience.

Appendix 5 – Characteristics of stress and wellbeing

Here are 10 common characteristics of stress when it becomes problematic. Do you recognize any of them? I've put the equivalent wellbeing characteristics in green.

Knowing what is happening helps us pick it up much earlier and gives us clues as to what we need, so we can set our sights on, and begin to move more towards, wellbeing. They aren't in any particular order. Which are the key ones for you?

1. **Constriction/Tightening/Rigidity** – we tighten up and hold on. Inflexible, fragile - we have reduced emotional, mental, behavioural flexibility so it is more difficult to change or move between things. Our awareness and ability to respond narrows and our world constricts, usually around the things that are stressing us.

Wellbeing - Openness /spaciousness/self aware/perspective

2. **Wound up/can't switch off/worry and anxiety.** We are going at a fast pace inside and can't find the off button. We are trying to find some sort of completion or answer or resolution by going over things, but can't stop, even when it's not useful to continue.

Wellbeing - Relaxed/at ease/settled/balance

3. **Caught up in the stress** – if there's no space between us and the stress it's hard to get a clear perspective on what's going on, and it's difficult to act. Here you're unable to access your inner resources.

Wellbeing - Freedom/flexibility/flow/capacity

4. **Thrown/fragmented/shattered/all over the place** - We are not centred or together. We lose our inner stability. A predominant feeling of inner disturbance.

Centred/together/connected to home base

5. **Worn out, tired, 'thin', depleted** - our batteries are low or empty. No fuel in the tank. Our get up and go has got up and gone. We feel tired and sluggish, as if we are wading through mud.

Wellbeing - Vitality/energy/your well is full

6. **Heaviness and pressure** – it feels like a burden or weight which dampens down your experience. You carry it around with you, or experience it as a something that's surrounding you. It's hard to take positive action

Wellbeing - Lightness/ease/ freedom/can act and move forward when we need to

7. **Scrambled brain/Blocked/Fog** – when you go to act you can't. You can't think straight, your brain turns to mush, or you just go blank. You can't focus or concentrate.

Wellbeing - Clear/focussed/progress

8. **Separate** – there's barriers between us and the world. Sometimes it's like you're in your own world. You find it hard to really be part of things. Lost is compassion and empathy or understanding from another's view. You become judgemental of others and of ourselves.

Wellbeing - Oneness/connectedness/compassion for self and others

9. **We lose our happiness, joy, humour and wellbeing** – say no more. ☹️

Wellbeing - Happiness/joy/light heartedness/well in yourself

10. **Reduced tolerance and stability** – You can't stay steady. Your emotions are all over the place and anger, sadness, crankiness are just under the surface. You feel fragile, find it hard to hold it together. You can't tolerate noise, changes, stimulation, or ambiguity. Small things set you off.

Wellbeing - Acceptance/steadiness/solidness/tolerance

Using these characteristics of problematic stress, how would you describe a recent experience of stress? Which are the most common for you? Are there any other descriptors you would use?