



Wellbeing Tool Kit

Daily Lifestyle Choices to Create Optimal Conditions for Wellbeing

Choose from each category what you can begin to weave into your daily life.
Handouts and Resources are available in the “Resources” section at www.dharmaspirit.com.
Use the “Self Care Daily Reflection” handout as a checklist to support your self care.

Self Care

1. **Eat for Wellbeing.** Enjoy three nourishing meals per day and stay well hydrated with pure water. Review the guidance in the “*Conscious Nutrition*” handout. To balance your brain chemistry, eat good-mood foods such as protein, healthy fat, vegetables, and fruits. Reduce or eliminate the “Big 5” that agitate the nervous system: nicotine, alcohol, caffeine, sugar, and chemical additives and preservatives. (Read *Mood Cure* and *Diet Cure*, by Julia Ross, and *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, by Daniel G. Amen M.D.)
2. **Breathe Deeply.** Receive abundant oxygen with regular full gentle breaths. Practice simple breathing exercises throughout the day. (See “*Breathing Practices*” handout.)
3. **Sleep Deeply.** Review the guidance in the “*Deep Sleep*” handout. Keep a dream journal to inquire into a deeper part of your self. Discuss what your dreams are communicating to you with a trusted other.
4. **Sunlight and Fresh Air.** Daily sunshine and fresh air shifts emotions, increases mental clarity, and regulates the sleep-wake cycle.
5. **Aerobic Exercise.** Move in ways you enjoy – walk, bike, hike, swim, jog, water exercise, dance, etc. Aside from helping with healthy body weight, exercise increases mobility, protects against bone loss, reduces stress, increases the body’s natural serotonin and endorphins, and helps prevent heart disease, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels. Gradually work up to 20+ minutes 3-4 times per week.
6. **Explore Nature.** Contact with nature can improve health, decrease mental fatigue, and enhance mood and concentration. Stroll through a park or garden, hike on trails, or spend time in the wilderness or at the ocean, and receive the beauty through all your senses. Open to natural discoveries and adventure.
7. **Deep Relaxation.** Practice a guided relaxation 20+ minutes each day to cultivate a more balanced and relaxed baseline for your nervous system. Lie down, breathe, let go... (See “*Support Through CDs*” handout. Read *Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times*, by Judith Hanson Lasater)
8. **Mind-Body Practice.** Take a class, watch a video, or develop a home practice of yoga, restorative yoga, Qigong, Tai Chi, aikido, or other practice to create balance and harmony of your body and mind, and experience integration, wholeness, and connection to something greater than your self. These practices stabilize emotions, clear the mind, deepen concentration, develop the ability to be still and alert, and provide a path toward full aliveness, equanimity, and inner peace. (See “*Yoga & Qigong Resources*”)
9. **Pleasure and Fun.** Do something pleasurable and fun every day. Make a list of what you have enjoyed in the past or imagined would be fun, and regularly choose something from your list to do for yourself. What fun things did you like or imagine as a child? Overcome guilt and resistance to feeling good. Practice an inner smile throughout the day. (See “*77 Ideas for Self Nurturing*” handout.)
10. **Laughter and Tears.** Allow the natural expression of your heart. Laughter heightens alertness, releases endorphins – the body's natural pain killer, reduces stress, increases pain tolerance, and brings the autonomic nervous system into balance. Laughter lowers blood pressure, and increases the flow of blood and oxygen through the arteries reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Laughter strengthens the immune system, stabilizes blood sugar levels, improves respiratory functioning, and even burns calories. Practice laughing each day independent of mood or life circumstances. See the playfulness and absurdity of life, listen to or read

amusing things that make you chuckle, watch humorous programs or movies. (Read *How We Choose to Be Happy: The 9 Choices of Extremely Happy People*, by Rick Foster and Greg Hicks. See the August 2009 “Laughter” issue of *Ode Magazine* for ideas.) Let yourself cry in a safe supportive way. Allow the natural expression of sadness, loss, and grief, and meet your feelings with kindness. Reach out for comfort and support with a trusted other on a daily basis when you are sad.

