

The Wellness COMPASS

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Notebook FOR Parents

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*Parenting is making a journey with our
children toward wholeheartedness. It's about
learning and growing alongside them.*

—Brené Brown

Welcome!

Life is a journey, and like any journey, it is important to make sure we are intentional about the direction in which we are heading. *The Wellness Compass Notebook for Parents* offers an opportunity for YOU to take a look at your life as a parent and to help you think about how you feel about the direction your family's life is going. Just as many use a compass to help check their bearings and make sure they are headed in the direction they intend, we hope this Notebook will become a trusted compass for you, offering tools and resources to support you as you pause and check your bearings regarding the significant choices you are making in your life, and in the life of your family.

This notebook will help you identify your values and dreams as a parent, and help you better understand and then choose next steps that will help you navigate your way toward greater well-being. This notebook will also help you to see where you may need to pay



more attention to the ways you are tending to the garden that is your life, noticing which areas have been well-tended, and which may be in need of additional attention and care.

There is much to read, reflect upon, and think about in this Notebook, so don't push yourself to hurry through it. Instead you will want to work through it slowly, breaking it down into manageable parts.

You may want to digest it on your own, talk over the concepts with your parenting partner, or with a group of other parents. It may take you several

months or even a year to go through your Notebook and that is good and normal. As time goes on, come back on occasion to each area of wellness and consider making new SMART Steps if and when you feel they are needed. Remember that parenting is a lifelong endeavor and is worthy of our ongoing attention.

It is our hope that the process of working through this Notebook is an important stepping stone for you, helping guide and support you on your way to the healthier, more balanced life that you desire.

There is no greater honor and joy than being a parent. And for us, there is no greater honor than being able to walk a part of the journey of parent wellness with you.

Wishing you well on your journey,

Holly Hughes Stoner, LMFT & Scott Stoner, LMFT

1. Preparing for the Journey

The journey we are about to embark on is one that will take us through the terrain of our lives as parents, especially as it relates to our family's health and well-being. For any journey, we often talk about the importance of having a compass and a good set of maps so that we can more skillfully navigate and enjoy the places we encounter along the way. But first, as we would before taking any meaningful journey, we need to prepare. We hope the resources we've brought together in this chapter will help you to do just that.

The content in this section lays the foundation for everything we talk about throughout the rest of the Notebook, so please take the time to read and reflect on this material.

We think you will find it helpful to revisit as you engage with the other material in the Notebook.

Key Concepts and Resources

Over the next several pages we will introduce key concepts and resources that will serve as a trusty compass and guide throughout the rest of the Notebook. They are foundational to our work with parents and they are relevant for all eight areas of well-being. These include:

1. Parent and Parenting Defined
2. Parenting as a Vocation
3. Stop, Look, Listen, and Proceed
4. True North: We Are Our Children's Guiding Compass
5. Pay Attention to What You Pay Attention To
6. Listening to the Whispers
7. The Wellness Compass: Everything Is Connected
8. Practicing and Forming New Habits
9. Choosing a Centering Practice

1. Parent and Parenting Defined

We feel it is important to begin by sharing what we mean when we refer to parents and parenting. When we refer to parents, we mean *all* parents, regardless of the age of their children: biological parents, step-parents, foster parents, single parents, adoptive parents, and/or parents who are co-parenting with a spouse, ex-spouse, or partner. We also include expectant parents because they are doing the hard work of preparing for the social, emotional, and spiritual journey of parenthood that begins the moment their child joins the family.

You may be familiar with the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” It is important to keep in mind that a parent can also be a person who plays an essential role in the life of a child. These include grandparents, aunt and uncles, other family members, close friends, neighbors, and teachers. We are finding that these people are playing an increasingly bigger role in raising grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and other children through close relationships.

A parent can be any adult who spends significant time loving, protecting, caring for, teaching, and tending to the overall well-being of a child.

As the proverb illustrates, the fundamental reality is that raising a child is a collective responsibility.

2. Parenting as a Vocation

Vocation has to do with knowing both our gifts and our purpose in life. When we are expressing our unique gifts in meaningful work, education, volunteer service, or in our personal roles (partner, parent, friend, sibling, etc.), we will experience wellness.

How we experience our work/education/service lives and how we balance that with our lives at home as a parent can have a major impact on our wellness and wholeness.

Some people may associate vocation with people who live a religious life, such as a clergy person. In truth, we all have a vocation, a calling in life. The word *vocation* comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which is related to the word *vocal*. Focusing on this root meaning of vocation helps us to understand how raising children is related to a calling, and to the idea of having a voice.

Understanding parenting as a vocation is to realize it is a calling as we seek wisdom and insight for the important decisions we make about the welfare of our children. We do our best to let our core values be our compass in all matters related to parenting, allowing our values and beliefs to guide us each and every day.

Another connection with the root meaning of *vocation* is to our voice as parents. Our parental voice is a combination of our unique gifts, personality, and intentions. The question is not whether or not you have a powerful voice as a parent. Trust us, you do. Instead, the question is how mindful and intentional are you about your voice as a parent? Is your voice clear and love-based, or is it angry, distant, or fear-based? Is your voice as a parent consistent, or does it vacillate between being strict and permissive? In this chapter, we invite you to reflect on your voice as a parent and how it aligns with your values and beliefs. For more on parenting voices, see p. 25.

3. Stop • Look • Listen • Proceed

These four steps describe the first important process underlying the content in this Notebook. This is a process that will help you to listen to yourself, to learn and reflect, and then to decide on the path that will lead you toward greater balance and wholeness

in all areas of your life. You have already taken the first step, which is to **stop**. You have paused in your busy life and made the commitment to take time to read this Notebook. We encourage you to honor the decision that brought you here by making time each day to stop and reflect on your desires and next steps as you seek to achieve a greater sense of balance as a parent.

The next step in the process is to **look** closely at an area of wellness through the lens of your life as it is right now. In Step One in each chapter, we learn about an area of wellness, and then we read several topically related reflections that provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications. In Step Two in each chapter, you are invited to **listen** to your deepest self in order to discern the changes you desire and are ready to make. Here you will complete a Self-Assessment for one of the eight areas of wellness. The results represent a present-moment snapshot of how you are currently experiencing your life. Then you have an opportunity to respond to reflection questions that, like the assessment results, will reflect back to you your present state of wellness and balance. In Step Three in each chapter, you **proceed** with specific action (SMART) steps that will lead to a greater sense of wholeness and well-being, for you and for your family.

4. True North: We Are Our Children's Guiding Compass

A compass will always point north except when there are other forces, electrical or magnetic, interfering with the needle. If there are other interfering forces, it will be hard for the needle to be pulled toward north and the compass will become unreliable.

When it comes to our inner compass, we can think of north as our core values and beliefs. Our inner compass will point to north when we are not unduly influenced by forces around us. When external forces and pressures begin to interfere with our inner compass, we can become disoriented and find ourselves heading in a direction other than north, living in ways that do not reflect our values.

Children, by their very nature, are in the process of developing their own inner compass. One of the most important things we can do for our children is to help shape their sense of true north. There is no higher calling, no more important work, than being the primary influence in shaping our children's core values and beliefs, the compass that will guide them for the rest of their lives. This is why it is essential to take time every day to check our bearings to make sure that other forces and other noises are not getting in the way of our ability to make healthy choices, for ourselves, and for our families.

In their own way, our children also serve as a compass for us. Nowhere is the state of our own wellness more apparent than in the way we interact with our children. When we allow ourselves to be pulled in too many directions, when we are not oriented toward our own true north, we might well veer off-course and end up taking our family in a direction we do not want to go. Yet when we are oriented toward our true north, our interactions with our children are more likely to be focused on the things we value and hold to be most important.

5. Pay Attention to What You Pay Attention To

In our practice, we spend a lot of time talking to families that are hurting. Over time we have noticed that one habit in families—and frequently the cause of much of the hurt—is a tendency to focus on the negative about other family members. During a negative cycle, an encouraging word is nowhere to be heard. That is why it is so important to “pay attention to what you pay attention to.”

In the context of families, we become fully known to each other. Our deepest longings and vulnerabilities are revealed in a way that the rest of the world seldom sees. Our endearing qualities, along with our annoying habits, are transparent in our families.

This full knowledge of one another in the context of a family is a given. The choice becomes what we will pay the most attention to, and what we will emphasize most in our interactions with one another. What do we notice most about our children? **It is a more positive experience for all when families focus on intentionally lifting and celebrating the positive in one another.** On the other hand, when families choose to focus instead on each other’s shortcomings, this can often lead to unhappiness and frustration.

What we pay attention to ultimately reflects our own core values. For example, focusing on winning or achieving at all costs reflects that winning and achieving are our most important values. If, on the other hand, we balance this with a focus on character development, working well with others, and fostering values like perseverance, integrity, and honesty, then we are expressing a different set of core values.

It is important to keep in mind that no one is good at everything. We all have strengths and weaknesses. If we pay attention to family members’ shortcomings, that will be the way we see them. Lifting up strengths while helping others to overcome challenges will be considerably more productive than focusing on shortcomings alone. By doing this, we will be making an important contribution to the overall well-being we will experience in our homes.

6. Listening to the Whispers

Our lives are always speaking to us; the question is, are we listening? Often, the first sign that something needs to change in our lives appears as a “whisper.” The source of the whisper could be a partner, child, friend, or ourselves. The whisper is a sign that we may be out of balance and need to do something different.

If these whispers aren’t listened to, they have a way of getting louder, as do we. We may find that we are impatient and argumentative, quick to judge and to distance ourselves from those we care about. We may find ourselves shouting at our children. We want to honor and respond to the whispers because it is easier to address and resolve a problem or issue while it is still just a whisper than when it becomes a fracture that is more difficult to heal.

7. The Wellness Compass: Everything is Connected

The greatest wisdom we have learned from the field of whole-person wellness is that everything is connected. Just like a mobile or kinesthetic art, every dimension of our being is interconnected—movement in one area affects all the others. We are not compartmentalized people. Whatever impacts one area of our lives (positively or negatively) has an impact on the other areas.

Difficulty sleeping may be connected to any, or all, of the following: stress at work, stress in a relationship, a sense that life has lost its meaning, a change in diet, or the recent loss of a loved one. Disruption in one area will likely affect other areas, just as when you shake one element of a mobile and it moves the entire mobile. On the other hand, if the whole mobile is moving and you hold one strand still, that same calmness will radiate out to the rest of the mobile.



The Wellness Compass offers us guidance in eight areas of well-being, divided into four sections. Each of these eight areas of well-being helps to guide and equip us as we commit to being more intentional about the way we live our lives. The purpose of this Compass is to provide a dynamic resource that will assist us in our search for balance and wellness.

Eight Areas of Wellness

The Wellness Compass includes eight areas of whole-person well-being, organized into four sections.

- **Relationships.** The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.
- **Emotions.** The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way.
- **Spirituality.** The development and practice of a strong personal value system and a meaningful purpose in life.
- **Rest and Play.** The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.
- **Care for the Body.** The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being.
- **Resilience.** The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.
- **Organization.** The ability to keep track of and make good use of possessions, money, and time.
- **Work and School.** The ability to balance work, school, education, volunteer work, and other responsibilities at home in order for everyone in the family to thrive at work, school, and in the rest of life.

8. Practicing and Forming New Habits

Many of us find it challenging to form new habits, especially during times of change or increased demand on our time and attention. If this rings true for you, know that you are not alone.

The good news is that any one of us can make immediate progress toward a desired habit once we set our intentions to do so, and ask for support from others.

It is helpful to remember that building a habit is a lot like exercising. If we do it occasionally, we won't see much change in our physical well-being. When we exercise regularly over a period of time, however, we become stronger, faster, more fit, and more energetic. In other words, we experience all the benefits of exercising when we exercise regularly. Small steps taken every day can make a big difference over time.

It is also helpful to keep in mind that because a new habit is not what we are used to, it likely won't come naturally. Initially, this can feel uncomfortable, time-consuming, and perhaps even draining at first. That feeling won't last. The longer we stick to our new habits, the more "comfortable" they will become.

Steps to Take When Forming a New Habit:

- Identify one habit you are trying to form, and then focus on just that one habit.
- Think of one or two concrete steps you could take to move toward your new habit.
- Set deadlines for taking those steps. Few things are more motivating than a deadline. Treat this deadline for yourself as important as one you would honor for someone else.
- Do what you need to do repeatedly. This is one of the best ways to strengthen the muscle of a behavior and to make that behavior a habit.
- Ask someone you trust and respect to help you get started and to support you as you grow this new skill. Research shows that we are much more likely to be successful when we enlist the support of others.



9. Choosing a Centering Practice

An essential step in the process of creating a map for growth and change is choosing and engaging regularly with a mindfulness centering practice. It is widely known and accepted by experts that we make our best choices and decisions when we are centered. For example, when we are not centered, might say something along the lines of: “That wasn’t like me to say or do that” or, “I certainly wasn’t at my best last night.” Statements like these acknowledge that when we don’t act from a place of centeredness, our actions are less likely to be in alignment with our core values.

A mindful centering practice is simply a commitment to do something on a regular basis that connects us with our “best self” and/or our Higher Power. A centering practice calms us and recharges our spirits.

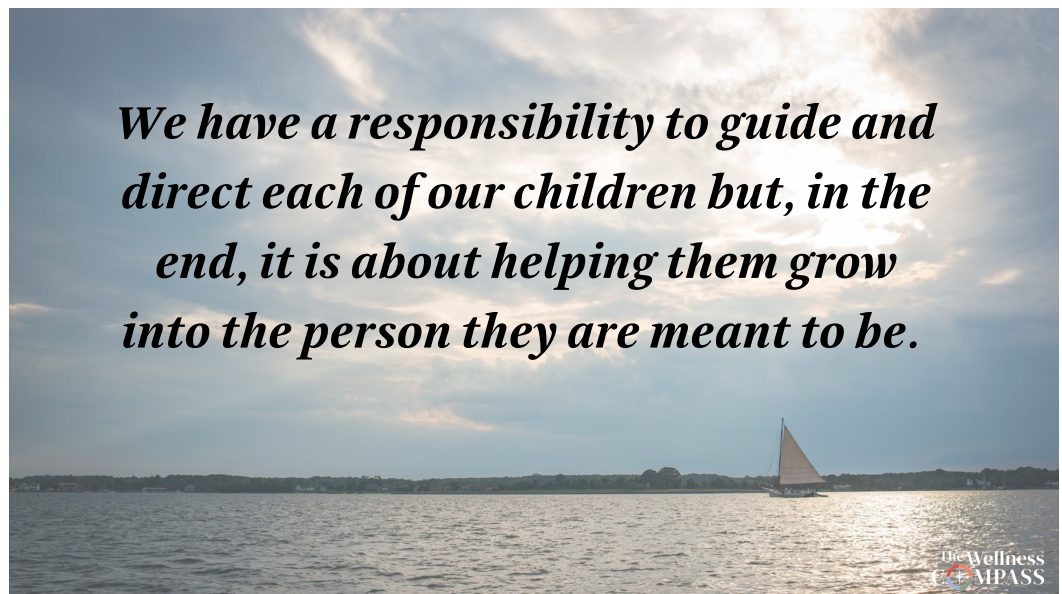
To help you get started, following are some examples of time-tested centering practices we, and others we’ve heard from, have used. This is simply a list to help “prime the pump” in case you are unfamiliar with centering practices. There are many more that you can easily discover on your own. You may already have a practice that works well for you. No matter your starting point, the main thing to remember is the importance of committing to a regular practice

- Keep a gratitude journal and write something you are thankful for each day.
- Start a mindfulness practice.
- Play a musical instrument, sing, or dance, with others or alone.
- Sit quietly in silence or while listening to music you find calming.
- Meditate on a meaningful text or quote by repeating it slowly in time with your breath.
- Spend time in nature. This contemplative practice can help connect us more deeply with creation, and with ourselves. You might try walking more slowly and pausing from time to time to pay attention to things you might not notice if you were walking at your normal pace.
- Read a book that inspires your soul.
- Choose a mantra and speak it silently or out loud throughout the day.
- Practice yoga, tai chi, or other forms of spiritual movement.
- Paint, draw, or participate in any form of artistic expression.
- Write a letter to someone you love (living or someone who has passed).
- Spend time with your dog, cat, or other pet.
- Create a meditation space in your home.
- Participate in a community of faith.

