

## THE FIVE DOMAINS OF WELLBEING

Regardless of our diverse histories, backgrounds, cultures and perspective, all people share a set of universal needs, what the Full Frame Initiative calls the **Five Domains of Wellbeing**. We all need **social connectedness** to people and communities; the **safety** of being able to be our authentic selves without significant harm; the **stability** we get from having some predictability in our lives and having the sense that one small obstacle won't send our whole lives into chaos; **mastery**, the skills and empowerment to exert control and choice in life; and **meaningful access to relevant resources**, the ability to meet our basic needs without shame, danger or hardship.



We are all driven to meet our needs in each of these **Five Domains of Wellbeing**, but how we experience each domain is deeply personal. A returning veteran may feel physically vulnerable and unsafe sitting in traffic; a sexual assault survivor may feel unsafe sitting with her back to a door. One person may feel a sense of belonging and connectedness at a pick-up basketball game, while another person feels awkward and isolated. Our personal history, gender, age, race, community, family, values and context all impact how we experience each domain by influencing what feels important and what we are (or are not) willing to give up.

Increasing wellbeing doesn't happen by making progress in each single domain independent of the others; the domains are interconnected. Sometimes things build on

each other: becoming connected to neighbors might mean an older person has someone checking on him on a regular basis, or that his walk is shoveled when it snows (safety). Other times, moving forward in one domain means giving up something we value in another: a tradeoff. We all ask ourselves, "Is it worth it?" *Is it worth it to take a job that gives me a big raise?* If it means waking up 20 minutes earlier, maybe so. But if it means always missing visiting hours at my mom's nursing home, maybe not.

Sometimes we can find a way to minimize the tradeoff so that what wasn't worth it before now is: convincing the nursing home to let me come by afterhours twice a week, since my visits are so important to my mom. Being able both to decide for ourselves what's "worth it," and to navigate life in ways that move us forward and minimize tradeoffs, creates wellbeing.

### **We all need wellbeing. We don't all have it.**

People, families and communities living at the intersection of poverty, violence and trauma face constant threats to their wellbeing. Services may help them address a challenge in one domain—gaining access to housing for example—but too often, these same services aren't designed to take into consideration the tradeoffs of this progress. For example, if turning down available housing

automatically disqualifies a person who is homeless from other housing options, the system has decided housing is “worth it,” no matter what. But what if taking that housing means a mother has to move across the state, away from her job and the grandmother who provides care to her child who has a disability? That housing placement probably won’t last, even if she takes it.

**Breaking cycles of poverty, violence and trauma demands that we first and foremost recognize that what creates wellbeing is the same for everyone: *build assets in and minimize tradeoffs between the Five Domains of Wellbeing.***

## WHAT THE FIVE DOMAINS OF WELLBEING MEAN FOR INDIVIDUALS

### Social Connectedness

The degree to which a person has and perceives a sufficient number and diversity of relationships that allow her or him to give and receive information, emotional support, and material aid; create a sense of belonging and value; and foster growth.

Related concepts: belonging, social capital, social networks, social support, reduced social isolation and exclusion

### Stability

The degree to which a person can expect her or his situation and status to be fundamentally the same from one day to the next, where there is adequate predictability for a person to concentrate on the here-and-now and on the future, growth and change, and where small obstacles don’t set off big cascades.

Related concepts: resiliency, permanency, certainty

### Safety

The degree to which a person can be her or his authentic self and not be at heightened risk of physical or emotional harm.

Related concepts: security; absence of harm, risk or danger

### Mastery

The degree to which a person feels in control of her or his fate and the decisions she or he makes, and where she or he experiences some correlation between efforts and outcomes.

Related concepts: control, choice, self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-confidence, empowerment, applying knowledge

### Meaningful Access to Relevant Resources

The degree to which a person can meet needs particularly important for her or his situation in ways that are not overly onerous, and are not degrading or dangerous.

Related concepts: having knowledge, meeting “basic” needs, cultural competence (of resources), utilization rates, service integration/defragmentation, reduced barriers, information and referral, navigation

*The Full Frame Initiative’s mission is to change systems so that people and communities experiencing poverty, violence and trauma have the tools, supports and resources they need to thrive.*

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