11. **Physical Contact.** Research has shown that a 20-second hug, as well as pleasant physical touch like holding hands or eye-to-eye communication, releases Oxytocin, the brain chemical that signals the pre-frontal cortex (the part of the brain that regulates our emotions and body sensations) to send neurochemicals to calm the fear and stress response, and return to balance and wellbeing. If you are in a relationship, practice relaxing into being held in silent stillness. Open to intimacy, giving and receiving conscious touch. Enjoy a bodywork session such as massage, cranio-sacral therapy, Rosen work, or Trager Psychophysical Integration. Hug yourself, or give yourself “butterfly hugs”- place hands on opposite shoulders and alternately tap. Cuddle with a pet or visit the Humane Society for cuddle time.
12. **Authentic/Creative Self Expression.** Explore your inherent authenticity and creativity, giving regular expression to what uniquely comes through you – write, draw, sing, dance, craft, speak, vision... in simple ordinary every-day ways. Invite a sense of possibility, discovery, and surprise at the deeper imaginings and creative impulses that are revealed when given space to surface. Allow a rich inner intimacy that inspires an ever emerging sense of self, an inner beacon that guides your unique life journey. Notice the myriad ways others creatively express themselves, and explore local visual, music, cultural, and expressive arts activities. (Read “Morning Pages” in *The Artist's Way Workbook*, by Julia Cameron)
13. **Inspiration.** Notice what you surround yourself with and put into your mind. Be enriched with life-long learning. Read or view something new, inspiring, heart-warming, healing, or stabilizing each day. See your world with fresh eyes. Set intentions and hold aspirations based on your core values. What your mind thinks depends on what you feed it. (See “Core Values” handout.)
14. **Manageable Goals.** Explore your desires and dreams, and the possibility that comes from pursuing simple ideas. Set intention, and small attainable goals, then take manageable steps to build experience, skill, and competence. Embrace set-backs, orient to new possibilities, and open to the satisfaction that comes from exploring new choices. Remember, the path is the goal. (Read *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams*, by Deepak Chopra.)
15. **Health Care.** Your body is your lifetime home and the gateway to your soul. Care well for the attention and physical therapy your body needs for whatever physical or health challenges you manage. Meet physical limitation and pain with the greatest kindness and compassion. See your health care professional for a regular physical to determine if there are any underlying factors affecting feelings of dis-ease.
16. **Self Care Daily Review.** At the end of each day, reflect on and appreciate the ways you nurtured your well being. Caring for yourself, cares for the world as well. Do a daily review of your self care and support, and set new intentions for each day. (See “Self Care Daily Reflection” handout for a checklist.)

Interpersonal Care

1. **Safe-Secure Space with Another.** Create the physical and emotional conditions for safety and authentic connection with another. Honor your need for secure attachment. Co-create the relational capacity for presence, trust, honesty, acceptance, and compassionate witnessing. Transform through the cycles of harmony → disharmony → repair. (See “Creating a Safe-Secure Space – with a Partner” handout.)
2. **Authentic Connection.** Have regular authentic connection with a trusted other – a supportive friend, family member, therapist, or counselor – who is safe, attuned, resonant, and responsive to your feelings and needs. While staying connected through phone, email, and text is supportive, have in-person eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart connection with trusted others on a regular basis each week, or daily if possible. To support authenticity, practice the Four-Fold Way: (1) Show up and be present. (2) Pay attention to what has heart and meaning. (3) Speak your truth without blame or judgment. (4) Don’t be attached to outcome, be open to outcome. Practice the Four-Fold Way of listening as well. (Angeles Arrien Ph.D.) (See the “Creating a Safe-Secure Space – With a Partner”, “Intentions, Fears & Boundaries”, and “Conscious Communication Guidelines” handouts. Read *Hold Me Tight*, by Sue Johnson Ph.D.)

3. **Wise Boundaries.** Choose the internal and external boundaries that support safety, connection, and wellbeing – not too rigid and not too loose – with friends, family, co-workers, strangers, as well as an intimate partner. A boundary is the place where you and another meet in a way that truly works for both. Practice healthy boundaries even when others don't. Regularly ask yourself, "What do I need/want right now? What does the other person need/want right now?" then choose your boundary wisely. Identify stressors in your life – people and circumstances – then minimize contact with them, and increase connections that feel safe and good to you. (See "Healthy Boundaries" handout.)
4. **Pleasure and Fun with Another.** Do things that are pleasurable with a trusted other. Make a list of what you have enjoyed or imagined would be fun to do with another, and regularly choose something from your list to do with someone or with a group. (See "77 Ideas for Self Nurturing")
5. **Community.** Coming out of isolation and separation is healing. Be a part of a supportive "community" where you feel safe, connected, seen, understood, accepted for who you are, and a sense of belonging. Consider a recovery group, therapy group, medical support group, recreational, spiritual, or other form of community. Find ways to sustain the physical and social environments that sustain you.

