

In last week's column, I shared the 8 dimensions of wellness the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) promotes as part of their Wellness Initiative. The wellness wheel model they use offers a visual picture of these dimensions - showing how they overlap and connect with each other as part of a person's holistic wellness.

What does it mean to "be well?" It means something unique to each individual person. However, in general it means that you are experiencing good emotional, social, physical, spiritual, intellectual, occupational, environmental, and financial health.

Let's take a closer look at what it means to experience wellness in relation to emotional and social health.

Emotional health involves how you cope with life. It also involves how you establish, foster, and maintain satisfying relationships. The American Psychological Association explains that emotional health can lead to success in work, relationships, and health. In years past, people believed that if you are successful, you are happier. New research indicates that it is the opposite – happy people are successful.

When you have emotional wellness, you demonstrate these characteristics:

- You are able to express your emotions openly and honestly with another person.
- You can say "no" to someone without feeling guilty.
- You feel good about who you are.
- You are content most of the time.
- You feel you are supported by those around you and have a group with whom you can rely on.
- You are able to let go and relax.

A key part of emotional wellness is resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back or regain strength after something bad has happened. Resilient people find ways to, as the saying goes, turn lemons into lemonade. They can thrive under stress and come out of a situation with increased stamina and emotional strength.

If you find yourself overly stressed, try some of these techniques to help you find more balance:

- 1) Make sure your self-talk is positive. Recognizing the things that you are good at and letting go of the things you struggle with can help you see the glass as "half full."
- 2) Prioritize. You simply may have too much going on. Take a moment to list the top 5 things that you need to tackle to reduce your stress. Determine the order in which you need to prioritize these things and take care of them one at a time.
- 3) Recognize your limits. Remember, one of the characteristics of a person who maintains emotional wellness is that they can say "no" without feeling guilty. We

all have to make decisions on a daily basis that can aide or hinder our emotional wellness. As situations arise that require a decision, consider the impact the alternative outcomes can have on your emotional well-being.

- 4) Know that a healthy lifestyle contributes to emotional wellness. Eat a healthy balanced diet, exercise regularly, find time to relax every day, and get a good night's sleep. All of these actions, when consistently followed, lend themselves to emotional wellness.

Social wellness is equally important to your overall wellbeing. This dimension of wellness is demonstrated in how you interact with the people around you. It includes effective communication, your ability to respect others as well as yourself, handling conflict constructively, and your ability to develop meaningful relationships.

People who have social wellness demonstrate these characteristics:

- You have assertive skills that are neither too passive nor aggressive.
- You know what it is like to have fun.
- You have a strong support group in your family and friends.
- You engage with others in your community.
- You can balance your social and personal time effectively.
- You have the ability to establish and maintain boundaries in your relationships.

Three key areas to work on if you struggle with social wellness are communication, relationships and stress management.

Keeping the lines of communication open with those around you helps you to be more transparent and builds trust in relationships. You not only need to be able to convey your thoughts and feelings in appropriate and constructive ways, you also need to listen carefully to what those around you are saying to you. When you communicate effectively, it is easier for you to maintain balance with your social and personal time and more clearly establish boundaries in your relationships.

Our personal relationships can (and often do-) dramatically impact our social health. When we are able to demonstrate mutual respect and communicate openly and honestly with those we care about, we are promoting our own social health. Being in healthy and positive relationships is mutually beneficial and helps create a "snowball effect" to our overall wellness.

Finally, stress impacts all areas of wellness and social wellness is no exception. Although stress is a normal part of life, it requires careful and attentive management to ensure it doesn't take over. The ability to have fun is a characteristic of social wellness AND it is a great way to reduce stress. Spend time with family and friends doing activities that you find enjoyable and fun. Keeping a handle on how much stress we have in our lives is a great first step in making sure we maintain overall wellness.

Our wellness is not limited to health and physical activity. By understanding all 8 dimensions of wellness, we can make choices that will help us reach wellness goals in all areas of our life. Be intentional about choosing things that support all areas of your wellness.

Next week, I will wrap up this 3-part series by looking at environmental, financial, and occupational wellness and how the 8 dimensions of wellness impact our lives every day. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!