A Final Note

Exploring their surroundings and living authentically is not something only children are doing. As parents and guardians we are also exploring who we are in this important role. We are figuring out what our own unique way of parenting is, and what approaches best suit the unique needs of our children.

We hope this chapter has provided several valuable key concepts, ideas, and practical suggestions you can take with you into the rest of the Notebook and, more importantly, into your life. Please return to it anytime you need to refresh your perspective, or to refer to these trusted tools and resources for the journey. You also may want to consider gathering a few parents for a conversation about what you are reading and thinking as you move through the materials. This could be a great way to both offer and receive support as you navigate this amazing journey we call parenting.



2. Tools for the Journey: What's in the Notebook

In this chapter we'll take an in-depth look at how we have organized this Notebook. This is important to cover before getting started so that no matter which order in which you choose to move through these materials, you will be confident that you know how to navigate each section in every chapter. Our intention is that the materials are easy to read, to reflect with, and to return to as needed anytime you need to check your bearings, for you and for your family.

Just as all areas of our lives are interconnected, so is the content in this resource. These materials have been carefully designed to support you every step of the way toward the growth and change you seek as a parent. It has been our experience that parents are eager to dive into a particular area of wellness, so we have designed the Notebook so that you can either proceed chapter by chapter in the order presented, or you can head straight to the chapter on the area of wellness that interests you most. Because we are usually at different places in different areas of well-being, key evaluation resources have been repeated in each chapter so that you can see and appreciate that where you are in one particular area of wellness is not likely the same as you are in another area. For example, you may be feeling strong and stable in the area of organization, but notice that you aren't handling stressful situations and events very well. Please feel free to take what you need when you need it.

NOTE: For a deeper dive into some of these resources, we have included an appendix in the back of the book on pp. 159–169 where you can learn more.

Okay, let's get started!

Notebook Overview and Content Outline of Each Chapter

The Notebook for Parents has been organized around eight dimensions of wellness as they relate to our journey as parents: Relationships, Emotions, Spirituality, Rest and Play, Care for the Body, Resilience, Organization, and Work and School. Chapters 3–10 invite us to explore each of these dimensions of wellness and how they are interconnected, and how we are doing in each area in our lives. We will learn and practice being more intentional about how we live our lives as a parent, and how we can best serve as a compass for our children and for our families.

Each chapter will focus on one of the eight areas of well-being mentioned above from the Wellness Compass. Within each chapter you will find a three-step process to help guide you through the material: Step One: Learning; Step Two: Listening to Yourself; and Step Three: Living It. Following is an overview of the content outline you'll find in each chapter.

Step One: Learning

In the first section of each chapter we introduce and explore one of the eight areas of wellness, and then share several reflections on topics related to that area of wellness. We include both information and insights from our own experience, as well as those of others, that we have found valuable and helpful.

Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In the second section of each chapter we invite you to listen to the whispers—those from within, and/or from friends, family, and others—that are letting you know what may need more of your attention. Here you will take the **Parent Wellness Self-Assessment** for one of the eight areas of wellness. The Self-Assessment is followed by an opportunity to **Map Your Current Reality** using three resource models designed to help you better understand where you are in the process of growth and change in each area of well-being. NOTE: We go into more depth with each of these models on pp. 163–169.

1. Stages of Change

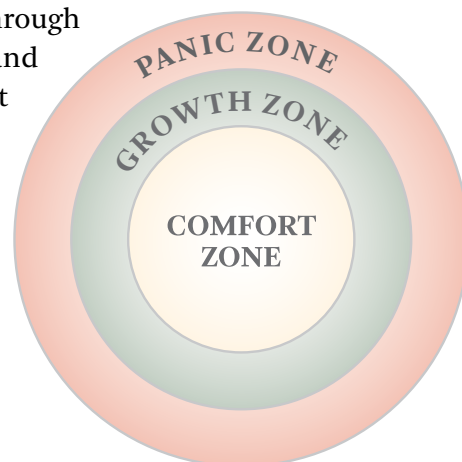


—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

Here we learn that all change is a dynamic process that follows predictable stages. It is important to note that we can be in any of the five stages when thinking about a change, even bouncing backward and forward over time. This is how change often works. It is also important to remember that we likely will be at different stages in the different areas of wellness. The Stages of Change model helps us to better understand and navigate the changes we are considering making. *(Learn more about each Stage of Change on p. 163.)*

2. The Zones

Here we invite you to view change and growth through three zones: the comfort zone, growth zone, and panic zone. It is important to keep in mind that neither the comfort zone nor the panic zone are sustainable or helpful if we are truly seeking to grow and change. While requiring more attention and effort, the growth zone is where we will find optimal conditions for improving our well-being. *(Learn more about each of the Zones on p. 164.)*



3. The “J” Curve

It is helpful to remember that when making a change, even one we are excited about, things will get more difficult before getting better. This model illustrates how we can overcome that tendency to want to return to the way things were when we feel challenged, and trust that things will stabilize and improve with time and commitment to the process. *(Learn more about the “J” Curve on p. 165.)*



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

The Self-Assessments are followed by **Reflection Questions**. These questions offer an opportunity for you to explore each of the areas of well-being, and then to reflect on your relationship to and experiences in this particular area of wellness.

Step Three: Living It

After learning and reflecting on a particular area of well-being, and based on the results of your Wellness Self-Assessment, you will begin to map your next steps in the third section of each chapter. Here you will have an opportunity to fill out the **Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change** page, and complete a **SMART Step Worksheet** to help you clarify and decide what next steps you are ready to take in each area of well-being.

- The **Mapping Your Journey** section provides prompts and space for you to describe where you are, where you feel ready to make changes, and what might provide assistance, support, and inspiration in this area of your life.
- The **SMART Step Worksheet** provides a place for you to take an overarching goal or desire and break it down into doable actions using the SMART-Step process (more on this on p. 167). This worksheet will help you clarify and determine what next step you are ready to take toward the change and growth you seek.

In order to make meaningful change, it is important to not skip any of the steps in the SMART-Step process. To help you, we’ve included a SMART-Step worksheet in each chapter where you can identify an overarching goal (something you really want and are ready to work toward), and then engage the SMART-Step process by filling out each of the steps.

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, “out of sight, out of mind,” once you’ve identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

Once you’ve committed to a SMART Step, it is time to take action, trusting that small, concrete steps taken consistently and intentionally will add up to a journey filled with meaningful change and growth. Every time you successfully complete a SMART goal on your journey toward what matters most, it is essential to share and celebrate with those whom we trust at every milestone along the way.

3. Relationships



Love isn't a state of perfect caring. It is an active noun like struggle. To love someone is to strive to accept that person exactly the way [they are], right here and now.

—Fred Rogers, *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*

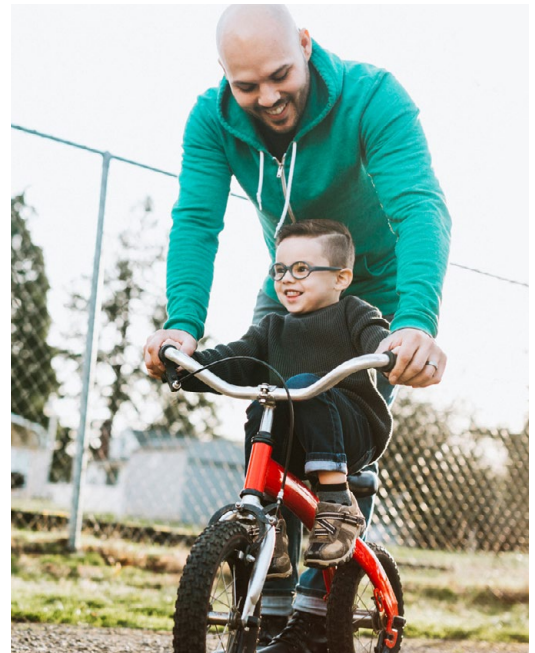
Step One: Learning

Few things affect the quality of our lives more than the quality of our relationships, especially within our families. Being intentional about how we build, sustain, and participate in them is one of the most important investments we can make in everyone's happiness and well-being. How we interact with those in our family, as well as the other people in our lives, and the quality of those interactions, determines to a large extent the satisfaction we experience in our lives.

It is not uncommon for parents to struggle with the relational patterns they have with their children and with other family members. They can feel defeated and powerless to affect any change in themselves or others. **The good news is that any relationship can be strengthened with commitment, practice, and patience.**

Everyone knows the benefits we gain from working proactively on our physical wellness. When we exercise and eat well, we have greater strength, flexibility, and a greater overall sense of well-being. The same is also true when we work proactively on our relationships. Research shows that those who have healthy relationships live longer, healthier lives, so it is important to pay attention to this part of our lives, for ourselves and for our children.

In this chapter we invite you to learn, reflect, and practice new habits as you focus your attention on the heart of parenting and family life: your relationships. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications, following are five reflections related to relationships within the family that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.



1. Standing in Love

What does it mean to stand in love? Most importantly it means that we realize that healthy relationships require conscious and intentional effort to remain strong and vital. Feelings ebb and flow in all relationships, so it is essential to remember that love is not just a feeling, instead love is an ongoing decision. When an exhausted parent gets up for the third night in a row to care for a sick child, that act of love is as much a decision as it is a feeling. Love is not just a matter of the heart, but also an act of the will. To stand in love as a parent means that we continually work to remember how important the relationships are in our families, and then to act intentionally in ways that will grow and strengthen those relationships, no matter how we are feeling in any given moment or circumstance.

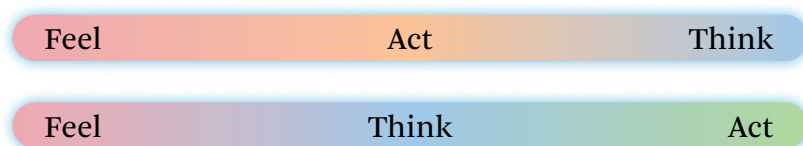
Standing in love means that we ground the relationships with our children in the core values of trust, integrity, honesty, commitment, generosity, and kindness. We commit to act out of these core values at all times, not just when we feel like it.

When our goal is to create loving relationships and to “stand in love,” we are choosing to be intentional about how we relate with our children and others in our home.

2. Helpful Skills for Building Healthy Relationships

“**Feel ... then Think ... then Act**” describes what we strive to do as we become more aware that our words and actions as parents make the relationships better or worse within a family, and from the beginning set the emotional tone. It is wise to consider our words carefully before we speak or act. As any overtired parent who has “lost it” with their child well knows, we all have times when we speak without thinking. This is a version of “Feel ... then Act ... then Think” and describes someone who does or says something without thinking, and the results can be hurtful. This is something we will want to avoid as much as possible.

Learning to talk things through instead of acting out feelings of hurt, anger, or frustration also helps build and strengthen healthy relationships within the family.



The example above of speaking harshly to our children when we are feeling stressed or overwhelmed is a situation all parents have experienced at some point. A more helpful option would be to take a little time to recenter and then apologize to our child for our part in the upset. Then we can begin again by calmly expressing our feelings and encouraging our children to share their feelings as well. When people in a family feel listened to and respected, it creates a more positive, supportive, and loving home for everyone.

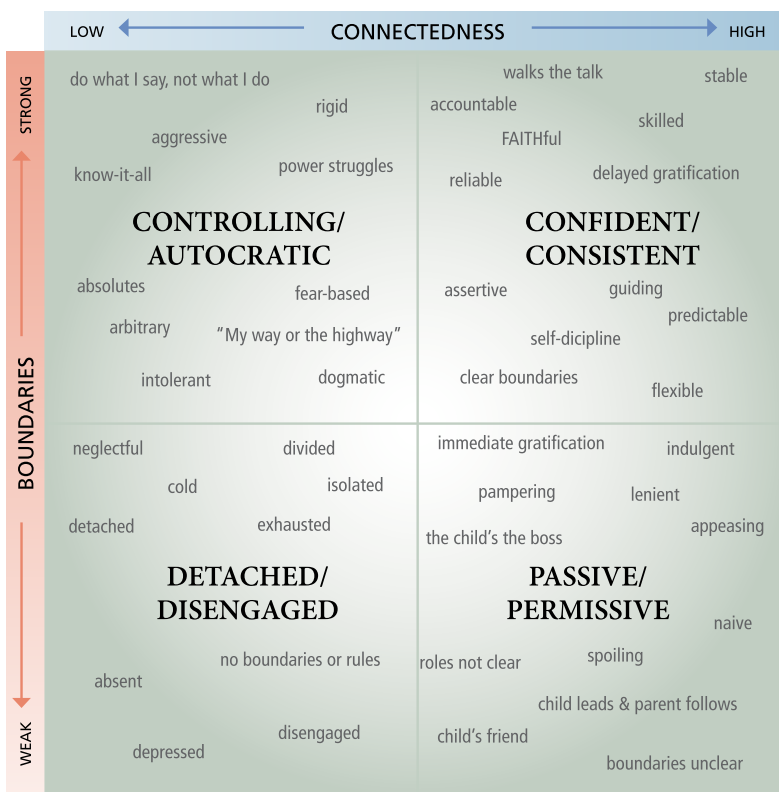
There are really only two choices we have: to talk things out or to act them out. If we don't talk it out, if we try to ignore or hide whatever we are feeling, chances are we are going to act out our feelings one way or another.

The same is true for our children. And it's important to remember, especially with children, that all behavior is a form of communication, however clumsy or frustrating it may seem.

3. Four Parenting Voices

The parenting voice we develop over time generally falls into one of four types: confident/consistent, controlling/autocratic, passive/permissive, and detached/disengaged. It is important to keep in mind that the voice our parents most frequently used influences

Four Parenting Voices



the voice we tend to use with our own children. It is also important to note that, depending on our circumstances, we often have a different parenting voices in different areas of wellness. For example, if our parenting voice in Care for the Body is usually confident and consistent, but then we experience an illness, we may find our voice changes to more detached or disengaged.

Each of these voice patterns (depicted in the graphic) falls into a different quadrant as it relates to two continuums: connectedness and boundaries. The horizontal axis shows the connectedness continuum, which describes the strength and stability of the emotional bond between parent and child. The vertical axis shows the boundaries continuum, which relates to the expectations and standards that parents communicate to their children.