Relating with Thoughts, Feelings, and Sensations

1. **Safe-Secure Space with Yourself.** Visualize the physical and emotional conditions for safely entering your inner world of thoughts, feelings, and sensations. Choose a safe and trusted guide to help you explore and gain new perspective on your felt experience. (See "Creating a Safe-Secure Space – for Your Self" handout.)
2. **Self Awareness Practice:** Regularly close your eyes and bring your awareness inward. Notice your breathing, physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Meet what arises in your inner experience with a sense of compassionate witnessing and kindness. Take three slow deep breaths and gently open your eyes.
3. **Stay Within Your "Window of Tolerance."** Cultivate the awareness and skills that enable you to experience strong emotions, sensations, or stressful life circumstances without flooding with emotion or shutting down and going numb. Bring regular awareness to your emotional and physical felt experience, and make choices to stay in a stable range where feelings and reactions are tolerable, you can think and feel simultaneously, and your reactions adapt to fit the situation. Optimize moment-to-moment wellbeing:
 - If you are hyper-aroused (overwhelm, anxiety, panic, impulsivity, hypervigilance, defensiveness, feeling unsafe, reactive, angry, racing thoughts) shift your state through such things as shaking out and stretching your body, gentle breathing, relaxation, quieting music, and soothing your nervous system through engaging the senses (soothing sight, sound, scent, taste, touch and movement).
 - If you are hypo-aroused (numb, passive, no feelings, shut down, "not there", ashamed, can't say no) shift your state through such things as stretching, breathing, walking, sunlight and fresh air, listening to lively music, and activating your nervous system through engaging the senses (enlivening sight, sound, scent, taste, touch, and movement) (*Trauma & the Body*, Pat Ogden, and Janina Fisher, Ph.D.)
4. **Check Your SUDS Level.** Regularly assess your level of wellbeing using the Subjective Units of Distress (SUDS) scale of 0-10 where 0 is wellbeing and 10 is as much distress you can imagine. Be proactive to increase self care, healthy boundaries, and wise choices to come back into your Window of Tolerance when your SUDS level begins to increase, and reach out for the support of a trusted other.
5. **TICES Journal.** When you experience strong emotions (SUDS level beginning to increase) notice the Trigger, Images/memories, Cognitions, Emotions, and Body Sensations (TICES) and write them in a journal. Give daily written expression of your inner experience and your sense of concern and importance in your life. Challenge self-limiting thoughts and core beliefs, and explore new options for relating with your experience. (See "Self Inquiry Journal" and "Cognitive Distortions" handouts.)
6. **Support Recovery from Addictive Behavior.** Addictive behavior is an attempt for self care that masks your true needs and feelings, and disrupts wellbeing. Recognize your Abstinence/Relapse Cycle: sobriety/abstinence → increase in emotional symptoms → increase in addictive impulses or pre-relapse behavior → substance or behavioral relapse → increased acting out or unsafe behavior → sobriety/abstinence. (Janina Fisher Ph.D.) Notice choices you can make to identify your deeper feelings and needs and respond to them with care. Recovery does not happen in isolation. Consider the care of a supportive group like AA, NA, CODA, ACA, Alanon, or the LifeRing Program. (See "Self Awareness, Healing & Recovery Resources" for

support groups and treatment programs. Read *Facing Codependence: What It Is, Where It Comes from, How It Sabotages Our Lives*, by Pia Mellody.)

7. **Process Triggering or Traumatic Emotions, Body Sensations, and Memories.** The traces of big and small trauma – early attachment, relational, and acute – that remain in your mind, body, and nervous system can be released, freeing a new relationship with your self and your life. Explore dis-ease and distress, listening in to the deeper needs and feelings of all parts of your self. Work with your therapist to acknowledge, release, transform, integrate, and make meaning of your past. In order to release the imprints, consider such mind-body approaches as Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, EMDR, EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique – “emotional acupuncture” tapping), Hakomi, or Somatic Experiencing. (Join a “*Transformation Group: Awareness & Skills to Transform Trauma*”. Read *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma: The Innate Capacity to Transform Overwhelming Experiences*, by Peter Levine)
8. **Grieve.** Grieve deeply and well your current and past losses with kindness and compassion. Notice the waves of emotion that are expressed through the five stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining (“if only”), Depression/sadness, Acceptance (Elizabeth Kubler-Ross). Reach out for the support of trusted others daily when you are sad, and consider the care of a Grief Support Group. (See “*Death and Dying Resources*” and “*Support through CDs*” resources)
9. **Inquire into Anger.** Anger is powerful energy that indicates something is not as you want or need it, or something is important to you. Give the anger safe expression by moving the energy through your body, taking action, and giving it expression through writing or speaking – all in ways that do not cause harm to you, others, or property. Rather than being used as a weapon against others or turned inward against yourself, embrace the anger and inquire into its roots with kindness as you would an angry, frightened child. Anger can be divisive, or it can be in service of deeper connection with your self and others. Reach out to a trusted other daily when you are angry. (See “*Anger Management Resources*”)

