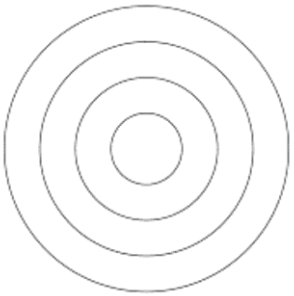
SESSION 4 - SOCIAL WELLBEING

Social wellbeing is all about connection. It's important for humans to have positive relationships with other humans! The benefits include:

Emotional rewards: sense of belonging, source of support and encouragement which leads to increased happiness overall
Material rewards: people we can rely on for money, food, shelter, transportation in times of need and challenge
Health rewards: increased immune systems and lowered rates of premature mortality (you live longer!)

TASK: Circles of connection. This exercise is about reflecting on the positive relationships and connections you already have in your life. On a piece of paper, draw four concentric circles as shown in the picture on the right.



In the smallest circle, write your name.

In the second-smallest circle, write the names of the closest people in your life. These are the people you would call in an emergency. It might be your significant other, your best friends and/or your immediate family.

In the next biggest circle, write the names of the next closest people in your life e.g. other friends, other family members, perhaps some colleagues or friends from extra-curricular hobbies etc.

In the last circle, write the names of any other people you connect with on a daily/weekly basis. This might be bus drivers, colleagues, retail assistants, hair dressers, social media friends, dentists and doctors etc.

Take a moment to reflect on your relationships. What kinds of things do you talk about with the people in each of these levels? Who would you go to in times of crisis? Is there a level with very few people in it? Why do you think that is?

Here are 5 tips for sustaining close, positive relationships:
1. Be Honest. Shallow, superficial relationships will fizzle out. Emotional closeness comes from opening up to your friends and telling them the truth about how you're feeling even if it isn't all sunshine and lollipops. It's also about giving them honest answers to tough questions.

2. Repair ruptures. No one is perfect and we change a lot over time so our friendships have to evolve with us. If you have an argument, apologise for your mistakes and work together to fix the problem. Try to get to the root of the problem- was it a silly miscommunication? Is someone feeling hurt or angry? Talk, talk, talk about it! Hiding it under the rug might work for now...but later, someone's going to trip on it.

3. Make time for them and show your appreciation of the friendship. If you don't water the plant on your windowsill, it's going to wilt and die. Check in with your loved ones regularly even if it's just a quick 'thinking of you!' text. If your friend does or says something that you really appreciate, make sure they know how grateful you are!

4. Check your expectations. Let's use the example of a birthday present. Is your expectation that your friends give you birthday presents? If they don't, will you be mad? Maybe they forgot to buy a present but they were the only person to call you on the day and find out how your birthday had gone? Maybe they buy you presents at other times of the year when they see something they think you'll like? Accept your friends for who they are and if it's really bothering you- go back to Tip 1 and be honest! Let them know that when they don't buy you a birthday present, you feel sad and worried that they don't care about you. It might not have occurred to them!

5. Compassion first. Stay vulnerable. How would you feel if your friend said or did that to you? Being 'right' is not the priority - sustaining a close, positive relationship is. Judging their choices will shut them out: give them your honest opinion and love them whatever outcome they choose - even if it's ignoring your advice!

During this time of heightened anxiety, it's more important than ever for us to feel connected to other humans.

If you're living alone, make sure to have regular virtual meet-ups with friends and family and give each other time to vent/cry/laugh- just like you would in a normal conversation. Have 'dinner' together during a video call or play an online quiz – whatever is as close to normal for you. Obviously we can't talk to friends and family all day but having the radio on in the background while you work (or not!) is really comforting and knowing other people are listening too fosters a wider sense of connection.

If you're worried about how lonely you feel and it's starting to affect your mental health, The Samaritans have a helpline and a lot of useful tips on their website: https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/support-and-information/if-youre-having-difficult-time/if-youre-worried-about-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak/

If you're in lockdown with your family, you've got a beautiful opportunity to work on your family bond. Please note: If you're feeling overwhelmed by the things you're already trying to do and have no mental capacity for this right now - just skip over this section! It's completely understandable - and you're already doing a great job. These are just useful tips for feeling closer and more connected to your families:

- Turn off your phones when you're having 'quality time' e.g. playing a game or eating dinner so everyone knows you are their priority in that moment.
- Introduce family traditions e.g. Every Friday night is pizza night and we all eat together or every Sunday afternoon we go for a nature walk. Traditions contribute to our sense of belonging.
- Involve everybody in decision-making e.g. let the kids choose one dinner that week or choose one activity to do together at the weekend.
- Apply some of the tips for friendship! Be honest, repair ruptures, make time for them, show your appreciation and also try to act with compassion and empathy. Your children are missing their friends, their hobbies and their sense of normality as much as you're missing yours. (Make sure that your children also have opportunities to connect with their other friends and family through calls, emails, texts, letters etc.)

TASK: Boosting the family bond. Take a moment to reflect on your relationships with your immediate family whether it's your parents, your partner, your children or all of the above! What do you love about each of these people? When you think of your relationship with them, what one word comes to mind? (Happiness, trust, fear, barriers, love?) Is there anything you would change about your relationship with them? There's no shame in admitting that a relationship isn't perfect and wanting to make it better. Make a list of 3 things you're going to do this week to improve your

relationship with that person/those people... and then go do them!

Finally, let's think about feeling connected to our wider community. You can belong to lots of different communities at once based on a wide range of factors like your home town, your country, your sexual identity, your religion, your family and friends, your hobbies or even the global community of human beings! Engaging with one (or more) of these communities increases our happiness through increasing our sense of purpose and belonging. It makes us feel like we make a positive impact on the world around us.

Many people think of engaging in the community as having to formally 'volunteer' for something which can feel time-consuming and like something else you have to try and fit into your already busy lives, but it doesn't have to be something as big as making a regular commitment. Striking up a conversation with your neighbour, attending an online neighbourhood watch meeting, posting in a community forum online or donating extra pennies to a local cause are all ways to support and feel connected to a community you care about.

That said, there are so many different types of 'volunteering' out there, there's bound to be one that fits in with your lifestyle- some are only once a month! If you do want to volunteer and have the time and ability to do so then great! Do-It.Org has amazing volunteering opportunities here: https://do-it.org/ including opportunities to help with the current crisis.

TASK: Make a list of 5 things you could do to support a community of your choice and set yourself the goal of doing at least one of them by the end of the year! If you have children, why not look at volunteering opportunities you can do as a family?

Happy Socialising (from home) everybody!

Congratulations on completing Session 4 of Wellbeing Warriors! You are 4/6 of the way through the course.