

Thriving and Flourishing
Together: Advancing Wellbeing
for the Autism Community



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*Vice President of Implementation
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**Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence.
Humor. Gratitude. Fairness. Kindness.**



Who is Proof Positive?

Our Vision

Imagine a world where wellbeing wins.

WE BELIEVE the autism community deserves to flourish.

WE EXPAND access to resources to learn and practice the skills of wellbeing.

WE EMPOWER individuals to enhance wellbeing in their communities.

WE ADVANCE research at the intersection of positive psychology and autism intervention.

OUR MISSION IS TO ...
Spread the Science and Skills of
HAPPINESS



Wellbeing outcomes for the autism community are unacceptably low.

- 38% of employed adults with ASD report being underemployed
- Persons with ASD had a more than a 3-fold higher rate of suicide attempt and suicide
- Many autistic adults report being lonely
- 37% of autistic young adults are disconnected from school/work after high school
- Autistic individuals have higher rates of mental health disorders
- Parents report high levels of stress
- Provider turnover is at an all time high

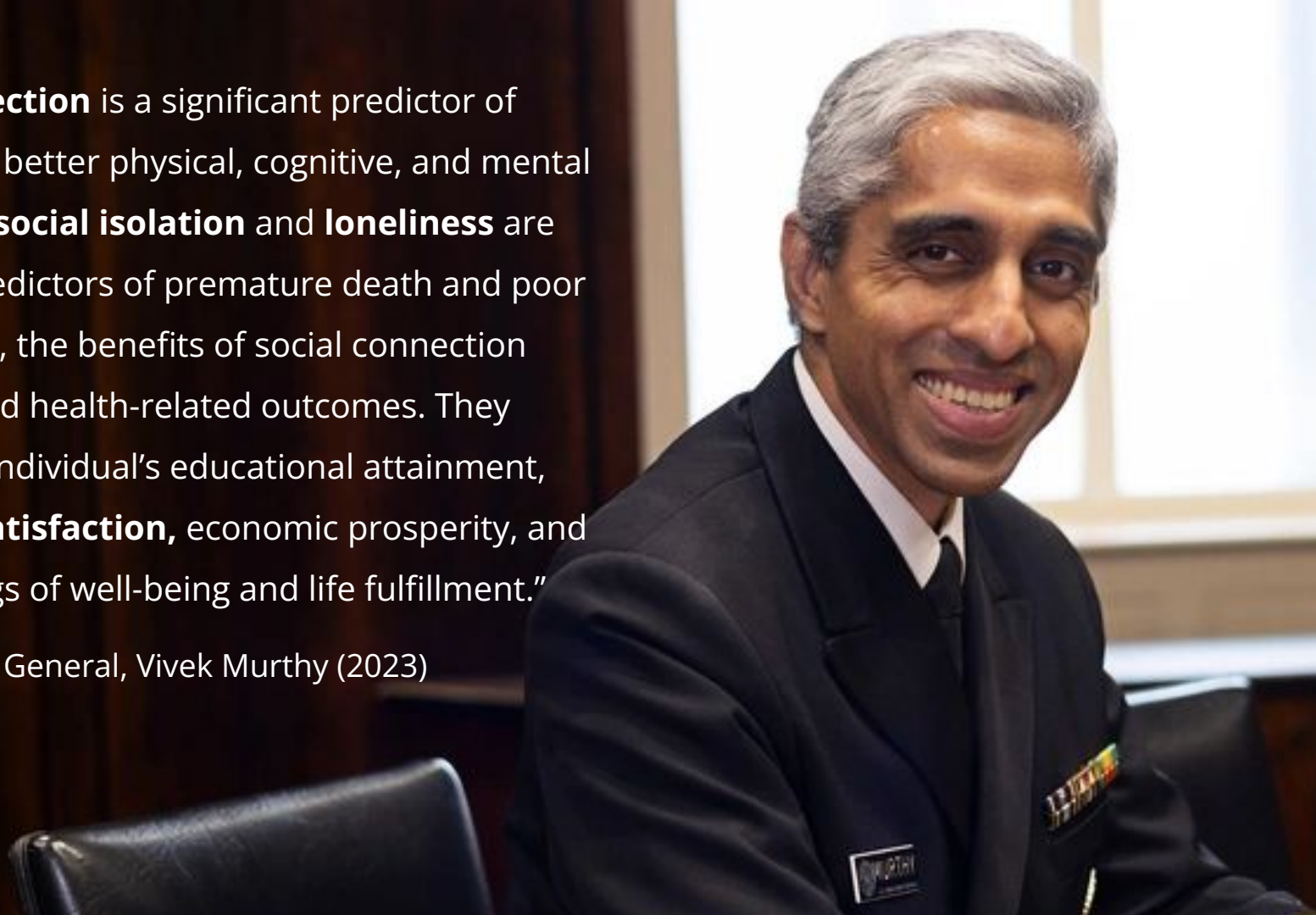


“Currently, around a third of adults and half of young people experience loneliness. Being socially disconnected increases our risk of heart disease, dementia, depression, anxiety, and premature death.”

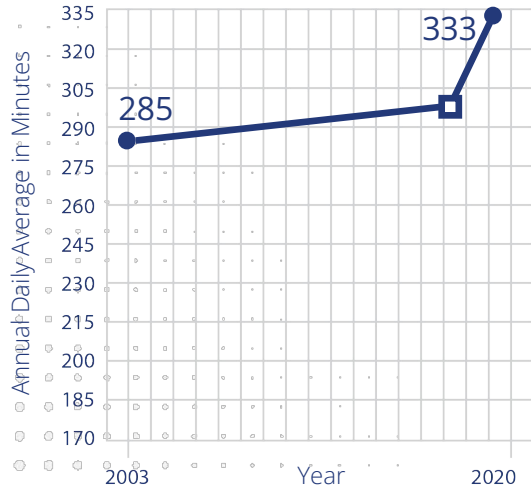
— US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy (2025)

“Social connection is a significant predictor of longevity and better physical, cognitive, and mental health, while **social isolation** and **loneliness** are significant predictors of premature death and poor health. In fact, the benefits of social connection extend beyond health-related outcomes. They influence an individual’s educational attainment, **workplace satisfaction**, economic prosperity, and overall feelings of well-being and life fulfillment.”

— US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy (2023)

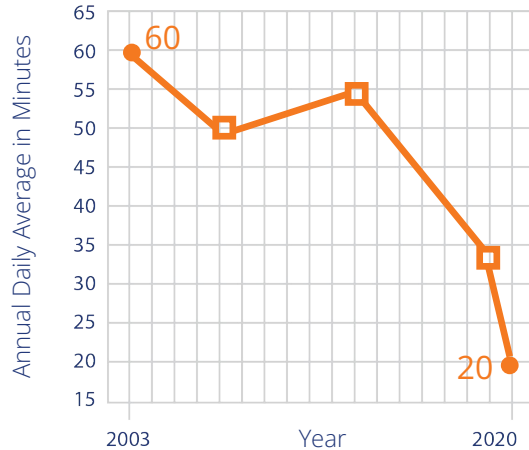


National Trends for Social Connection



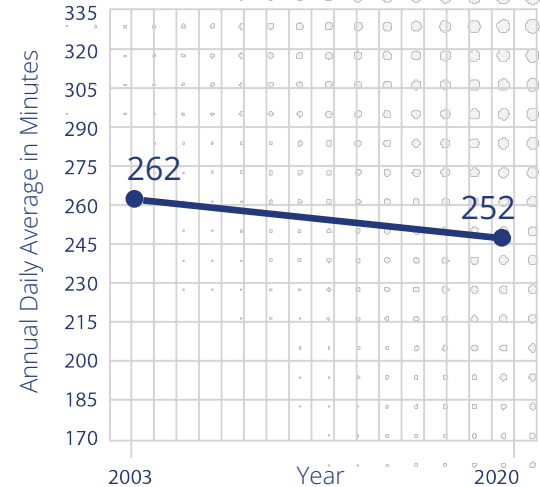
Social Isolation

an increase of
24 hours per month



Social Engagement with Friends

a decrease of
20 hours per month



Household Family Social Engagement

a decrease of
5 hours per month



Happiness Can Be Learned ...