Practices for Well Being

1. **Mindful Awareness.** Refer to the “*Mindfulness Meditation*” handout for basic instruction. Cultivate a pure awareness of your moment-to-moment internal and external experience throughout the day. Develop a neutral witnessing of body sensations, emotions, and thoughts, in a stable, non-judging, spacious awareness. Learn to approach your here-and-now experience with Curiosity, Openness, Acceptance, and Love (COAL). (Daniel Siegel M.D.) Practice a self-observing state, increased mind-body awareness, and a sense of well-being independent of life circumstances. (Read *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn.)
2. **Inherent Esteem.** Hold onto yourself, even when others don’t. Unlike conditional esteem (what you do, who you know, what you have), inherent esteem can’t be added to or taken away – it is your inherent value as a human being. Stay connected with your self and your deepest values, even when others don’t. Practice holding inherent esteem for others, and for relationships. (See “*Personal Bill of Rights*”; “*Core Values*” handouts.)
3. **Kindness.** Practice meeting emotional and physical pain, and challenging life circumstances, with acceptance, kindness, forgiveness, compassion, and spacious awareness. Recognize the impermanence of all things as life unfolds. Rather than judgment, practice patience and gentleness with your self, as you would a tiny child. Choose simple ways to be of service to others – the meeting of hearts where you offer something to the world and the world offers something to you.
4. **Tonglen.** Transform painful emotions or life circumstances. Refer to the “*Tonglen*” handout for instructions for this simple and powerful tool. When we feel isolated and alone, we may struggle to get away from that uneasy uncomfortable feeling. Through this practice, we can contact the suffering and joy of human experience, and our shared humanity and kinship with each other. (Read *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*, by Pema Chödrön)

*May all that suffer find peace
 May pain give rise to kindness and equanimity
 May our intimate contact with suffering bring forth
 A world of compassion and joy.
 May you enjoy the ease of wellbeing...*

Self Care Daily Reflection

Based on the *Wellbeing Tool Kit Handout*

At the end of each day, reflect on and appreciate the ways you cared for and supported your well being. Use this sheet either as a checklist with notes, or as a wellbeing scale from 0-10 where 0 is wellbeing and 10 is distress.

Close your eyes and bring your awareness inward. Notice your breathing, physical sensations, emotions, and thoughts. Meet what arises in your inner experience with a sense of compassionate witnessing and kindness. Take three slow deep breaths, gently open your eyes, and reflect on your day...

Self Care

- _____ Mindful Nutrition & water:
- _____ Breathing Practice:
- _____ Deep Sleep – last night's sleep:
- _____ Tonight's intention:
- _____ Sunlight, fresh air, & nature:
- _____ Aerobic Exercise:
- _____ Enjoy nature:
- _____ Deep relaxation:
- _____ Mind-Body practice:
- _____ Pleasure & fun:
- _____ Laughter and tears:
- _____ Physical contact:
- _____ Inspiration:
- _____ Health care:
- _____ Other:

Self Inquiry & Expression

- _____ Self Inquiry Journal
- _____ Dream Journal
- _____ Authentic/creative self expression:
- _____ Inspiration:
- _____ Manageable Goals:
- _____ Other:

Interpersonal Care

- _____ Safe-Secure Space with Another
- _____ Authentic connection with:
 - Friend:
 - Family member:
 - Therapist/counselor:
 - Support Group Meeting:
- _____ Community:
- _____ Wise boundaries:
- _____ Pleasure & fun with another:
- _____ Other:

Relating with Thoughts & Feelings

- _____ Safe Secure Space with Yourself
- _____ Self Awareness Practice:
- _____ Window of Tolerance today:
- _____ SUDS level today:
- _____ TICES Journal
- _____ Support for recovery:
- _____ Support with a therapist/counselor:
- _____ Grieving:
- _____ Anger inquiry:
- _____ Outreach to trusted other:
- _____ Other:

Practices

- _____ Mindfulness Meditation:
- _____ Inherent Esteem
- _____ Kindness to self/other
- _____ Tonglen
- _____ Other: