

PULSE

No one prescription for pursuing mental and emotional well-being

What comes to mind when I mention the word wellness?

One definition (dictionary.com) explains it as “the quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, especially as a result of deliberate effort.”

By and large, in our society, the word “wellness” conjures images of our physical state, but not always our mental state. A friend of mine once observed that children are required to have an annual physical, but there is no yearly check of their mental well-being.

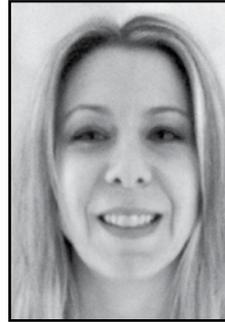
More and more research supports the mind-body connection, yet there continues to be a stigma attached to tending to one’s mind on a regular basis. It is more common to attend to emotional well-being when life becomes troublesome.

Wellness sometimes is thought of as a luxury. In our busy lives, it can

seem challenging to slow down enough to cultivate a sense of well-being. When that seems to be the case, I think of the instructions we are given during the safety talk on the airplane. We are told that if the cabin loses pressure and we are traveling with children, we should put our own mask on before we help our children with theirs.

In other words, if we are gasping for air, what good are we? Regardless of whether you have children, it follows that when we are not taking care of ourselves, it influences the nature of the interactions we have with others in our lives. This in turn affects the types of interactions that come back around to us.

It’s important to note that wellness is a very subjective experience to



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each individual. What may create a sense of being well for one person may not for another. Wellness can even look different at various points in life.

For instance, when my children were very young, part of my sense of wellness was connected to how often I got to wash my hair (for the record, it was not often). These days I am more mindful of wanting to

bring something creative back into my life. Ultimately, the importance of being healthy in mind and body is universal; otherwise, an imbalance can occur.

So what about the “deliberate effort” piece in the definition of wellness? It is true that if you want something different, you have to do something different.

I could go on to suggest various strategies for enhancing wellness, advising you to increase your level of physical activity or stop checking social media before going to bed, etc. However, there are enough opportunities on a daily basis to be inundated with messages about what we are not doing well.

Instead, I invite you to consider what you are already doing to promote wellness. What brings you complete and absolute joy in your mind and body? It doesn’t have to be anything complicated or costly, just something that nourishes your well-being. Take stock and perhaps do it more often. We all have the ability to do something that encourages wellness on our behalf. Grant yourself the permission to do so.

— *Alisa Messana of Hinsdale is a licensed clinical social worker and mental health consultant/trainer.*

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