People who Practice the Skills of Happiness Experience ...

- Increased wellbeing
- Longer, healthier lives
- Improved sleep quality
- Stronger relationships
- Increased school and work performance
- Lower levels of depression and anxiety



What is Positive Psychology?

"Positive psychology is the scientific study of human strengths and virtues. The study of what constitutes the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life."

— Dr. Seligman

"Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions."

— Dr. Gable



PERMA+ Theory of Wellbeing



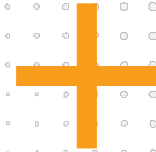
POSITIVE
EMOTIONS

ENGAGEMENT

RELATIONSHIPS

MATTERING

ACCOMPLISHMENT



+HEALTH

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair and bangs, laughing heartily. She is lying back in a blue hammock, her eyes are closed, and her mouth is wide open in a joyful expression. The background is softly blurred, showing green foliage and a bright, sunny outdoor setting.

P

Positive Emotions

Experiencing and striving to feel a variety of positive emotions.

What good are
positive emotions?



The Science of Positive Emotions

The benefits of positive emotions don't stop after a few minutes of good feelings subside. In fact, the biggest benefit that positive emotions provide is an enhanced ability to build skills and develop resources for use later in life.

— Barbara Fredrickson



The Broaden and Build Theory

Open our Minds

- Increase creative thinking
- Expand our visual field
- Promote diversity and inclusion
- Prevent depression and anxiety

Protect our Bodies

- Undoing effect
- Improve cardiac functioning
- Increase healthy sleep
- Boost Immune function



Engagement

Having interests and pursuits that captivate us, resulting in the regular experiences of *flow* and personal growth.





Relationships

Connecting to others
in positive, authentic,
trusting relationships.

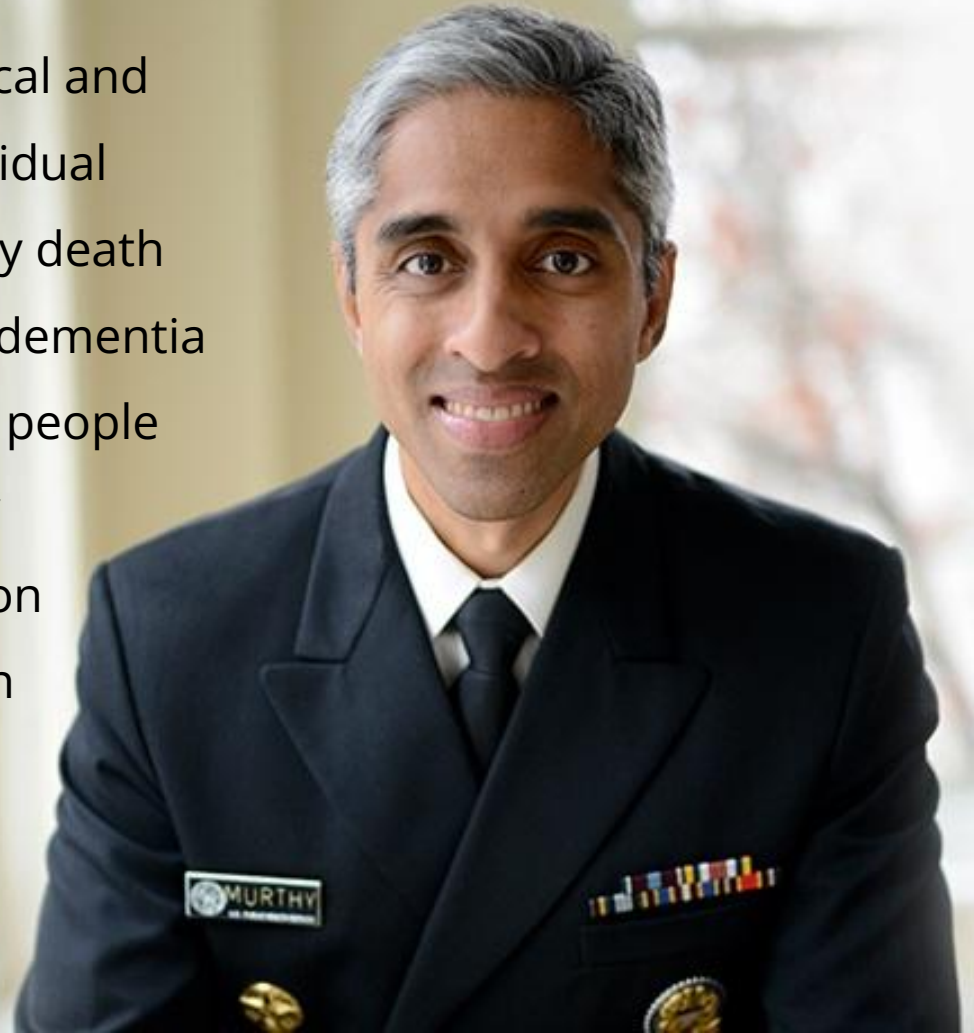


Meaning

Creating purpose,
passion and fulfillment by
connecting and serving
something larger than yourself.

“Purpose can be good for our physical and mental health. A high sense of individual purpose may reduce the risk of early death as well as stroke, lung disease, and dementia for some. Research also shows that people with a strong sense of purpose may experience lower levels of depression and anxiety and greater resilience in the face of stress.”

— US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy (2025)





Accomplishment

Setting and pursuing goals.
Feeling a sense of hope about
what is possible and pride in
reaching new boundaries.

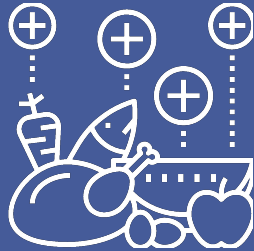




Health

Nutrition, movement, and sleep fuel our bodies and minds to get us ready to pursue each of the other elements of PERMA, enhancing our wellbeing!

The Three Pillars of Health



NUTRITION



SLEEP



MOVEMENT

PERMA+ Theory of Wellbeing



Positive Emotions

Experiencing and striving to feel a variety of positive emotions.



Engagement

Having interests and pursuits that captivate us and leave to regular experiences of flow.



Relationships

Connect with others. Build a stronger environment in which you and others can flourish.



Mattering

Creating purpose, passion, and fulfilment by connecting to and serving something larger than yourself.



Accomplishment

Pursue bigger and better goals. Push yourself to reach new boundaries.



+Health

Engage in the 3 pillars of physical health with intention — sleep, nutrition, and movement.

Can we measure
wellbeing?



Practicing PERMA+

SMART Homes, Meaningful Lives: Incorporating Wellbeing Practices into Independent Living Supports

By Taylor Auker,
Balance Action
and Paige B. Kautz, PhD
Proof Positive

James moved into his own apartment in January of 2024. He liked his independence but didn't have much to do when his support staff spoke with him during their daily video check-in. He was "bored." His day was "stagnant." And, he had nothing to report for wants and needs. James was languishing (Kuyes, 2002), and his support staff wanted him to FLOURISH, but they just didn't know where to start.

So, what does it mean to flourish? The work of Martin Seligman (2001) and colleagues defines flourishing as more than just the absence of suffering and more than just feeling good. It is about experiencing a full, rich, meaningful, and connected life, a "good life." Decades of research tell us that people who practice the skills of positive psychology (e.g., positive goals, using personal strengths, or mindfulness) can increase their wellbeing and move towards flourishing (Boyer et al., 2013).

