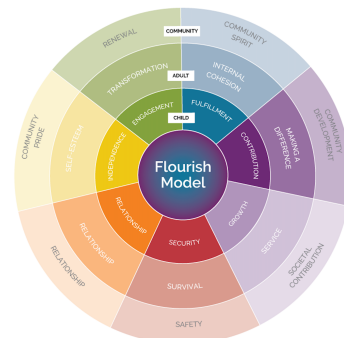


The Ecology of Wellbeing

Introducing the Flourish Project



It's all about relationship

Even before the COVID pandemic, levels of human loneliness, unhappiness and systemic dysfunction had been steadily climbing.

Currently 13% of the world's adult population are estimated to be clinically overweight or obese, along with 38.2 million children under the age of 5 years.ⁱ In 2016 one in six Americans was taking psychiatric medicationsⁱⁱ and in the UK 1 in 6 adults experiences a common mental health problem, with 1 in 5 considering taking their own life at some point.ⁱⁱⁱ

Dr. Vivek Murthy, former Surgeon General of the United States, recently wrote: *"Loneliness and weak social connections are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day"*. And it's not only older people that are lonely – a 2018 survey showed that 16-24 year olds were, for the first time, experiencing loneliness more often and more intensely than any other age group.^{iv}

Adults with integrated levels of health exhibit flourishing in life, with high levels of vitality and wellbeing. Flourishing, then, is when our inner needs are in a state of cohesive balance with the demands of the external world, allowing us to tune in to what most interests and delights us, to hone, express and share our unique skills and capacities and to functionally optimise our lives – physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually. It creates lives of meaning and purpose where our own activities make sense in the context of the whole.

Adults with fragmented levels of health instead exhibit languishing in life with low vitality and wellbeing. Some of their needs may be being met, but often at the expense of others. Human languishing is frequently experienced as emptiness and stagnation, often constituting lives of quiet despair. There is no sense of cohesion and an eroded and compromised sense of meaning and purpose, where our lives seem pointless and of little or no value to the whole.

The dispositions we have inherited, the lived experiences that we have had and the knowledge that we have accumulated have all shaped the values, beliefs and worldviews that we have created to make sense of the world. Of the 113 billion people that are estimated to have ever lived, there is no-one that has ever had exactly the same combination of these things as you, so literally nobody has ever, or can ever, have the same map of the world as you do. **What is amazing is that you are totally unique** - just like everyone else.

Everybody's reality and truth is uniquely their own, which is why diversity is embedded in human existence and there are multiple ways of seeing the same thing. What is true for you may not be true for me, even if we are looking at the same thing.

Introducing the work of the Flourish Project

Human wellbeing, therefore, is a complex and dynamic systemic state that is constantly being influenced by whether or not our physical, relational, emotional and spiritual needs have been, and are being, met through both our physical and social environments and our personal lived experiences. It is about the fact that normal human life is chaotic and messy, that if things are going well one day, they might well be compromised and difficult the next and that is the ability to bounce back from adversity and to see the bigger picture that enables us to fully honour our bodies, minds and spirits.

Physical health is about how well we manage the needs of our bodies; mental health is about how well our minds interpret and process the information and experiences that are constantly shaping who we are; emotional health involves the ability to manage and regulate the feelings that are constantly associated with what we have learned and experienced; and spiritual health is about feeling deeply connected to our selves, each other and the wider world. We think it is only by acknowledging the dynamic interrelatedness of all these aspects that we can begin to promote, measure and evaluate wellbeing in ways that have real value and meaning.

About the Flourish Project

The Flourish Project introduces a new and powerful framework for understanding and mapping human wellbeing that promotes community involvement and whole-systems thinking.

Currently moving from concept development into its pilot phase, it offers parents, teachers, schools, care-homes, businesses, city-leaders and national policymakers the ability to better understand and promote the health and wellbeing of both themselves and their own local communities and populations. In each case, it provides a quick and easy way to map and evaluate existing wellbeing scales and indicators that promotes eco-systemic thinking and the need to 'measure what matters'. Above all, it underpins the call for a more caring, sustainable and compassionate world.

THE FLOURISH MODEL

- Is a unique and easy-to-understand ecological framework for aligning the needs and values of whole people within whole systems
- Emphasises the intimate relationship between Self, Society and the Natural World
- Highlights the crucial importance of early human development for lifelong health and well-being
- Promotes active community participation and engagement
- Changes the narrative around human health and wellness
- Acknowledges the messiness and unpredictability of life as essential to human flourishing
- Reveals the roots of difference and lays a path towards compassion

"We are all about helping people to better understand human flourishing and to find ways of tackling human languishing in the context of the creation of a more caring and sustainable world. Our own success is intimately bound up with 'walking our talk' and the wellbeing and success of the people we work with."

Wendy Ellyatt, 2021

ⁱ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/1-in-6-americans-takes-a-psychiatric-drug/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/statistics>

^{iv} <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/loneliest-age-group-radio-4>