James is not unlike other autistic adults; many are not flourishing. The number of autistic individuals who are unemployed and underemployed is unacceptable (OBI


et al., 2017), and data indicate high rates of co-occurring conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and/or mood disorders (Oso et al., 2015). Furthermore, autistic individuals report higher levels of loneliness and poorer physical health than the general population (Jackson et al., 2018; Ryderson et al., 2021). In short, the autistic community is not okay.

As a result of these poor outcomes, there has been increased interest in understanding and supporting wellbeing within the au-

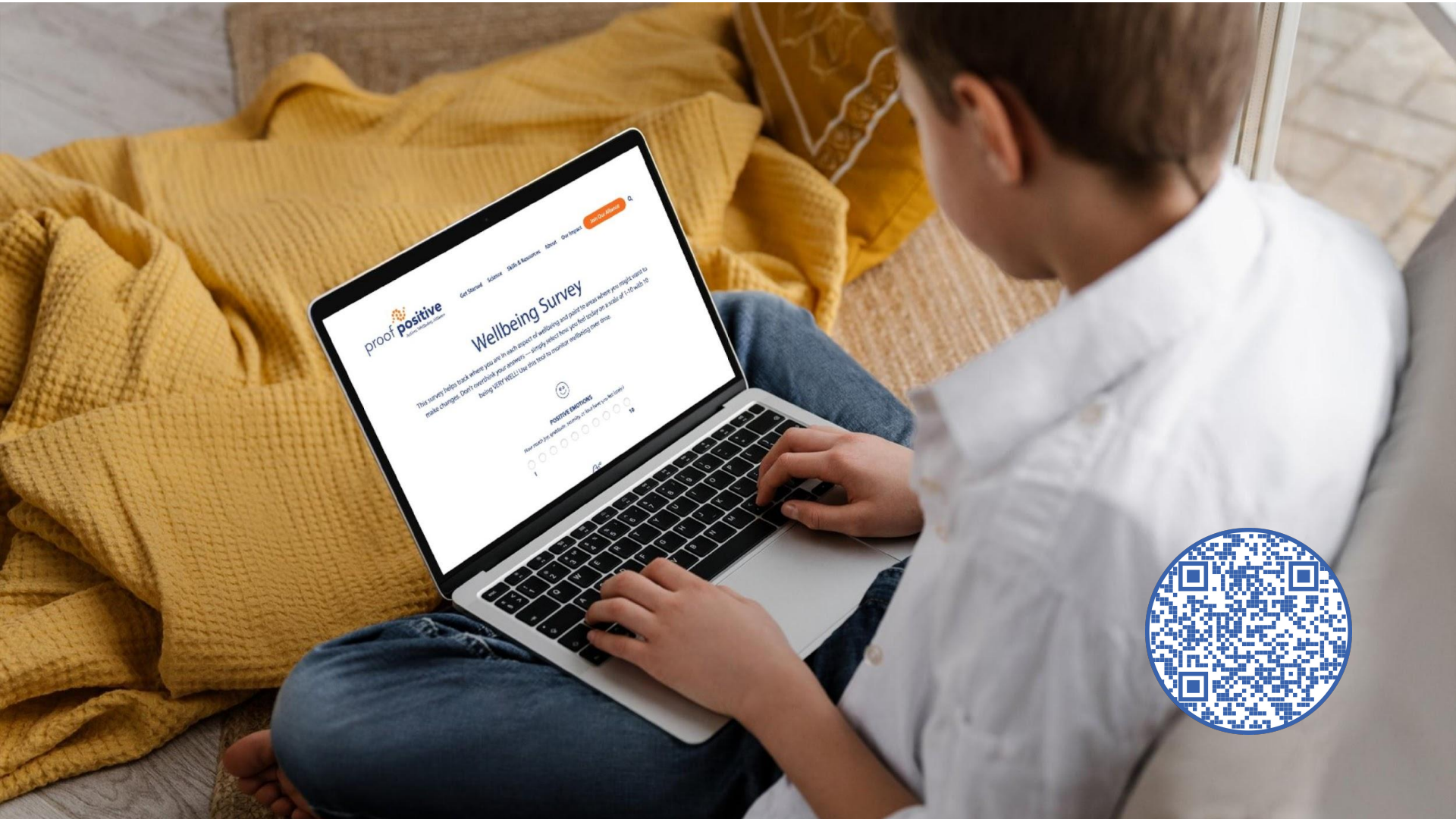
istic community (Taylor et al., 2020). One organization in Iowa is taking Balance Action: providing services for autistic children and adults through their adult services include social community living supports, for enhancing independence. Early Balance Action launched an i program. The SMART Living initiative uses technology to get the highest degree of independence to adults in the supportive living. The program utilizes advanced to offer personalized support locations throughout Iowa's. The remote assistance it provides includes video conferencing support and digital of resources to foster independent self-determination.

Central to the remote support are personalized two-way video communications devices with SMART homes. These allow clients to connect with staff at any time. Individuals can Remote Support Professionals their day and communicate needs. Remote Support Professionals check in with clients receive the necessary assistance.

A virtual check-in between a Remote Support Professional and a client at Balance Action

The image shows a wall display for the PERMA+ program. At the top, there is a red sign that says "Positive Psychology" with two QR codes. Below it, the acronym "PERMA+" is displayed in large, colorful letters (P: red, E: orange, R: yellow, M: green, A: blue, +: purple). Underneath each letter is a small box with a corresponding word: "POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY", "POSITIVE EMOTIONS", "ENGAGEMENT", "MEANING", "RELATIONSHIPS", and "ACCOMPLISHMENT". To the left of the acronym is a mind map with "PERMA+" in the center and six branches leading to "Positive", "Pride", "Love", "Joy", "Aim", and "Strength". To the right, there is a yellow sign that says "Proof Positive" with two QR codes. In the foreground, two people are sitting on the floor, looking at a large yellow flower graphic on the wall.



proof positive
PROOF POSITIVE WELLBEING

Get Started Support Skills & Resources About Our Impact [Log In](#)

Wellbeing Survey

This survey helps track where you are in each aspect of wellbeing and point to areas where you might want to make changes. Don't overthink your answers — simply select how you feel across on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being NOT WELL and 5 being BEST. Use this tool to monitor wellbeing over time.



POSITIVE EMOTIONS

How often do you experience... anxiety or feelings of being overwhelmed?

1 2 3 4 5





The Science and Skills of
HAPPINESS

CHARACTER STRENGTHS



We shine the light on
what is RIGHT with you, your
students, and your colleagues.

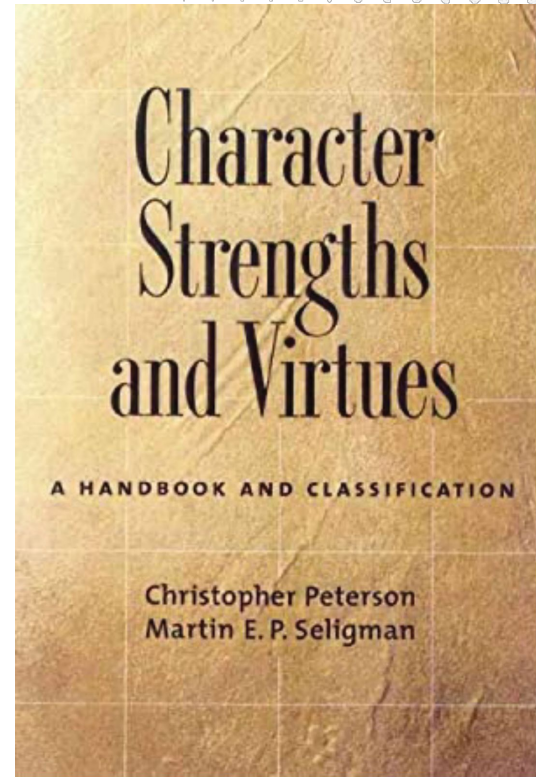


Current Approach

Often assessments,
reports and plans are
heavily deficit based



But what about
identifying what is
RIGHT?



Character Strengths



Appreciation
of Beauty and
Excellence



Bravery



Creativity



Curiosity



Fairness



Forgiveness



Gratitude



Honesty



Hope



Humility



Humor



Judgment



Kindness



Leadership



Love



Love of Learning



Perseverance



Perspective



Prudence



Self-Regulation



Social
Intelligence



Spirituality



Teamwork



Zest

Benefits of Character Strengths

Improve	Improve mental, physical, and social health
Boost	Boost greater happiness and overall wellbeing
Increase	Increase positive affect
Work	Higher work satisfaction and positive association with work
Improve	Improve your relationships
Buffer	Buffer against the onset of mental health challenges
Build	Build psychological resilience

Use Strengths in Novel Ways

*"A meta-analysis was published on the intervention, use a signature strength in a new way (Schutte and Malouff, 2019), which involves subjects identifying one of their highest strengths from their VIA Survey results and then using that signature strength in a new way each day, typically for 1 week. The meta-analysis found that in randomized controlled studies, **this intervention boosted happiness, flourishing and strengths use, and decreased depression.**"*

Relevant Research Findings

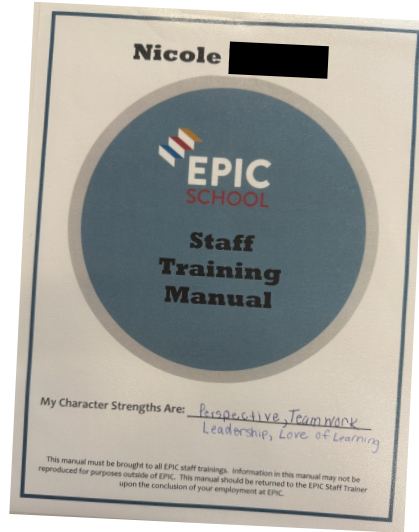
Employees who used four or more of their signature strengths had more positive work experiences and were more likely to consider their work-as-a-calling than those who expressed less than four (Harzer & Ruch, 2012a).

Harzer, C., & Ruch, W. (2012a). When the job is calling: The role of applying one's signature strengths at work. *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

Implement Character Strengths

- Complete the VIA survey
- Review and share strengths at a team meeting
- Add the VIA survey as part of your onboarding for new hires
- Add the VIA into intake and add identified strengths to treatment plans
- Have clients and parents take survey to learn about their strengths and how to leverage

Character Strengths



Love of Learning



Leadership



Teamwork



Perspective

Pointing Out Character Strengths

N Strengths and Limitations

Strengths	Limitations
Excellent problem-solving skills	Verbal Communication
Zest	Delay in responding
Love of Learning	Attending
Appreciation of Beauty	Social interactions with peers (e.g., when playing
Fine Motor	Food selectivity
Prideful of his accomplishments	Generalization and maintenance of skills
Strives to be independent	
Adaptability in using modes of non-verbal communication	
Humor	

STRENGTH SPOTTING



Notice, name and describe (YES! Say it out loud or write it in a note) the strengths you see in yourself and those around you.



Benefits to Strength Spotting

- Increased happiness and overall well-being
- Higher work satisfaction and positive association with work
- Improved relationships
- Less stress and reduced anxiety



Implement Strength Spotting

- Start a team meeting with strength spotting by highlighting a team member, what you observed and what strength was demonstrated
- Add strength spotting to IEP/team meeting for schools
- Add strength spotting to the start of parent training sessions

Strength Spotting in Action



JOLTS OF JOY



Jolts of Joy teaches us to intentionally experience higher levels of wellbeing and bursts of positive emotions across the day.



How to Practice Jolts of Joy

- Reflect on the things that evoke positive emotions for you
 - Place a list of those where you will see it everyday
 - Engage in a minimum of 3 Jolts of Joy per day, build this into your schedule
- Have a poster in a central area for team to see and gain inspiration
- Have a scheduled team Jolt of Joy break
- Consider how you can teach and embed this skill into plans for the clients you serve
 - Part of a self-management program
 - Built into transition time between activities
 - Part of a visual schedule

Jolts of JOY!

Play a Game

Meditate

Take a Walk

Color a Picture

Eat a Snack

Dance

Do Some Yoga

Take a Nap

Do Some Jumping Jacks

Watch Your Favorite Video

Read a Book

COFFEE!
-Julia

Family of
-Bob

My
Nephew Luck
-Bertha

My
Niece
-Tina

Shopping
-Mama

6
Cousin
-John

Thank
you
-Mama

Thank
you
-Mama

Thank
you
-Mama

Summer
in
the
Back
-Mama

Coffee
of
course
-Julia



FOOD
-Mama

I see you but
not you! See
together in the
middle of my heart
-Mama

Chester
-Mama



Thank you
-Mama

What is a
Jolt of Joy?

What is a
Jolt of Joy?

What is a
Jolt of Joy?





CREATE A

Jolts of
Joy Jar!



WHAT WENT WELL



The act of training your brain to mindfully notice, remember and track good things that happen each day.



People Who Practice Gratitude ...

- Have happier, healthier, longer lives
- More optimistic and hopeful
- Fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer
- Exercise more frequently and have better cardiovascular health
- Have stronger relationships and increased social support
- Find greater meaning in their work
- Perform better and achieve at higher levels
- Are less depressed and anxious

Implement What Went Well

- Get a journal, notepad, or app on your device
 - Set a time each day that you will practice What Went Well
 - Write down at least 3 good things from the day
 - Reflect on what made each good thing special
- Start a What Went Well team chat for work
- Start each team meeting with a What Went Well opener
- Add a What Went Well to a team newsletter
- Practice WWW during transitions within a session (transitioning from a break to group work)
- Set a treatment goal around practicing and planning time for WWW

What Went Well in Practice



Tue, Sep 30 at 2:28 PM ☆

Hello Mom,

My day was good. I went to 7-11 I bought a slurpee. For lunch I ate Quesadilla and Applesauce. Something that went really great today was karate.

See you soon

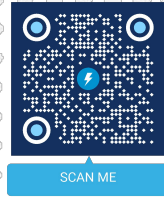


imagine a world where
wellbeing
WINS!

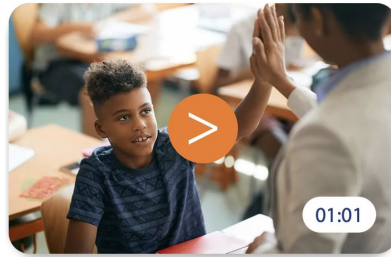

proof **positive**
Austrian Wellbeing Alliance

Visit Our Skill Center

Learn more about the **SKILLS** of happiness!



Character Strengths



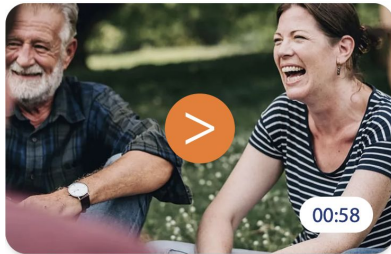
What Went Well



Jolts of Joy



PERMA+ Snapshot



Strength Spotting



Positivity Portfolios

Visit Our
Science Page





Join the Alliance

When you join the Autism Wellbeing Alliance you commit to creating a world where wellbeing wins for all, including autistic individuals.

First Name	Last Name
Email	
Select One	
<input type="submit" value="Submit"/>	



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*VP of Implementation and
Dissemination*

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