Research shows that children raised with a confident/consistent voice are more likely to demonstrate strong social skills and high self-confidence. They feel emotionally cared for and know what is expected. These children will usually integrate their parent's confident and consistent manner into their own lives, showing those traits themselves.

Children raised in a controlling/autocratic home may demonstrate high achievement, but show lower self-confidence than might be expected, and they don't necessarily get along well with others. These children may be successful in terms of achievement, but often at the cost of feeling driven to be perfect. Not surprisingly, children raised with this type of parenting are likely to grow up to be controlling and autocratic themselves, and may struggle to form close interpersonal relationships.

Children raised in a passive/permissive home often demonstrate self-confidence, but find it hard to set and reach goals. When these children grow up, they often get frustrated and impatient when they find out that other adults expect more from them than their parents did.

Children raised in a detached/disengaged home will struggle the most with self-confidence, achievement, and social skills. It is very difficult for a child to mature emotionally in an environment where the parents are detached and disengaged. These children will often seek out other adults—teachers, pastors, coaches, or extended family members—for the boundaries and emotional connections that they crave and desire. They may also attempt to fill their emotional needs from the missing parental connection through friends or dating.

Healthy relationships take a lot of effort, yet with intention, patience, and perseverance, the effort we make to develop and strengthen a loving and consistent voice with our children will be a powerful and life-giving gift to everyone.

4. The Best Time to Start a Conversation

According to a proverb we like to share, “The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago; the second-best time is today.” It also seems to be true that the best time for any of us to begin a difficult conversation within our families might have been months or years ago, at the moment when we first became aware of a difficulty. The second-best time to begin that difficult conversation is today.

An excuse often given for avoiding difficult conversations within families, and one we have sometimes even heard ourselves say is some version of, “I just don’t want to rock the boat.” The ironic thing about this comment is that it is almost always said at a time when the boat is already rocking. “I would prefer not to acknowledge how significantly the boat is rocking,” might be a more accurate statement of what the person, couple, or family is thinking and feeling. Or one might even hope that if they ignore the concern the boat will stop rocking on its own.



So why do we avoid difficult conversations? There are, no doubt, many reasons, but we believe one primary reason is that there is great vulnerability when having these conversations. Honest conversations can feel scary. As long as we can avoid a conversation, we can pretend either that there really isn’t a problem, or we can go unchallenged in our belief that we are right and the issue is the fault of someone else.

Choosing to have a hard conversation means that we may find out an uncomfortable truth, or that the other person has a considerably different perspective on the issue and that they believe it is *we* who have some important changes to make. It may seem in the short term too risky to bring up a difficult subject, but in the long run, if we ignore it the concern or problem may grow and become an even bigger problem.

It is not unusual for families to have unwritten rules, rules they may not even be aware of, about things that are not to be discussed.

Some common examples of these unspoken rules are:

1. “We don’t talk about conflict.”
2. “We don’t talk about money.”
3. “We don’t talk about how much so and so drinks.”
4. “We don’t talk about our feelings.”

It is common for families to internalize and not question these unwritten—and often unspoken—rules. This is especially true when those around us unwittingly agree to follow them as a way of keeping a false sense of peace. The paradox is that not talking about something difficult usually makes it worse, allowing suppressed emotions to build in intensity. For example, not talking about some sort of conflict almost always guarantees that it will spill out eventually, in a way that is often hurtful to relationships in the family.

It takes courage to start difficult conversations. But the hopeful news is that while growth and change require risk and vulnerability from everyone involved, when we are willing to have those conversations, real growth and connection is possible.

5. The Importance of Connection

Pause for a moment and think of an adult who had a significant positive impact on your growing up, someone you admired and respected. It could be a family member, teacher, coach, mentor, or any adult who taught you important life lessons. The positive energy you feel when you think of that person is likely because of the positive, stable, and caring bond that you had with them. This was their greatest gift to you.

Human beings are wired for connection. As children and teens, the adults who had the strongest impact on our development influenced us through caring connection. The same is true for your children. They will connect with and be influenced by many people, but you are the primary person your child wants to connect with and be influenced by.

It may not always seem like it, but during childhood and even adolescence, you are still your child’s primary connection, their primary source of love and safety.

Following are a few specific things you can do to maintain and strengthen the connection and influence you have with your child.

- Fill your child’s “love tank” every day. Words of affection, affirmation and respect, along with loving gestures are concrete ways to fill your child’s “love tank.” Your child needs to feel your love every day. Your love needs to be felt as unconditional, separate from how you feel and react to bad choices and decisions that they make, loving him or her at the core of who they are.
- Remember that *to discipline* means *to teach* and teaching takes time and patience (more on this on p. 137).
- Repair a stressed, broken, or damaged connection as soon as possible. Take responsibility when you have injured your relationship with your child and make repairs immediately.
- Pay attention to the good things your child does. What we pay most attention to regarding our child is what we will see grow in them. For example, if they are appreciated, they will appreciate, if they are blamed, they will blame.
- Think of your child as having an “emotional bank account.” You make “deposits” in their bank account every time you love, appreciate, and affirm them. You make “withdrawals” when you correct them or act out of frustration. Set a goal of keeping the ratio of deposits to withdrawals at 5:1 (more on this on p. 42).



Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you are living into the relationships in your family as a parent. First, you will take a brief Self-Assessment, and then respond to the reflection questions that follow the Self-Assessment.

Please take a few moments now to rate the statements on the following Relationships Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone to see but you; you can respond to these statements honestly. You don't need to show your answers to anyone unless you choose to. This is an opportunity for you to listen to and better know yourself.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in any way a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. Don't spend too much time thinking about each response, just enough time to rate each statement honestly.



► Relationships Self-Assessment

The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes		Half of the Time			Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I model healthy relationships for my child. _____

Our family talks about important issues affecting us, even when it may be uncomfortable to do so. _____

I work to help my children recognize relationships that are unhealthy and, when necessary, help them choose other relationships. _____

I think before speaking to my child when emotions are high. _____

The way I regularly interact with my children is helping to build loving and healthy relationships. _____

I am satisfied that our family is not overly connected to email, texts, phones, social media, or computers in ways that interfere with our relationships. _____

I set a good example for our family by saying I’m sorry when I hurt someone, and encouraging my children to do the same. _____

I am able to resolve conflict with my children in a productive way. _____

I feel confident that our relationships with family, friends, and others are creating a strong, caring community for our family. _____

Our family works together as a team to resolve problems or concerns. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

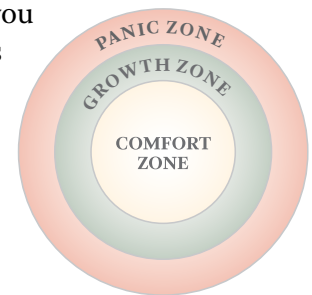
We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of relationships as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

The following questions will be helpful as you think about how you and your family are doing in the area of relationships. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life as a parent. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself or your family in this area of wellness? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 30. Was there anything that stood out to you? Why?

What do think about the idea of "standing in love"? How do you think it relates to your current relationship with your child or children? Explain or give some examples.

Write about a conversation you had with your child where you spoke or acted without first thinking through what you wanted to say. How did the situation unfold? Tell the story here.

Think about that same conversation, but this time imagine **you** thought before you spoke. What might have been different? What could you do differently next time a situation like this arises to avoid hurt feelings or as much conflict?

Is there anything you would like to change about how you engage relationally with others in your family? Describe how things would be different if you were able to make that change.

Is there a concern or worry on your mind that could benefit from an honest conversation with your child, or the other parent? If so, what is the first step you could take to ensure that it is positive and productive?

What relationship values are most important to you? Being trustworthy? Having integrity? Honesty? Commitment? Generous? Kind? Ethical? Respectful? Helpful? Patient? Others? Can your family tell that these values are important to you?

Watching adults is a primary way children learn. How are you modeling these things for your child or children? Is there anything in this area that you would like to do differently? Explain what that would take.

Do you recognize one of the four parenting voices described on p. 25 as your primary voice as a parent? What impact do you see that having on your family life together? Are you comfortable with that? If not, what might you work on doing differently?

Sometimes parents shift to a less nurturing and effective parenting voice when things are stressful. How does your parenting voice shift when you or your child are stressed? What concrete steps could you take in order to reduce the amount of stress in your life?

We hope you have experienced the many benefits of taking time to learn more about healthy parent/child relationships. It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself and your family in this area of wellness. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let's take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you as a parent are right now in the area of relationships with your children.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be in this area of wellness.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of family relationships. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | Have you had previous successes in making positive changes in this area of your life that can serve as hope and inspiration for you? Describe.

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or in your family might arise as you seek to make changes in your relationships?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific timeframe (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Relationships

Date: _____

Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.	
Specific:	What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.
Measurable:	Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.
Achievable:	Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.
Relevant:	Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.
Time-bound:	Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.
Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?	Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?
Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

4. Emotions



Making the decision to have a child is momentous.

It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.

—Elizabeth Stone

Step One: Learning

In and of themselves our emotions, and those of our children, are neither good nor bad. What is helpful or unhelpful is the way we choose to express them, how we relate to them, and what we do with them. Just because we experience many emotions doesn't mean that we are dealing with them well. In fact, if we are not mindful, we may find that we are reacting in ways that are habitual and unconscious, often in patterns—good or bad—that we learned from our childhoods. We may react emotionally without first thinking.

A commitment to emotional wellness begins with regularly stepping outside of ourselves and our emotions to reflect on how well we are handling our own emotions. Are we able to feel and express the full range of emotions in a way that is constructive? Are we teaching our children to do the same? What are we modeling for our children around emotional wellness? We are here to help you answer these questions as you become more aware of some of the qualities of emotional wellness for parents and families. The way we handle our emotions with our children has a direct effect on our children's well-being, and so when we take steps to nurture and strengthen our own emotional wellness, our children benefit, as well.

It is important to remember that all of our emotions ultimately serve as trustworthy guides, helping us make sense of the world around us, and helping us better understand where we fit in that world. This is true for all members of our families. What is essential for everyone's well-being is that we each learn to recognize our emotions and learn from them. They are providing us with important information and it is in our best interest that we learn to read and understand them.



When you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by the emotional challenges of raising a family, know that you are not alone. As with all of the areas of the Wellness Compass, we simply are seeking to make progress, not perfection.

Following are four reflections related to emotions that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.

1. The Full Range of Emotions

Imagine your emotions, or those of your child, existing on a continuum or on a scale from zero to ten. Think of the emotions on the left end of the scale, zero to five, as the difficult or unpleasant emotions, such as fear, self-doubt, worry, frustration, anger, and sadness. Now think of the emotions at the right end of the scale, six to ten, as pleasurable, such as joy, laughter, contentment, love, and excitement. Both parents and children need a complete range of emotions to be fully human, fully alive. The important thing to remember is that when we are able to recognize what we are feeling, we are able to choose how we want to respond.

Our emotions, and those of our children, are meant to help us recognize both healthy and unhealthy situations, and help guide us through those moments. It takes time to both learn to identify and express our emotions in healthy ways, and to listen respectfully to the emotions of others. Learning how to handle our emotions

and the emotions of others in our family is an important skill that will impact everything we do. Depending on what we saw modeled as children, handling emotions in a healthy way may or may not be our usual way of operating. However, it is good to know that we can always better manage our emotions positively with practice and intention.



No matter what range of emotions we are feeling as parents, we can choose to keep them bottled up inside, or we can choose to express them in healthy ways. It is up to us. And it is part of our job to teach our children to do the same.

If we, or another member of the family, become irritable with others, withdraw from family and friends, or are tempted to drink, smoke, or use other drugs in an attempt to cope, we can assume that we are not doing well emotionally. Although these choices are most likely attempts to cope with difficult emotions, they run the risk of us losing our ability to manage feelings and stress in healthier ways.

One of the first indications or whispers that an area of our lives is in need of attention may be a change in the way we handle our emotions.

If we do notice a change, we need to pay attention to what is going on, looking at all of the areas of life and identifying which one may be in need of more attention. We can use this as an opportunity for everyone in the family to grow, remembering to be gentle with ourselves; we all have challenging days. Creating a healthy life is a life-long process. We are all in it for the long game.

It is important to note that there will be times within families when emotions naturally will be more difficult to navigate for everyone, particularly when someone in the family is going through any sort of transition in life.

Following are just a few examples of transitions many of us and our families will face at some point in their lives.

- A family member or friend is sick or dying
- Starting at a different job and/or school
- Moving to a new community
- Parents breaking up and new living situations
- Beginning (or ending) an important friendship or significant relationship
- Blending families (can mean a new step-parent, step-children, or step-siblings)
- Someone new joins the family through adoption, birth, or marriage
- Children leaving home

The support of others will help us move through times of transition. It is important to think of people each member of the family can talk to, confide in, and trust: a friend, parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, partner, sibling, spouse, clergy person, teacher, coach, and/or therapist are all possible resources to consider.

It is important to resist the temptation to pull away from others when times are hard. Don't be afraid to reach out and stay connected with others who are comfortable with what we are feeling. It is helpful to remember that we are stronger together than we are by ourselves.

Finally, it is wise to think of everyone's emotions as gifts. They allow each of us to experience life on a deeper, more vital level. When ignored, pushed aside, or left to fester, emotions can be harmful, causing damage to our physical health, relationships, and overall well-being. When handled well, emotions can enhance relationships, our health, and can open up new opportunities in your family's life together.

2. Emotional Bank Accounts

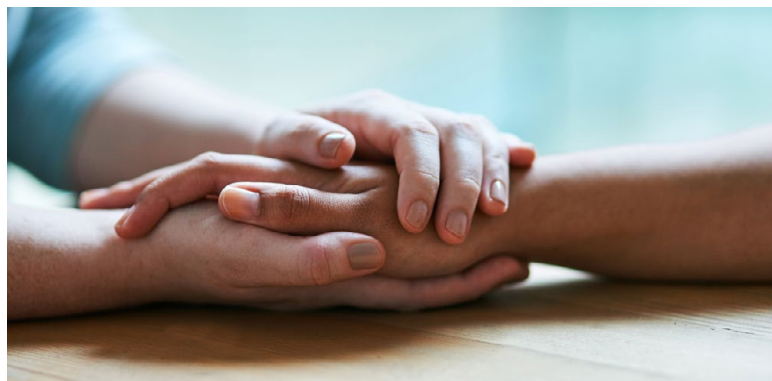
Stephen Covey introduced the idea of emotional bank accounts in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, and we find it to be a helpful concept in maintaining emotional wellness, especially in families. An emotional bank account is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that has been built up in a relationship. Every kind, affirming, or encouraging word we can give or receive is a deposit. Every criticism, unkind, disrespectful, uncaring and mean word we give or take in is a withdrawal.

Everyone in a family has an emotional bank account, children and parents alike. An essential aspect of parental well-being is being sure that we are paying attention to the current balance of *our own* accounts. It is nearly impossible to give to our children what we ourselves do not have. There is a saying, “You can’t pour from an empty cup.” If we are not proactively caring for our own emotional well-being, we are vulnerable to turning to our children in hopes of getting deposits from them, or blaming our children if we are overdrawn.

While our children clearly bring much joy and love into our lives, it is not their role to take care of our emotional well-being, nor is it our children’s fault if our cups are empty. But on the other hand, it is our role to care for our children’s emotional wellness by maintaining our own. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to build a healthy emotional environment in our homes.

One of the most significant ways we can enhance a child’s well-being and our relationship with our children is to make regular deposits in their emotional account. Deposits are positive things we do to let a child know we care, such as a kind word, a promise kept, a loving action, a gentle touch, a meaningful gift, a special meal, or quality time spent together.

Of course, there are times when we need to critique our child or allow them to experience the consequences of dangerous or undesirable behavior. When this happens, our children might see this as negative, a withdrawal from their emotional bank account. We also make withdrawals when we lose control and say or do things that we regret. Yet, if this isn’t a regular occurrence and we are willing to apologize, while making plenty of regular deposits (**on average five deposits for every withdrawal is a good rule of thumb**), it needn’t be an enduring problem.



3. The Power of Vulnerability

There is extensive research to support the idea that a key to living well, a key to living a wholehearted life, is the ability to feel and express vulnerability. Not surprisingly, many faith traditions also have taught us to accept our vulnerability as the first step in acknowledging our need for others in our life and for a power higher than ourselves.

Dr. Brené Brown is a leading writer and researcher on the topic of vulnerability. Through her research, Brown has discovered that while blocking or numbing feelings of insecurity may help us in the short run, in the long run it prevents us from growing the ability to form meaningful connections with others. Being age appropriately honest and humble with our children sets an example and helps our children feel free to do the same with us when they feel unsure or scared.

When family members are vulnerable, confused, or scared they may ask hard questions that deserve our best attention and seriousness. Pets die, parents get divorced, horrific things happen in the world and children wonder why. These are spiritual questions and our being vulnerable and loving in return can be a comfort to our children.

It turns out that science now proves that the old notion—that we should hide feelings of insecurity in order to protect ourselves—is not at all helpful. Instead, learning to express vulnerability is an important key to experiencing happiness and joy. She even goes as far as to say in her book *Daring Greatly* that **being vulnerable and real with our children has more positive influence over our children than any other thing we know about parenting.**



Vulnerability is similar to another core value that is part of all spiritual traditions: humility. While Dr. Brown's research on vulnerability may be counterintuitive to what many of us have been taught and believed in the past, when we thought these two words implied weakness. Now we can trust that putting the results of her research into practice, by striving to adopt these two characteristics, will help us experience more honesty, authenticity, and joy in our families.

4. Good Communication

Good communication is vital in creating family well-being. One piece of communication advice that we feel is particularly helpful for everyone in a family to know about is: *“Say what you mean and mean what you say.”* A few years ago, we learned a third phrase to add to this already great advice: *“Don’t say it mean.”* That sentence is the icing on the cake.

“Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Don’t say it mean.”

There is much wisdom for parents and families in those three short sentences. They sum up the need to be clear and consistent with the boundaries we create for our children while, at the same time, being respectful and keeping a consistent emotional connection with them.

Say what you mean. Discussing family rules and expectations with our children gives us a great opportunity to connect these boundaries and expectations with our core values and beliefs. It is in everyone’s best interest for parents to confidently and consistently say what we mean when it comes to sharing with our children what matters most. And to teach them to do the same.



Mean what you say. This speaks to another key aspect of effective parenting: being willing to “walk the talk.” For Example, it would not be effective for a parent to tell their child to express anger in a respectful manner if that same parent “goes off” in an angry tirade against the child or anyone else. The best way to teach our core values and beliefs is to pattern our lives in such a way that our children can see our values through our words and actions.

Don’t say it mean. Often this is the most difficult advice for many of us to follow. Somewhere along the line, it seems someone got the idea that parents could increase their influence by raising their voices. Yet, we now know that attempting to increase our power by raising our voices actually has the opposite effect: the loss of both authority and respect. When we yell at our children, they may feel shame and humiliation and, over time, will gradually stop listening. It is never appropriate for us to shame or humiliate our children, as it tears down their self-esteem and hurts the relationship.

When we find ourselves emotionally flooded as a parent, it is wise to call a timeout, and wait until we are sure we won’t say or do something we’ll later regret. When we have calmed down, we are better able to “say what we mean, mean what we say, and not say it mean.”

It takes a lifetime to master this wisdom and to apply it to all of our relationships. Any of us, at times, can and will “say it mean.” It happens and so we need to be careful not to shame or humiliate ourselves, or our children if they slip. We simply need to apologize, learn from what happened, and grow from the experience. And this is exactly what we want to model for our children.

Step Two: Listening to Yourself

A commitment to emotional wellness begins with regularly stepping outside of ourselves and our emotions to observe and reflect on how well we are handling our own emotions. Are we able to feel and express the full range of emotions at home in a way that is constructive? Are we teaching our children to do the same? What are we modeling for our children around emotional wellness?

In this section, you have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you relate to your emotions, as well as the emotions in your family. You'll do this first by taking the following Emotions Self-Assessment, and then by responding to the reflection questions that follow.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in any way a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. Don't spend too much time thinking about each response, just enough time to rate each statement honestly so that it is helpful if you want to refer back to it later on.



▶ Emotions Self-Assessment

The ability to process, express, and receive emotions in a healthy way and helping others in my family to do the same.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes			Half of the Time			Most of the Time			Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I am helping my children to learn about, feel, and express the full range of emotions (sadness, fear, joy, boredom, anger, joy, love) in healthy ways. _____

The words I use and the way I speak to my children are helping to build a solid and healthy sense of confidence within them. _____

When my child misbehaves in some way, I use that as an opportunity to teach them about a better way of doing things. _____

When I am emotionally upset, I have places to turn to re-center myself, and I teach my family to do the same. _____

I make regular deposits into everyone in the family’s emotional bank accounts. _____

I take my children’s emotions seriously and do not minimize their feelings. _____

My relationship with alcohol and other drugs, as well as other possibly addictive behaviors, is good for my family. _____

I forgive myself and my children when we make mistakes and model expressing forgiveness easily. _____

The relationships in my life are emotionally stable and are a healthy model for my children. _____

I “say what I mean, mean what I say, and I don’t say it mean.” _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

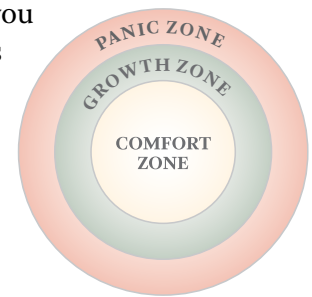
We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of emotions as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

The following questions will be helpful as you think about how you and your family handle emotions. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life as a parent. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself or your family? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 46. Was there anything that stood out to you? Why? Describe in detail below.

Are you comfortable feeling and expressing the full range of emotions: sadness, fear, anger, joy, etc.? Are you comfortable with all of your family members expressing the full range of their emotions? Are some easier to handle than others? Describe.

Is there anything you want to do differently in terms of allowing, and even encouraging, everyone in the family to feel and express the full range of emotions?

Do your emotions, or those of your children ever “get the best of you,” causing you to say or do things you later regret? Have you noticed a pattern of when this happens? Explain.

What are some of your favorite ways for you to receive deposits in your emotional bank account? What about for your children? What deposits do they seem to enjoy the most?

What is your estimate of your current ratio of deposits to withdrawals with your children? Are you comfortable with that? If not, is there something you could do to change that? Try to be specific.

Which of the following phrases do you find most challenging to model on a regular basis: “Say what you mean.” “Mean what you say.” Or, “Don’t say it mean”? Give an example. Why might this be?

The last time you were challenged by one of the above phrases, what happened? What did you, or can you, learn from that experience?

Remember: feel, then think, then act. It is very helpful if we can learn to think before we speak. Are you able to think about how you are going to respond to someone in your family before you say something? If not, what might help you stop and think before you speak?

We hope you have benefited from taking time to consider how you and your family handle emotions. It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself in this area of family wellness. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let’s take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life with your family in the area of emotions.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be in this area of wellness.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of family emotional well-being. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in making positive changes in this area of wellness that can serve as hope and inspiration for you?

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make changes?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific timeframe (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Emotions

Date: _____

Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.	
Specific: What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.	
Measurable: Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.	
Achievable: Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.	
Relevant: Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.	
Time-bound: Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.	
Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?	Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?
Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

5. Spirituality



There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

—Albert Einstein

Step One: Learning

The word *Spirituality* comes from the same root as the word “breath.” Spirituality is that which gives us breath, that which animates our lives. In the metaphor of a compass, our spirituality is how we define “true north” for ourselves and our families. Our spirituality gives our life direction and purpose and is how we live out what we most profoundly believe.

Spirituality is not the same thing as religion. A person may or may not express their spirituality through a traditional set of religious beliefs and practices. If you are familiar with twelve-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, you will have heard of the concept of a “higher power.” All twelve-step programs are deeply spiritual and ask those in their programs to identify their higher power. That higher power might be the good of humankind, or it might be a traditional expression of religious belief. The point is that everyone has a higher power or a true north that helps to orient the important decisions in their lives. Spirituality is what grounds our core values and beliefs, as well as our moral and ethical standards.

An essential job for parents is to teach their children values by which to live. Parents, through the actions they model and the lessons they teach their children, provide answers to spiritual questions such as, “How should I treat others who are different from me and from my family?” “How should I treat others who are less fortunate than me?” “How should I care for the earth and the natural world around me?” “How should I give back to the world?” “What is important in life?” Some families express their spirituality



through volunteer work or community service. Some participate in important spiritual traditions that are central to a family's identity and have been passed on from one generation to the next.

Parenthood is itself a spiritual journey where we clarify and strengthen our own core values and beliefs. It connects us with the spiritual side of life, offering both miracle and vulnerability.

Spirituality, whatever that looks like for each of us, helps us to define our core values and beliefs, those we turn to for guidance when facing the important decisions in our lives.

If, for example, honesty, respect, and integrity are core values for you, they will guide how you treat others, as well as provide guidance when, say, an opportunity to be dishonest or disrespectful presents itself. In any number of ethical situations we face each day, our spirituality helps us decide how we will respond, such as how we treat others, how we share what we have, and as we decide whether or not to gossip, lie, or steal.

In this chapter we invite you to learn, reflect, and practice new habits as you focus your attention on the ways you are developing the spiritual aspects of your lives together as a family. Deepening and enriching our lives through our choices of spiritual experiences help us think about what gives our lives meaning and direction, and helps us clarify our values. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications, following are five reflections related to spirituality that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.

1. Core Values

Knowing our core values and having the courage to act on them is an important part of our spirituality, as our values guide how you live our lives. They are our compass, and they are the compass that influences who we are as a parent.

The following exercise will help clarify your core values. It may be a challenging exercise, so it will be more meaningful if you do it silently and mindfully when you have time to be alone.

Identify the values that are most important to you as a parent. Do that gradually by striking through values on the list that are less important to you.

This does not mean that you are throwing values away or don't think they are meaningful. The ones you cross out may be important but just won't be the *most* important to you at this time in your life. This narrowing process is meant to help you identify your core values. The goal is to eventually narrow your list to a few values that you hold as most meaningful and relevant now. If a value that you hold is not on the list, please feel free to add it.

Pay attention to your inner dialogue as you narrow the list to just a handful. Your process will reveal interesting things about yourself, and help you see what values you want to pass on to your children.

acceptance	attractiveness	community	contribution	ecology	family
fun	helpfulness	humor	intimacy	logic	pleasure
responsibility	self-esteem	stability	tradition	wisdom	accuracy
authority	comfort	courtesy	excellence	flexibility	generosity
honesty	independence	justice	gentleness	popularity	risk
self-awareness	strength	virtue	success	achievement	beauty
compassion	creativity	integrity	forgiveness	growth	hope
hard work	knowledge	moderation	power	safety	service
being mindful	wealth	adventure	authenticity	caring	honor
love	dependable	fame	friendship	health	humility
truth	peace	leisure	loyalty	orderliness	practical
self-control	simplicity	tolerance	punctual	gratitude	kindness
patience	faith/spirituality	_____			

After you have narrowed down your values, think about ***whether those around you can tell*** that those values are the most important ones for you, individually or as a family.

Developing our spirituality helps ground us in something larger than ourselves, and from that place we will be better prepared for any tough times that might come our way.

2. Building a Cathedral

As the story is told, several hundred years ago in a small town, a large group of people were building a cathedral. These were the primary laborers for the project and so their work was often tiring and tedious. One day, a visitor to the town had a chance to ask two of the laborers about their work and received two very different responses.

The first laborer had a cart full of rocks that they was straining to pull. This person looked tired and harried. The visitor asked the laborer what they were doing. “What does it look like I’m doing? I’m hauling rocks! Every day, that’s all I do. I haul rocks from morning until night,” was the reply.



The other laborer, working on the same building, was also straining to pull a cart full of rocks. However, this person had a happier look on their face and their attitude seemed quite different from the first laborer. When asked what they were doing, a smile appeared on his face and he said, “I’m helping to build a cathedral. And it’s going to one of the most beautiful cathedrals in all the world!”

These two workers were doing the exact same task. The first one was exhausted and irritated because they saw what needed to be done all day as a never-ending grind of hauling rocks from place to place. The second worker was toiling just as hard as the first, but instead felt a spirit of excitement and pride in the work. They were not merely hauling rocks, they were building a cathedral! It is the mindset each chooses that makes all the difference.

There is no doubt that at times parenting can be a grind. There are times when it is exhausting and feels like all we are doing is hauling rocks from place to place. If we get stuck in that mindset however, we will likely miss out on the true spiritual gifts that parenting has the capacity to offer.

Our spirituality and our values are influential determinants of our attitudes and have a powerful effect on how we see the world. As parents, our mindsets have a strong influence on how we view our children, and on how we experience the day-to-day job of parenting. It will determine whether we experience our work as parents as simply hauling rocks, or as building cathedrals.

3. Your Spiritual Root System

One way to think of spirituality is that it is the root system that grounds our lives. **Just as a tree draws strength, stability, and nourishment from its root system, we too can draw strength, stability, and nourishment from our spiritual lives, our root system.** Parenthood is often a natural time for us to deepen our spiritual lives. There are many chances for us to examine our beliefs as we answer the hard questions that children inevitably ask.

It is not uncommon for new parents to join a faith community, even if they have not been part of a faith community for a long time, or perhaps ever. The reasons stated by parents for seeking out a faith community are often because they feel that it would be wise to give their child a strong spiritual foundation.

Many parents also recognize a need to deepen the spiritual foundation of their own lives as they live into the awesome responsibility of raising a growing young person. It does



indeed take a village, and not just to raise a child, but to raise and support a family, as well. Faith communities can be important villages of support for families.

Remembering that “spirituality” comes from the same root as the word “breath” helps us to understand the power that spirituality can have in our lives. Spirituality gives us breath. It animates our lives. Spirituality is the source of all that gives us joy, creativity, and love. And it is as close to us as our own breath. And helping our children develop a spiritual root system for themselves is a gift they will have with them for the rest of their lives.

4. Our Children as Spiritual Teachers

There are many spiritual teachers from whom we can learn important lessons. If we wish to grow our own spiritual lives, we might find a spiritual teacher from whom we can gain deeper insight into spiritual wisdom. Such a spiritual teacher might be an author, a retreat leader, a spiritual director, or a clergy person.

In addition to these spiritual teachers, there is one more teacher from whom we can learn a great deal of spiritual wisdom: our child. **While children are certainly always learning from us, there is a great deal of spiritual wisdom that we as parents can learn from our children, as well.** Here are three of the many spiritual lessons that we have learned from raising children.



- 1. Live fully in the present moment.** All wise spiritual teachers talk about the importance of living in the present moment, letting go of past regrets, and avoiding getting caught up in worries about the future. Young children are masters at living in the present moment. Children by nature live in what many spiritual teachers refer to as the “eternal now.”
- 2. Laugh and play, and enjoy life.** Humor and joy are truly fruits of a spiritual life. Children by nature are playful and love to laugh. They bring this spirit of playfulness out in adults, as is obvious when watching an adult making funny faces and funny noises as they interact with a young child. Children give adults permission to engage the life-loving spirit of their own inner child.
- 3. Love our neighbor.** A core teaching of all spiritual traditions is that of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. We as adults sometimes struggle with this, finding it

easy to love people we like and agree with, but harder to love people who are different from us. Small children have a way of breaking down the walls that adults create. They have an innate ability to love everyone and to see others through eyes free from the filters of judgment and hurt that often affect how we adults see our neighbors. Let us be open to learning this from our children.

Children, through the seemingly small things they say and do, actually help us remember what they already know about what is truly important. Things which, in the midst of the many distractions of life, we may have forgotten. Parenting is an ongoing spiritual adventure where we can be both teacher and student.

5. Some Suggested Centering Practices

Here are some suggestions for centering practices you and your family may want to try. They are meant to help enrich the spiritual part of yourself and those of your family.

- Pick a quote that inspires or empowers you and read it every morning. Tape it to your bathroom mirror, keep it in your wallet, or put it on your refrigerator for all to see.
- Focus on quieting your mind by sitting quietly and slowly breathing in and breathing out or try meditation.
- Sit outside in a favorite spot and relax and be still.
- Listen to music that helps you feel positive and alive.
- Use paints, music, or other mediums to relax into your creative side.
- Take time to express gratitude each day
- Take a walk, but leave your phone and other distractions behind.
- Give back to your community by volunteering your time and energy to a positive cause.
- Paying attention to the simple things that you might otherwise take for granted through journaling is also a great spiritual practice.

NOTE: For additional centering practices, see p. 16.

Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you are nurturing your spirituality, first by taking a Self-Assessment, and then by responding to the reflection questions that follow.

Please take a few moments now to rate the statements on the following Spirituality Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone else to see unless you choose to share it with them. This is a safe place where you have an opportunity to listen to and better know yourself.

As you complete the Wellness Self-Assessment you may become aware of where you are currently feeling out of balance. This knowledge can help you decide what next steps you may want to take, ones that will help you and your family find more balance.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in anyway a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. You are who you are, and this is just one way for you to see how you have been acknowledging and tending to this part of your life.



▶ Spirituality Self-Assessment

The development of a strong personal value system and a meaningful purpose in life.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes		Half of the Time			Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Our life together has a sense of meaning and purpose. _____

I am satisfied with what I model in giving back to the world. _____

I value centering/spiritual practices and make them a regular part of our life as a family. _____

I forgive people who have hurt me and model and teach forgiveness within my family. _____

The way I live my life is consistent with my spirituality, core values, and beliefs. _____

I have a sense of gratitude for the many good things in my life, and help my children to do the same. _____

I seek forgiveness from family members when I have hurt them. _____

My spirituality, core values, and beliefs are primary guides in making parenting decisions. _____

Our family is connected to a community that deepens our spiritual roots. _____

I am learning spiritual truths through my children and my journey as a parent. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

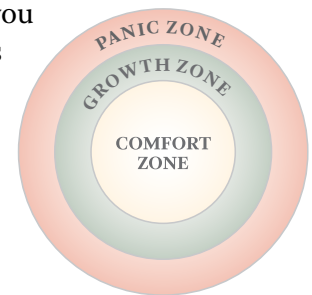
In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of spirituality as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

We hope following questions will be helpful as you think about spirituality. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life as a parent. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 62. Was there anything that stood out to you? Why?

When are you most likely to feel that parenting is like hauling rocks? Explain. How might that be impacting your family? What could you do to change that?

When are you most likely to feel that parenting is building a cathedral? Explain that, too. How does that affect your family? Give examples if you can.

Is there a next step you would like to take now about your mindset around being a parent? If needed, what could you do, concretely, to be more positive?

Imagining spirituality as being the root system of a tree, how do you water your spirituality? How about your family's? What practices do you have or could you develop as a family to grow your common spiritual root system?

Have you ever tried the practice of sitting quietly for a short period of time and just focusing on your breath as a way to center and calm yourself, a way to keep things in perspective? What happened? Might teaching this type of practice to your children be helpful? How?

What spiritual lessons have you learned, or are you now learning, from your children?

Do you have any spiritual teachers, other than your children, in your life right now? Why are you choosing them? How do those teachers impact your life as a family?

Do you often take time to just relax and enjoy the present moment with your family? How could allowing yourself this gift help you grow the spiritual aspect of yourself?

Do you often laugh, play and enjoy the life you have with your family? Write about that.

Do you model loving your neighbors for your family? If you find yourself judging your neighbors, how does that impact you and your family?

Is there something you would like to do now as you think of modeling open-mindedness in your family? Describe.

Is there something specific you would like to do to grow a greater sense of overall spirituality in your life as a family?

It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself in the area of spirituality. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let's take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life with your family in the area of spirituality.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be in this area of wellness.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of spirituality. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in making positive changes in this area of your life that can serve as hope and inspiration for you?

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make changes?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific timeframe (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Spirituality

Date: _____

Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.	
Specific: What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.	
Measurable: Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.	
Achievable: Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.	
Relevant: Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.	
Time-bound: Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.	
Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?	Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?
Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

6. Rest and Play



Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.

—Fred Rogers

Step One: Learning

This chapter focuses on an area of wellness that is often overlooked and undervalued in our current fast-paced, outcome-focused culture and, at times, even neglected: Rest and Play. Most parents we talk with identify that their families don't have enough rest and play in their lives. We believe that unless we are all intentional about making it a priority, it won't happen.

The word *recreation* literally means *re-creation*, the state of creating anew. Recreation rebalances our lives and recharges our batteries; it renews us. Yet not all forms of modern recreation are truly re-creative, and so we need to be mindful about choosing activities for ourselves and our families that truly renew and revitalize us.

While it can be challenging to make time for recreation, the good news is that we have built-in playmates and role models when it comes to rest and play—our children. Children are experts at being in the moment and playing. We simply need only to allow ourselves to be reminded by them just how important and refreshing it is to make time for laughter and fun.

Recreating as a family is an important element in building family bonds and strengthening relationships. If you ask someone about their favorite memories from childhood, most will share a story about a time their family had fun together, such as a fun family tradition, a vacation, or a fun activity they did together. Playing as a family provides a wonderful opportunity for children to see us relaxed and having fun, as well a time for us to see our children having fun too.



There is no doubt that parenting is serious business. It is also true that parenting can also be a great deal of fun, and that rest and play are an essential part of every family's sense of well-being. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical

applications, following are five reflections related to rest and play that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.

1. Playfulness as an Attitude, Not Just an Activity

When our son was three, he discovered a stirring stick for paint in a bag we had brought home from the hardware store. He took the stick out of the bag and his mind sprang to life with all the possible things the stick could be. He immediately lifted it to his lips and pronounced that the stick was a trumpet as he busily fingered the valves of the make-believe instrument. The paint stick was soon a violin, a guitar, and a flute. Then a golf club, a necktie, a fishing rod, and a tree. Before the afternoon was over, it had also become a baseball bat, a diving board, a spoon, a fork, a knife, a popsicle stick, a teeter totter, a giant pencil, and a magic wand.

Author George Bernard Shaw once wrote, “We don’t stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.” Some studies have found that children laugh an average of three hundred times each day, while adults only laugh an average of ten to fifteen times a day.

Some might be wondering how adults could possibly laugh more, with all the serious issues they have to address, things that children know little about. We believe that laughing and being playful are choices, and not simply choices about whether we engage in playful activities or laugh at funny things. Playfulness is an attitude we can adopt and an outlook on life, that we can choose. In many situations and endeavors with our children, we can choose to bring either a serious or a playful energy and outlook to the situation. The attitude we bring to any conversation or interaction within our family has a direct impact on everyone around us.



We have let our memory of our son’s vivid imagination with the paint stick remind us to be more playful in our approach to life and parenting. We believe that any family will benefit from being a little more imaginative and playful as they try new and creative ways to interact with each other.

2. The Intersection of Screens and Families

At a recent Parent Wellness Circle Holly was leading, many of the parents admitted—now that their children were in high school—that they felt somewhat alone and were looking for genuine connection with others. She invited them to work in groups to take a simple self-assessment of their lives. Most discovered that they wanted to work on connecting more meaningfully with their teenage children, and to spend more fun time with them. Many spoke of experiencing an increasing distance from their children, and a desire to recapture some of the playfulness they experienced with their children when they were younger.

Most agreed that part of the challenge in making connection with their children was the barrier created by screens. Parents felt frustrated by their children's attraction to all kinds of screens and how this had become a real obstacle to having time together as a family. They just couldn't seem to pull their children away from their screens.



One parent asked the group what their own relationships were with screens when they were at home. Everyone got quiet as each began to examine their own behaviors. They came to the shared conclusion that if they wanted their teenagers to change their pattern of relaxing and unwinding by going off on their own somewhere and sitting in front of a screen, they would have to change what they were doing as well. They would have to lead the way and set the example.

Few doubt that modern technology enhances our lives and the lives of our children in many ways. And, there is little doubt that modern technology can also be distracting and even harmful to relationships. We know for sure that the ubiquity of the internet and the increasing amount of time spent in front of screens impacts the way families spend time together. This is not going to change. What can change is that we become more intentional about discussing this issue with our families, deciding what we want our children to have access to, what family rules are needed for everyone's well-being, and what we want to model by our own use of technology.

3. I Love To Watch You Play

As family therapists, an issue that comes up frequently in our work is that of helping parents determine how they can best respond to their children’s involvement in extra-curricular activities—whether it is sports, music, martial arts, chess club, voice, debate, theater, art, or a job.

As children participate in these types of activities, parents have several options of how they can show interest and give feedback. Our feedback can potentially be helpful and enhance our children’s enjoyment of extracurricular activities. Or, if we are not careful, our feedback can unintentionally hurt our children.

It is fairly obvious what types of things parents can say or do to hurt their children in these situations. Expressing disappointment, offering unsolicited advice or criticism, losing control emotionally and yelling, or not showing any interest can all be hurtful. It can be painful watching an adult—whether parent or coach—give shameful or hurtful comments to a young person, thinking this is going to motivate them to perform at a higher level.

What is less clear is what parents or other family members can do after watching their young person participate that is honest and, at the same time, will build connection. Several years ago, we heard a talk given by two well-known coaches about their years of working with athletes and their parents at all levels of competitive youth sports. They told us that over the years they had asked the athletes *what they most liked hearing from their parents after a competition*. They reported that the athletes gave the same response over and over. We like to hear: “I love to watch you play.”



One thing young people are yearning for is a relationship with an adult who is not evaluating them.

“I love to watch you play” is powerful, both in its simplicity and in its positive affect on children. The beauty of “I love to watch you play” is that it celebrates the fun of watching a child do something they love. Whether our child played well or struck out, sang beautifully or off key, remembered their lines or froze in the spotlight, won or lost, this response keeps the focus on the courage the child has summoned to put themselves out there, and the joy in watching that unfold.

4. I'm Bored!

At some point every parent gets tired of their children saying, “I’m bored!” Children are not the only ones we hear saying, “I’m bored.” We talk with adults who often say, “I’m bored in my work,” or, “I’m bored in my marriage,” or, “I’m bored as a parent,” or, “Overall, I’m just bored with my life.” The parallel between expressions of boredom by both children and adults is the perceived helplessness to do anything about their boredom. “I’m bored and I don’t have any idea of what I can do to change this feeling,” is what they seem to be expressing.

We can all agree that parenthood can be boring at times. Laundry, grocery shopping, making meals, driving kids to and fro, and cleaning up can become tedious. So, like our children, it’s not a question of if we will ever experience boredom, but rather a question of how we will deal with it when it happens.

What is essential to teach our children, and to remind ourselves as adults, is that boredom is best resolved by a two-step process. The first step is to be patient and accept it. Boredom is a natural state of mind and not something we need to frantically avoid. The second step is to turn inward and look deeper within ourselves for creative ways to revitalize our time, our work, our relationships, and our lives. A deeper resolution of boredom is an “inside-out” job, not an “outside-in” job.

When a child says, “I’m bored,” it is important to resist the urge to find a solution for the child. A better response could be, “I understand. That’s a natural feeling that we all feel sometimes. I guess you just haven’t figured out yet something that you want to do. Be patient and I’m sure something will come to you. After you give it some thought, I’d be happy to talk with you to help you figure something out.”

Providing children with opportunities to grow a sense of agency in their lives—a clear sense that they can create fun and play in their lives—is one of the most important skills to develop in our children. Come to think of it, it’s a pretty important skill to develop in ourselves, as well.



5. Play Doesn't Come in a Box

I'm guessing you have witnessed a scene like this one. A child opens an expensive gift, wrapped inside a large box. After opening the present and playing with it for a few minutes, the child ends up playing for hours with the box the present came in. Children know a great deal about the simplicity and fun of unstructured, spontaneous play.

You see play cannot be boxed up and given to someone, it usually just arises. It can't be forced. It most often comes at unexpected times and in unexpected places. The trick is in being open to these opportunities to see the world through playful eyes.

It is also important to know that setting time aside that is merely meant for rest and play (like a picnic in the park, a ball game, or a family walk in the woods) gives everyone the chance to relax into the playful moments that will arise.

Our ability to play is a sure sign of wellness, just as surely as taking ourselves too seriously and being unable to play together is sign of stress. A healthy dose of real play is truly "re-creation," for ourselves, and for our families.



Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you are resting and playing, first by taking a Self-Assessment, and then by responding to the reflection questions that follow.

Please take a few moments now to rate the statements on the following Rest and Play Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone else to see unless you choose to share it with them.

When you have completed the Wellness Self-Assessment the results can help you decide what next steps you would like to take, ones that will help you and your family find more balance where it comes to rest and play.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in any way a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. Don't spend too much time thinking about each response, just enough to rate each statement as accurately as possible so that your responses can be helpful for you to refer to later.



▶ Rest and Play Self-Assessment

The ability to balance work and play and to renew oneself.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes		Half of the Time			Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I feel positive about the amount of time that everyone in our family spends on screens each day. _____

I feel positive about the number and the types of extra-curricular activities in which my family is involved. _____

I take adequate time to rest and renew myself, and encourage my family to do the same. _____

I feel that we have adequate time together as a family to connect and have fun. _____

I am satisfied with the amount of sleep that my family and I get. _____

I have at least one hobby or interest that I enjoy. _____

I am satisfied that the way we all spend our unstructured time is renewing. _____

My family and I often laugh together. _____

We try new things, new activities, and explore new places together. _____

I have fun with my children. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

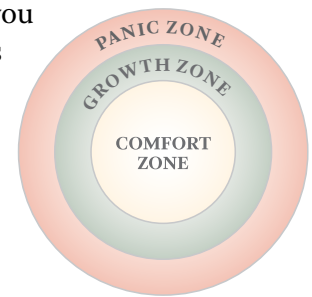
We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of rest and play as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

We hope following questions will be helpful as you consider the role of rest and play in the life of your family. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 78. Was there anything that surprised you there? Why?

Was there a playful attitude in your home when you were growing up? When did playful times typically happen? Give some examples.

Would your children describe you and your home as playful? Why or why not? Are you happy with your response?

If you wanted to be more playful with your children, what could you do differently from what you are currently doing? What difference might it make in your family if you were more playful?

What effects do you see screens and the use of technology having on your family? Do you feel good about this? If not, what could you do to change the patterns in your home?

Rest and play, by their very nature, are meant to renew us and be fun. Can you think of new things you could do together that do not involve screens? Name a few here.

Do your children like their activities and find them enjoyable and fun? Why or why not?

What kind of attention do you give to your children's activities? Is it healthy for everyone? Describe. How can you more fully express to your children that you "love to watch them play"?

How do you respond when your child reports that they are bored? What do you do when you are bored? Are you comfortable with that?

When you do feel bored, either as a parent, or in other areas of your life, how do you respond? Are you satisfied with how you respond or would you like to develop other, more creative responses?

Is there a next step you would like to take now to help your child (or yourself) better handle boredom?

When you think of the role of play in your family, do you tend to think of it as essential to your family's well-being, or a nice "extra" when time allows? As an experiment to see how rest and play impacts your family, try planning an activity everyone enjoys for your family in the next week or so, perhaps something totally new for all of you. Notice how you all feel afterwards.

It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you and your family currently find yourselves regarding your rest and play. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let's take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life with your family in the area of rest and play.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you and your family focus more attention to your rest and play.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of rest and play. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in making rest and play a priority in your life? They can serve as hope and inspiration for you.

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make changes?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific timeframe (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Rest and Play

Date: _____

<p>Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.</p>	
<p>Specific: What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.</p>	
<p>Measurable: Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.</p>	
<p>Achievable: Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.</p>	
<p>Relevant: Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.</p>	
<p>Time-bound: Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.</p>	
<p>Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?</p>	<p>Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?</p>
<p>Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.</p>	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

7. Care for the Body



Taking care of your body is a process, not a one-time event.

—Anonymous

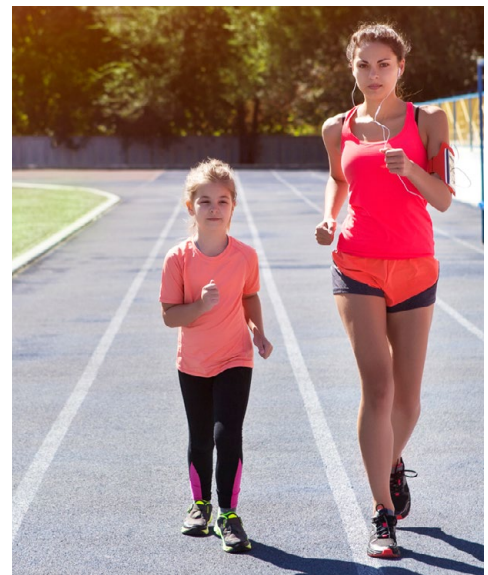
Step One: Learning

In the U.S., the human body on average lives about eighty years. If we think it is important to care for our cars to keep them running well, think how much more important it is to find a balanced approach to the care and nurturing of our physical wellness. The more intentional and proactive we are about caring for our bodies, the more likely we'll be able to enjoy life more fully. Listening to our bodies is vital to our sense of well-being, and is something we can teach our families.

It is also true that we live in paradoxical times when it comes to attitudes and habits related to our physical well-being. We know more than any other generation about what good nutrition looks like and what constitutes a healthy diet. We know how important movement and exercise are in maintaining physical wellness. At the same time that we have all of this clear information and guidance on healthy ways to live, as a culture we continue to struggle with growing health problems, ones that are, in large part, attributed to our unhealthy choices. Because of the complexity of the culture we live in, the path before us as parents can seem overwhelming.

Parenting can be emotionally demanding and draining. Less obvious, though, is how physically demanding it can be. As a full-contact sport, the physical demands of parenting can create wear and tear on our bodies. Add to this the fact that these demands make it challenging to find the time to care for our own bodies, and it's easy to see why our physical well-being can suffer over time.

The fact that parenting puts so many demands on us and makes it more difficult to care for our bodies, is the very reason that we must be intentional about self-care. This is doubly important for parents because how we care for our bodies models for our children how to best care for their own bodies. The decisions we make about nutrition, exercise, sleep, tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use speaks louder to our children than any words we will ever say.



Our bodies and those of our children are incredible gifts. They are a unique combination of the genes that come from our family's genetic histories. Both this, as well as the quality of the medical care we receive, influence our physical health.

And yet the simple, day-to-day choices we make regarding our bodies and our lifestyle are key contributors to how we feel, how we look, and how much energy we will have for the awesome job of parenting. What we do with our bodies makes a big difference in how long and how well it will serve us.

In this chapter we invite you to learn, reflect, and practice new habits by focusing your attention on the ways you care for your body, and how you model these habits for your children. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications, following are five reflections related to care for the body that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.

1. Our Children Are Always Watching

The daily choices we make for ourselves and for our children regarding diet, rest, and exercise become the foundation on which we and our children build long-term habits—healthy or unhealthy. We all want our children to grow up to be happy and healthy. In large part, that will depend on the habits we teach them as children. As challenging as it may be, it is up to us to model healthy habits that counteract the often-unhealthy lifestyle choices our children witness and desire. And we can be assured that our decisions are not going unnoticed by our children. They will most likely imitate our behavior.

As with all aspects of parenting, it is important to remember that whether or not our children seem to be listening to us, they are always watching us.

Parents are clearly the primary teachers of what their children think they should eat and drink, and about the importance of sleep and exercise. What children learn at home about how to treat and care for their bodies will continue to influence the decisions they'll make when they are grown and on their own. For this reason alone, it is important for us to honestly examine the self-care decisions we are making and modeling, remembering that we want our bodies—and those of our children—to run as smoothly as possible, for as long as possible, so that we all can more fully engage and enjoy life.



2. Me Want It, But Me Wait

The award-winning television show *Sesame Street* has long been a favorite of young children and parents alike. One of the factors that has kept *Sesame Street* relevant for so many years is that the show is always evolving to both include and address changes in the culture. A few years ago, the show expressed a desire to respond to what early childhood educators said was a growing problem with young children: struggles with impulse control and self-regulation.

The creators of *Sesame Street* chose Cookie Monster to teach children about the importance of learning to delay gratification. Cookie Monster is, of course, well-known for his insatiable desire to consume cookies any chance he gets. The show decided to have Cookie Monster reform his ways, coming up with a new motto to help him teach children about waiting: “Me want it, but me wait!” The creators seem to know that when it comes to children, they do what they see.



No matter what our children may want—a cookie before dinner, wanting to go to a friend’s house before helping with a chore, or playing a video game before doing homework—learning to wait is a key to wellness for all ages.

None of these are in any way meant to be punitive, but are simply subtle ways to teach responsibility and self-control.

It is important to note that this same principle is also true for parents because wellness in all areas of our lives is closely related to our own self-regulation and impulse control. Our bodies will suffer if we simply eat every “cookie” that comes our way. If we eat the “cookie” of late-night movies, or work into the wee hours of the morning when we need to get up early thus not getting enough sleep, we will eventually burn out. If we eat and drink whatever we see, rather than making thoughtful choices, our bodies and emotions will suffer. If we consistently choose to eat the “cookie” of lounging on the couch rather than getting exercise, our bodies will get sluggish.

Creating healthy self-care habits for ourselves and for our children is something none of us will ever regret, and is a key step in the important process of learning to wait by using self-control.

3. Physical Education Teachers

You may have never thought of yourself as a Physical Education teacher, but that is exactly what you are as a parent. In fact, you are your child's most important PE teacher. You don't need a teaching license, but you do need a commitment to model and encourage physical activity for yourself and for your children.

We know children and youth need daily exercise. **Studies have consistently shown that children who get exercise during the school day, and who are physically active outside of school are both happier and healthier.**

It is also true that obesity and diabetes rates are currently at a record high for children and adults alike. Knowing this, it is even more imperative for families to encourage and model healthy habits regarding physical activity.

While parents can help their children to be more active, it is also true that children can serve as inspiration for their parents. Family trips to the playground or gym, hiking, biking, walks around the block, or practicing a sport with your child, can motivate everyone to become more active.



The biggest challenge you may face will be pressures related to busy schedules and the amount of time both parents and children spend in front of screens. Yet, it is our responsibility as parents to limit screen time and other sedentary activities that can stifle our children's inborn desires to be active, and lead the way in showing them how much fun being active can be. Don't let these challenges stop you! Just remember how valuable exercise is for your body and your spirits, and that it can be great fun, for you and for your family.

4. Listening to the Body

We invite you to listen to what your body, and the bodies of your children, may be telling you right now about everyone’s overall sense of well-being and life balance.

Our bodies always tell the truth. If we get sick repeatedly, for example, it is possible that our bodies are trying to warn us about the amount of stress in our lives, or that we need more rest, or healthier food. We need to listen and respond to the messages from our bodies. They never lie.

Take a moment right now and listen to what your body is telling you. Is your body feeling refreshed or exhausted? Are you feeling relaxed or tense? Is there a pain in your body that is trying to tell you something? Are you feeling weighed down or energized? Is your breathing deep and slow, or shallow and rapid? Think now about your children. How do you think they would answer these questions?

Listening to our bodies regularly, and teaching our children to do the same, is a good practice to develop.



If we don’t listen to our bodies when they are whispering to us, we are likely to find them impossible to ignore once they are forced to “shout” at us to get our attention. Caring for our bodies, and teaching our children to do the same, is no different than caring for anything else that is truly important. When everyone takes time to pay attention to their physical well-being, a family’s overall health and wellness can’t help but improve.

Listening to our bodies—and teaching our children to do the same—and caring for them with intention not only helps with our physical health, it also allows wellness to ripple out to other areas of our lives. Listening to our bodies and responding in healthy ways is well worth the time and effort it takes.

5. Mindful Eating

Hurry and worry are two conditions that chase us through our days if we let them, and nowhere is that more apparent than how we approach eating. How many of us pay little attention to what and how we eat? We skip meals, get takeout food and eat in the car on the way to yet another activity, we plop in front of the TV, or eat while standing up and working on something else. We eat a large meal devoid of any nutrients and then wonder why we're unsatisfied and grazing 30 minutes later, all the while knowing how many modern health issues are related to our diet. How can we begin to honor our bodies—and our children's bodies—through our approach to food and eating?

Following are some simple suggestions for getting started.

Pay close attention to all that you and your family does that involves food and eating: meal planning, shopping, preparing, cooking, eating, cleaning up. Involve your children in as many of these as possible as is age appropriate. Pay attention to every step of the process.



Set up a peaceful, pleasant space to eat. Encourage everyone to slow down, remembering to eat slowly and savor the tastes, smells, and look of what has been prepared.

Take a moment with your family when possible to appreciate how this food came to be on your table. Where was it grown? How did the sun, water, and the earth plus other people help make the food they are about to eat and make it available to them?

Some longer term ideas for you and your family to consider:

- Try growing some of your own food, even if only a few small pots in a sunny window growing a few herbs.
- Prepare your own food whenever possible (saves money and increases your appreciation of the food).
- Buy locally produced food when possible, and even better, buy directly from a local farmer.
- Learn more about food production and make thoughtful choices based on what you all learn.

Whatever you choose to try, we encourage you to take time regularly to examine the way you care for your body and for your children's bodies and decide if you think it is life-giving for you and for your family. As with all other areas of wellness, the behaviors we model speak more clearly to our children than anything we say.

Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you relate to caring for all of the bodies in your family, first by taking a Self-Assessment, and then by responding to the reflection questions that follow.

Please take a few moments now to rate the statements on the following Care for the Body Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone but you; you can respond to these statements honestly. You don't need to show your answers to anyone unless you choose to. This is an opportunity for you to listen to and better know yourself.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in any way a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. Don't spend too much time thinking about each response, just enough time to rate each statement honestly so that it is helpful if you want to refer back to it later on.



► Care for the Body Self-Assessment

The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes		Half of the Time			Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I strive to be a good role model for my children in terms of caring for our bodies. _____

I am teaching my family to recognize and avoid choices of all types that are not healthy. _____

I go to the doctor and dentist for regular checkups, and have my children do the same. _____

My family and I prioritize the sleep we need to function at our best. _____

I model listening to my body and making healthy adjustments as needed, and teach my children to do the same. _____

I model a healthy approach to sexuality for my children. _____

I do my best to make sure we all eat a healthy diet. _____

I model healthy decisions regarding the use of alcohol, other drugs, and tobacco. _____

I do my best to make sure that both my children and I get the exercise we need on a regular basis. _____

I care for my body in such a way as to have enough physical and mental energy to be the parent I want to be. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

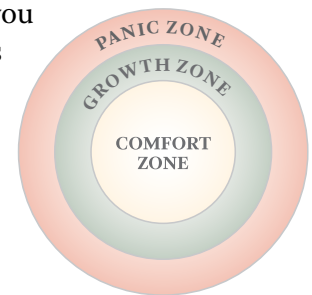
We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of care for the body as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

The following questions will be helpful as you think about caring for the body. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 94. Was there anything that surprised you? Why?

What was modeled in your home growing up in regard to physical wellness and caring for one's body? Think food, drink, sleep, exercise, sexuality, and body image. How does that affect the decisions you make today for you and your family? Are you comfortable with that?

Do you have any challenges currently in making and modeling good decisions around the above mentioned areas for you and your family? What kinds of changes could you make, or what support do you need, to reduce those challenges?

Is there a change you would like to make now in how you and your family care for your bodies? Be specific. How are things now and how would you like them to be?

What “cookies” are you as a parent tempted to eat when you shouldn’t? Staying up too late using social media? Eating on the run? Drinking too much?

One of the keys to physical wellness is learning to delay gratification. How does your family teach “Me Want It, But Me Wait”? Give some examples.

How might you better handle pushback when your children don’t like the self-care limits you set, such as a regular bedtime, brushing teeth, and eating healthy foods? Give concrete examples.

What are you currently teaching your children about the fun and importance of being active? Are you comfortable with what you are modeling?

Are the ways in which you and your children engage in physical activities healthy? Might it be too much or too little? Are there any changes you want to make as a family in terms of your level of physical activity? Describe.

Are there ways your child is inspiring you to be more active, perhaps inspiring you to do things you have never done before? Explain.

Take a few moments to listen to what your body is saying to you right now. What is your body saying? What would you like to hear? What might you do to make your body happier?

Regarding the idea that all areas of wellness in the Wellness Compass Model of Well-Being are interconnected, can you think of an example of how this is true for you and/or your family? How does everyone's physical health impact the rest of your lives?

Our children's behavior, no matter what their age, is a non-verbal way of telling us something. What behaviors do you observe that might indicate they need to take better care of their bodies in some way? Sleep? Food? Exercise? What could you do to help?

What do you think is the biggest challenge for you as a parent in caring for your own body? Might you be able to do anything about that?

What messages are you currently sending your children about nutrition, exercise, sexuality, sleep, the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs?

If you listen to the words you use to describe your body and those of your children, what do you hear yourself saying? Are you comfortable talking with your child in a positive way about their body, including their sexuality?

How could you encourage your family to better care for and celebrate their bodies? Be concrete.

Given that, “Whatever we pay attention to is what will grow,” as you look at your habits around physical wellness and care for your body, is there one thing you would like to pay more attention to? What could you do to get things going?

It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself in terms of caring for your body. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful for you. Now let’s take the next steps toward living into your desires for yourself and your family in this area.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life in the area of caring for your body, and teaching your family to do the same.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when everyone is where they want to be in terms of their physical health.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of caring for the body. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in making positive changes in this area of your life that can serve as hope and inspiration for you?

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make changes? Remember change is not easy, and that is normal.

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific timeframe (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Care for the Body

Date: _____

Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.	
Specific:	What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.
Measurable:	Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.
Achievable:	Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.
Relevant:	Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.
Time-bound:	Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.
Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?	Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?
Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

8. Resilience



It's your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself that determines how your life's story will develop.

—Albert Ellis

Step One: Learning

The word *resilience* means to *bounce back*, so when we talk about Resilience, we are talking about the ability to bounce back from, and recover from, all kinds of stressful situations family life presents. It is important to keep in mind that not all stress is “bad” stress. The right amount of the right kind of stress helps us prepare for the inevitable challenges life will bring our way. Challenging situations can sharpen our capacity to engage our imagination to solve problems, and when we overcome them we can increase our confidence.

Resilience is not something a person or a family either has or doesn't have, but rather is something that can be learned with practice and knowledge.

In fact, some of the most resilient families are those who have persevered through times of great stress, calling on healthy skills and habits they learned and nurtured along the way.

Stress is inevitable in the lives of all parents and families. The question is not whether we will face stress as a family, but how we will respond to it. When we proactively cultivate healthy habits, we will be better able to respond to stress from a place of relative strength. With that comes a much greater chance that we can be resilient and able to bounce back from whatever it is that is stressful to us.

When one person in a family, or the family as a whole, is going through a time of significant change, stress will naturally increase. It is during such times that we will have to be patient with ourselves and with others in the family, and not minimize the amount of extra energy it takes to navigate a significant change. Patience and compassion are key here.

In this chapter, you will learn some essential skills and habits that can help you and your children strengthen your resilience. And, as



with all areas of wellness, what we model for our children around how *we* handle stress significantly influences how *they* learn to handle it too. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications, following are six reflections related to resilience that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.

1. Gradually, Then Suddenly

In Hemingway’s famous book *The Sun Also Rises*, a character by the name of Mike Campbell is asked how he went bankrupt. He answers, “Two ways. Gradually. Then suddenly.” Had he been paying attention to his money problems, his bankruptcy would not have seemed to come suddenly and could possibly have even been avoided. Warning signs about stress building up in our lives also happens slowly, and then gradually increase.

The first sign that stress is hurting someone usually comes in a “whisper,” a quiet murmur, or a hint that things aren’t quite right. Whispers might show up in our bodies—a head ache, an upset stomach, or an inability to sleep—and might be telling us that we are under too much stress. Whispers sometimes show up in our emotions, such as moodiness, sadness, worry, or just plain crankiness. They can come from a desire to use alcohol or other drugs to calm down. Pulling away from friends and family, and wanting to be alone can also be a whisper. It’s wise to remember that whispers can show up in our children as well as in us, and that no matter their age, they will most likely not recognize these warning signs for what they are, nor have any idea how to handle their stress in healthy ways, unless we help them.

If these whispers for any of us aren’t listened to, they can have a way of getting louder. We also can get louder as those whispers get louder; any of us literally may start shouting or yelling at others. We may notice ourselves or others being contrary and disagreeing with everyone, especially the people in our families. Or someone may even withdraw.

If we pay to attention to the whispers in our family life or in each member’s individual lives, the problem can more easily be addressed. It is much easier to correct things before they grow into a shout no one can ignore.



2. The Wisdom of the “J” Curve

We introduced the J Curve on p. 21 (with more on p. 165) to help us understand the process of change and growth. As we mentioned, the J Curve is a helpful concept we often use to explain how change, both planned and unplanned, usually evolves over time.

The wisdom of the J Curve tells us that it is normal for things to initially get more challenging than we had hoped or planned for, even when we are choosing a change we want to make. This might be true for a family who is moving to a new town, a parent is starting a new job, or a change in the family set up through a breakup or remarriage. This is because they are not used to this new way of being, and adapting to change can be challenging for many families and their members.

We may be tempted to want to return to what was, but many times we can't. Instead, investing our energy in moving forward and garnering support from others, we will eventually begin to recognize growth and experience a new sense of stability.

The key to being resilient is finding a way to go forward and to accept the “new normal” in our lives.

One thing that can give us confidence as we face changes is to remember that we have all most likely gone through—and successfully navigated—many previous changes. We know, and can teach our children, that we all can and will, with time, intention, and the support of others, get through the J Curves of our lives, both planned and unplanned.

The J Curve can also be a very helpful tool for helping us to understand our children when they are going through times of change and transition. Any time our children experience a significant change in their lives they, too, will experience a J Curve. For example, the beginning of a new school year, moving, joining a team, a death in the family, parents splitting up, or the blending of families. Children of all ages need our help to negotiate these often-difficult changes until new, more stable levels of resilience and growth are established.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Another example is to think about adolescence as one prolonged J Curve for both teens and parents. Both are letting go of a previous level of connectedness and working their way toward greater levels of independence. It can be helpful to remember that while on the one hand, it may feel to the parents that things are falling apart, in reality things are starting to come together in a new and different way.

This understanding that J Curves are normal and predicable can help us develop the patience and perspective needed to move through any of the challenging times of change that naturally occur within a family.

3. The Importance of Timeouts

Through the years, we saw first-hand how our children's involvement in sports provided many valuable life lessons for them. One that stands out is the importance of knowing when to call a timeout. Timeouts are a key part of any good coaching strategy. For example, when a game is getting out of hand and a team is on the edge of falling apart, they need a timeout. The players might be tired, flustered, confused, or emotionally heated, and that is getting in the way of their playing a good game. This type of a timeout gives the coach a chance to help the team calm down, regroup, and make a new plan.

The importance of well-timed timeouts is as important in family life as it is in sports. Whenever you or your children find yourselves getting stressed, tired, flustered, confused, or emotionally heated because—for whatever reason—life is getting out of hand, it's time to call a timeout. A parent who is stressed by work, worried about bills, or their child's experience at school, and is about to say something they are going to regret will benefit from a timeout.

Children who find themselves flooded with emotion also need to be taught about the power of taking a timeout. Frustration, anger, jealousy, sadness, and grief are all emotions that can require a timeout. These timeouts are not meant to ignore or gloss over the pressures and emotions that are present. Instead they give everyone a chance to calm down, regroup, and a devise a new plan for expressing themselves and solving the problems at hand.

Learning when and how to take a timeout to regroup is one of the first lessons for successfully swimming through emotions. As the coaches of our families, it is up to us to call as many timeouts as we need, and to encourage our children to do the same, to reduce the stress everyone is experiencing. The important thing is to help everyone realize when the need is there, and then to not hesitate to make the call.



4. Learning to Be “Response-able”

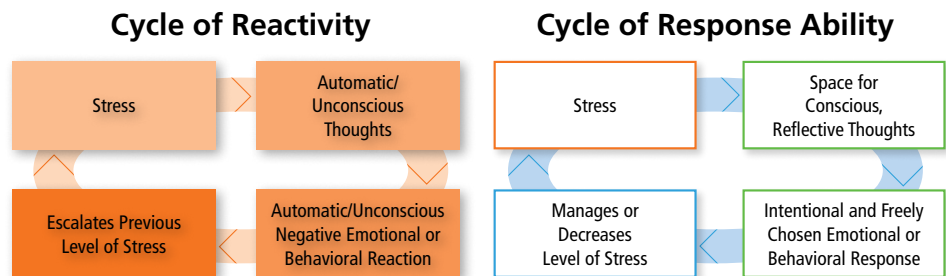
When stress arises in our families, we can choose—and this is a very important distinction—to either react or respond. When we simply react impulsively, it is likely an indication that our emotions have taken over. When this happens, we may later regret what we have said or done. When we overreact with our children, we often are tempted to blame our child for our overreaction. While it may be true that we would not have

overreacted if our child hadn't done what they did, we are still the ones responsible for our own behavior.

Responding, on the other hand, means we are able to *choose* the response we wish to make. To respond is to be thoughtful and controlled before we speak or act. Remembering that our children are always watching and learning from us, it is optimal whenever possible to choose to respond thoughtfully to our children rather than thoughtlessly reacting.

It is not uncommon for both parents and children to lose their perspective from time to time. It is also not uncommon to get “hooked” and find ourselves caught in a cycle of reactivity. When people in a family feel stressed, angry, or hurt, they tend to react impulsively. They are in a state of fight-or-flight and tend to react emotionally, that is, to overreact. That overreaction is emotional reactivity. In that moment, perceptions of the situation are altered. The emotional charge prevents us from seeing the situation for what it is, so we merely react. At this point, there is no listening going on anymore. Our emotions and defenses are driving our behaviors. The challenge then is to become aware of when we are in such a reactive cycle, take responsibility for our part of that cycle, and then to learn from what has happened.

The diagram below illustrates the difference between a “Cycle of Reactivity” and a “Cycle of Response-Ability.”



Blaming others, including our children or partners, for our reactivity will not help us regain our balance, and will only prolong the cycle of stress that is being created. We may later regret that we reacted too quickly and too impulsively because it hurts everyone. Instead, we need to remember to pause and take some deep breaths, putting on our own oxygen masks first, so to speak. Other helpful things we can do when stress is high includes practicing listening to the other person, not acting right away, and removing ourselves from the situation.

We will never regret that we paused and took some time to think about how to respond in the midst of an emotionally stressful situation. And our children will learn an important lesson through our example, as well.

5. Trust. Feel. Talk

There are three simple things you and your family can practice to help you recognize stress, and help you figure out how to deal with and diminish it: trust, feel, talk.

Trust. Trust is a day-to-day byproduct created by honesty, loyalty, and integrity. It is the bedrock of family life because when trust is present, family members feel safe and know they can be honest with each other, sharing both concerns and joys. When people feel safe they are more apt to be vulnerable and share feelings of stress and worry.

Feel. A home where everyone is encouraged to feel and share in a safe way all of their feelings—which are a natural and normal part of life—reduces stress for everyone, children and parents alike.

Talk. Also important is that we teach and model how to talk about feelings so that the whole family can positively face them, and thus reduce, stress.

We enhance our family's well-being when we create an accepting and loving environment where everyone can trust, feel, and talk honestly and freely. If everyone can be made to feel safe in this way it will undoubtedly make for a more relaxing and happy life for all.

6. More Ways to Grow Resilience

When we commit to regularly engaging in a practice that supports us in our efforts to strengthen our resilience and to better manage stress, this effort will strengthen our spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being as well. Following are some healthy coping methods members of a family could use to better manage the stress in their lives.

- Spending relaxing time with friends and family
 - Preparing a meal together
 - Enjoying a park
 - Getting enough sleep
 - Listening to one another.
 - Engaging in a hobby that you love.
 - Spending time with a pet.
 - Yoga or mindfulness
- Exercising
- Being organized and planning ahead
- Having fun together
- Reducing caffeine and screen intake
- Dancing
- Eating a balanced diet
- Making or listening to music
- Intentionally speaking respectfully to each other
 - Talking with someone who cares
 - Taking time for yourself

Stress is a part of life. There is no getting away from it, but we can learn to manage and reduce it in healthy ways, and we can teach our families the same. Like all things, this takes *practice, practice, practice*. But, it can be done.

Let's be clear: resilient parents and families are not those without challenges. All families face difficult times— No family is immune. Resilient families have developed—and continue to strengthen—the thoughts and habits that give them the ability to cope with their challenges. In fact, some of the most resilient parents and families are those that have faced some of the most difficult challenges, have come out the other side, and are once more moving forward. They faced the challenge before them, and it ultimately helped them grow.

Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you relate to resilience, first by taking a Self-Assessment, and then by responding to the reflection questions that follow the Self-Assessment.

Please take a few moments now to rate the statements on the following Stress-Resilience Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone but you; you can respond to these statements honestly. You don't need to show your answers to anyone unless you choose to. This is an opportunity for you to listen to and better know yourself.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in any way a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. Don't spend too much time thinking about each response, just enough time to rate each statement honestly so that it is helpful if you want to refer back to it later on.



► Resilience Self-Assessment

The ability to deal positively with the adversities of life.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes		Half of the Time			Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I do my best to adjust to changes in our family life in a positive way, and help my children to do the same. _____

When we are stressed or in the midst of a transition, my family and I are comfortable seeking support from each other and from others. _____

I am satisfied with the way I manage my own stress, so that it minimally impacts my children. _____

My family and I work to keep our challenges in perspective. _____

My family and I recognize the stressors in our lives and intentionally take steps to address them. _____

We are learning effective ways to alleviate stress, such as exercising, meditating, journaling, and connecting with others. _____

My family and I work to avoid activities that add excessive stress to our lives. _____

We have built a network of support around us that we can turn to when stressed. _____

I am able to respond thoughtfully to stressful situations, rather than merely reacting, and am teaching my children to do the same. _____

My family and I know how to take timeouts in the midst of stressful situations when needed. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

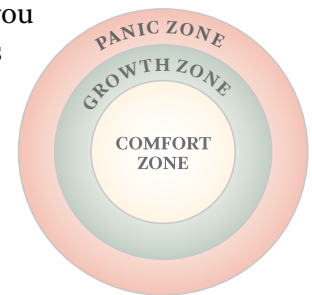
In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of resilience as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Jan Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

The following questions will be helpful as you think about resilience and your family. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 112. Was there anything that stood out to you? Why? What did you learn?

What wisdom do you draw from the answer Mike Campbell gave in *The Sun Also Rises* about how his bankruptcy happened "gradually, then suddenly"? How could that wisdom relate to your family and stress?

What might happen if you continue to live with the current amount of stress in your life? Explain why you think so. What might you do to reduce the stress or to help your family manage stress in a healthier way going forward?

Are you in the midst of any significant transitions or “J” Curves in your own life right now? How is that affecting your family? Do you have a child in the midst of a significant transition or “J” Curve at this time? How are they adjusting? How could you help?

If you, your child, or both are going through a transition currently, what concretely could you do to help everyone cope with the changes?

Can you think of a time recently when you were able to call a timeout for yourself and/or your child while in the midst of a stressful situation? How did that go? Was it helpful? If you have not tried this, do you think it might be helpful? Explain. If your children are old enough, you can invite them to help you strategize the best ways to call timeouts in your family.

How could the practice of carefully choosing your responses to your children or partner impact your family’s well-being?

Think of a time recently when you or someone in your family reacted rather than responded. What factors do you think contributed to this?

Now think of time when you or someone else were able to deal with a stressful situation by responding rather than reacting. What helped to make this happen? What can you learn from this?

Children often react rather than responding thoughtfully. Part of growing up is learning to think before acting or speaking. How could you help teach and model this skill in your family?

How is your family doing now in terms of practicing the key habits of “trust, feel, and talk”? Is there anything you would like to do differently to enhance these three habits in your family?

It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself in this area of resilience. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let's take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life with your family in the area of resilience.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be in this area of wellness.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of resilience. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in making positive changes in the area of wellness that can serve as hope and inspiration for you?

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make changes?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific time frame (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Resilience

Date: _____

Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.	
Specific:	What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.
Measurable:	Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.
Achievable:	Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.
Relevant:	Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.
Time-bound:	Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.
Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?	Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?
Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

The Wellness Compass
9. Organization



With organization comes empowerment.

—Lynda Peterson

Step One: Learning

The area of Organization in the Wellness Compass focuses on how we organize our schedules, money, possessions, and priorities in our families. The holistic approach to wellness taught in this program emphasizes that all eight areas of wellness are interconnected. For example, we know that being disorganized can be a cause and a symptom of stress, or of relationship trouble, or can result in a lack of time for rest and play. We see this both in our lives as adults, and in the lives of our children.

One of the themes running throughout this book is the importance of raising our families with intention and purpose. This is because as parents, we serve as a model and a compass for our children and how we organize our time, money, possessions, and priorities will have a large influence on them. Our children are always watching and learning from us.

Stress surfaces in many families when we allow outside pressures to influence our decisions about how we should organize our lives. Of course, sometimes this is unavoidable, such as when an unexpected crisis happens that affects everyone. It is also common for families to find ourselves overextended because we have taken on too many time and/or financial commitments. The cumulative effects of over-committing creates a burden on our family's ability to be clear, centered, and organized based on what is most important to us.



The information and examples in this chapter are meant to encourage us as parents to remember that more is not always better, and that learning to be more intentional about organizing our priorities will go a long way toward enhancing the well-being of each member of the family.

In this chapter we invite you to learn, reflect, and practice new habits as you focus your attention on the ways you and your family organize your time, priorities, money, and possessions. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications, following are four reflections related to organization that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope you find value in them too.

1. Learning Organization: The Hidden Curriculum

Teaching responsibility and organization is an important “hidden curriculum” for parents. Yet, in order for organizational skills to really stick, they need to be taught and modeled consistently, and then reinforced over time through our actions. We can’t assume that our children—no matter what their age or how smart we think they are—know how to get or stay organized. So we need to teach them while we practice the same skills ourselves. We also need to give positive support and reinforcement, and to have a lot of patience.

“Practicing what we preach” is as important here as in any other part of life because children are wired to imitate and will most likely follow our ways. If our children see us taking care of our things, keeping things orderly, and being on time, they will learn that this is important and will likely do the same. Helping them to develop the skill of organization is done in part through our example.

We can trust that the time we devote to helping our children learn the skill of caring for and organizing both their things and their time will be well worth the effort for everyone in the long run.



2. Organizing Our Priorities

The meaning of the word *priority* can be found in the meaning of the root word *prior*, which means “that which comes before,” or “that which comes first.” This definition makes it clear that when we talk about family priorities, we are talking about those things that are of first or utmost importance to our family. Priorities guide us in organizing all of our many choices. How are we doing with putting each other first? Our home? Our jobs? School? Activities? Community involvement? Friends and neighbors? Extended family? Connection with a faith community? How we spend our time reveals a lot about our priorities.

Often without even realizing it, every family shows who they are by the way they order their priorities. They reveal what is most important, both in short- and long-term decisions, day in and day out. Sometimes families get swept up in the day-to-day activities and do not realize that they are not living into the priorities they actually feel are most important. They are not organizing their time the way they would like to be organizing it and want a change.

One of the recurring invitations in this Notebook is to reflect on the many compasses that are competing to guide the decisions we make as parents. To make our core values our compass is to give priority to what matters most. We also want the decisions we make regarding how we organize our time, money, and possessions to reflect our values because they directly impact our family's well-being.



It is one thing to say that family is one of our most important priorities; it is another thing to reflect that priority in our day-to-day choices. To know if our family priorities are aligned with our deepest values and beliefs, we need to pause and reflect on our lived reality. We need to consider honestly how we order our lives, not just how we think about, or say, we order them. For instance, can my family tell that they are a high priority in my life?

To honor and live into shared values as a family, it is important for parents to make time to have regular discussions, and also to have family meetings to discuss and make clear the values that we as parents identify for our families. With thoughtful discussions about these important topics, any family can make wise decisions and feel good about where they are headed. And as a bonus, everyone will also learn the important skills of careful listening, problem-solving, and learning to respect differences.

3. Do We Manage Our Schedules or Do Our Schedules Manage Us?

Many of us as parents often express regret that our children's lives are over-scheduled and too busy. If we are willing to look in the mirror, we may see that our children's schedules often reflect our own lives. It seems to have become a badge of honor and a sign of success in our modern culture to be constantly "busy," and that pace of living has seeped into the pace and rhythm of family life.

Committing to too many activities is like eating at an all-you-can-eat buffet. If you eat too much, your overall experience will be one of dissatisfaction. Many families seem to approach life as an "all-you-can-do" buffet, and end up feeling dissatisfied, distracted, and exhausted.

If you can identify with this description, it might be helpful to consider these questions:

- Have you ever found yourself stretched too thin?
- Are you often busy but not productive?
- Do you feel like your time is constantly being hijacked by other people's agendas?

This Notebook is not another “how-to” book about organizing time, money, or stuff. It is about identifying our “why’s. “Why is it so important to organize based on our own priorities?” According to Greg McKeown, author of *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, organizing our priorities requires us to focus our energy on determining what is most essential to us and doing only those things. The following from the book helps make this point.

“Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it’s about how to get the right things done.”

This, then, is the real question: What are the right things to get done? Each parent, each family, has to answer this for themselves. Of course there are many

things that must be done on a regular basis to keep a family running: laundry, grocery shopping, work and school, meal preparation and clean up, baths and bedtime rituals, homework, paying the bills, and cleaning the house to name a few.

All of these tasks are necessary, but many of the other things we do are not mandatory, and so we must examine those things and decide if they are right for us. How do our extracurricular activities fit in? Are they enhancing our lives or are they stretching us too thin? Which of our other activities truly enhance our lives, and which ones drain time and energy away from what matters most?

We started with the question: “Do we manage our schedules, or do our schedules manage us?” It is a good question for every family to answer for themselves. If we feel that our lives are being controlled by our schedule, we may need to ask this question of ourselves.

How can we learn to say “no” more often so that we have renewed energy to be more fully present for the things we want to commit to doing?

The reward for families who commit to the hard work of doing less is frequently less stress, more time together, and more time to rest and renew themselves. These, and many other benefits, make it well worth the effort it takes to implement needed changes to take back control of our time.

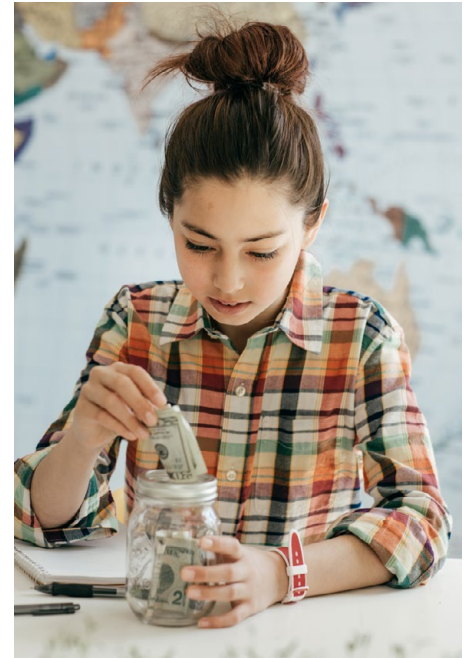


4. Our Relationship with Money and Possessions

A popular cultural assumption about money is that money = happiness. Left unexamined, this assumption can create stress for us and for our families. Research on this topic reveals that once a family's basic security needs are met for food, shelter, healthcare, and safety, there is no direct correlation between how much money we have and the degree of self-reported happiness we experience. As parents, it is good for us to explore how much we have bought into the assumption that money and happiness are connected, and to examine the stress this assumption may be causing us and our families.

We have been led to believe that greater happiness is tied to greater financial resources and the accumulation of possessions. Parents and families around the world have a variety of financial mindsets—some that are life-giving and some that are not, some that bring happiness, and some that do not.

We must decide for ourselves whether or not the relationship we have with money is serving us well. We need to examine what our children are learning about money and the role it plays in our life as a family.



Teaching our children to respect what money can do is important as they learn to save it, spend it, and share it with others. Keeping these three things in mind and finding the right balance between them will help our children grow up with a healthier relationship with money.

The financial education that we provide our children is largely influenced by the behaviors and mindset that we model in our own lives around the role and importance of money and possessions. In our work with families, we find that there are a few primary areas of stress related to money that seem universal. One is when a family gets caught up in the consumerism of the culture, stuck on the treadmill of always wanting and thinking they need to have more, but not realizing the toll this is taking on their family's overall well-being. We have worked with many families who, after reaching a state of being overwhelmed and exhausted from trying to have more, are able to come together and begin making more conscious choices around their relationship with money. Some have chosen to go in a different direction, instead following a compass that will guide them toward making decisions that are healthier for everyone in the family.

Another area of financial stress that we see in families is related to difficulties communicating effectively about money. Money is a sensitive topic because it often brings up all kinds of issues that are related to values. When parents have different values,

this often shows up in how they handle money. When this happens, it takes listening empathetically, being honest about feelings toward how any other adult in the family chooses to spend, save, and share money, and being patient and respectful toward each other so that they can discuss their different values and beliefs.

It is important to practice these good communication tools around money regularly and proactively. Don't wait until trouble arises. Regular family discussions, regardless of our children's ages, about budgeting, saving, and how much to share with others through charitable giving, are all helpful ways to grow financial and organizational wellness in the family.

Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you are doing in the area of organization, first by taking a Self-Assessment, and then by responding to the reflection questions that follow.

Please take a few moments now to rate the statements on the following Organization Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone else to see unless you choose to share it with them. This is meant to be a safe place where you have an opportunity to focus on the life of your family and listen to yourself and how you relate to organization through the lens of your role in the family.

As you complete the Wellness Self-Assessment you may become aware of where you and your family are currently feeling out of balance. This knowledge can help you decide what next steps you are ready to take that will help everyone find more balance.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in any way a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together.



Organization Self-Assessment

The ability to keep track of and make good use of your time, money, and possessions.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes		Half of the Time			Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

The way our family manages our money, and possessions reflects our most important values and priorities. _____

We have family conversations before we plan and schedule our activities to assure that they match our priorities. _____

I speak age appropriately with my children about money, and model healthy ways of spending, saving, and sharing. _____

Chores and expectations for helping around our home are clearly communicated, understood, and carried out. _____

I am teaching my children, and modeling for them, how to help keep our home clean and organized. _____

I feel confident that the number of activities our family participates in is good for everyone. _____

I know how my children spend their time and with whom they are spending it, and feel comfortable with what I know. _____

I am intentional about the amount of money my children have access to and how they use it. _____

I am helping my children learn how to manage their time and am working to model the same. _____

We have a system for planning and keeping track of our activities that works for everyone. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

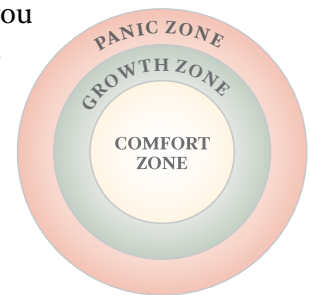
We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of organization as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

The following questions will be helpful as you think about how you and your family are doing in the area of organization. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your family life. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself or your family in the area of organization? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 127. Was there anything that stood out to you? Why?

In what ways do you help your children be organized and responsible?

Are you happy with how you model being organized for your children (think money, possessions and time)? If not, what change would you like to make?

Is there a next step you would like to take now in how you teach your children the skills of organization? Explain.

The way we manage our time reveals a lot about our priorities. Does the way you are currently prioritizing things line up with what you say you value? If not, how could you change that?

Have you ever had a sit-down family conversation about values and priorities? What might the value of such a conversation be in terms of organizing your family's time, money, and possessions?

Do you ever waste time? When? What were you doing? How do you feel about that? Describe.

What might you and your family eliminate in order to be more fully present to the things that matter most to you? What could you all say “no” to?

How might doing less help your family be healthier and happier?

Every family seems to have some stress around money. Does your family ever discuss earning and spending habits? How might your stress be reduced if you changed one of those things, earning and spending?

Saving, spending, and sharing are three things you can do with your money, individually and as a family. Do you feel like your family has the right balance between these three? Explain.

If everyone's possessions were more organized, would your family life be less stressful? In what ways? Describe.

How might the other seven areas of wellness be impacted if your family were to pay more attention to being organized? Think about each area individually.

It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself and your family in the area of organization. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let's take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life with your family in the area of organization.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be in this area of wellness.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of organization. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in getting organized that can serve as hope and inspiration for you?

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make your changes?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific time frame (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Organization

Date: _____

<p>Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.</p>	
<p>Specific: What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.</p>	
<p>Measurable: Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.</p>	
<p>Achievable: Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.</p>	
<p>Relevant: Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.</p>	
<p>Time-bound: Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.</p>	
<p>Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?</p>	<p>Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?</p>
<p>Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.</p>	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

The Wellness Compass
10. Work and School



It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.

—E.E. Cummings

Step One: Learning

In our work as therapists, especially at the beginning of the school year, we find that parents come to us with issues related to school challenges that their child is experiencing (fitting in, fears about going back, establishing new routines, grades, conflicts with teachers, athletics, behavior in and out of school with peers), and work/life balance. Many parents struggle with how to balance their work life with their home life, which includes their children's experiences at school. The demands of everyone's work can impact life at home, and our children's school experiences can also impact our home life.

The challenge is how to balance all of these roles and responsibilities. Balancing the demands of work and school for our families is an ongoing process. If things are difficult at home, work could either become an escape, or it might be difficult for us to focus. If our physical health is poor, if we are dealing with constant pain or some other condition, it most likely will make working difficult and keeping up with responsibilities a challenge. If we are feeling depressed, work definitely can be more challenging. Our children may be experiencing the same.

Our children are learning important things about us. They know if we like our jobs or find them a challenge. They know if we resent having to earn a living to support them, or if we think of it as a privilege in order to better care for them. They know if our jobs take up most of our time and energy, or if family life is just as important.



They are also learning through their life at school to balance more and more and, at the same time, are figuring out day by day a bit more about who they are. They are becoming more aware of their own strengths and struggles, and finding out about both their passions, and what is not at all interesting. This happens at school, in the classroom, on the playground, in the hallways, on the bus, and in the parking lot. Keeping

all this in mind, it is important to remember that our support will be essential as we watch them grow and face inevitable struggles.

In this chapter we invite you to learn, reflect, and practice new habits as you focus your attention on your role as a parent, at work and at home. To provide additional insight through illustrations and practical applications, following are four reflections related to work and school that we have found valuable in our work with parents. We hope they help you think about the role work and school are playing in your family's well-being.

1. Free to Be Who They Truly Are

Our responsibility in life is simply to show up as the fullest and most authentic version of ourselves. And, as parents, it is our job to nurture the unique spirit and expression that is within each of our children.

When we talk with parents we sometimes hear about the conflicts they have when their child is not turning out to be the person they dreamed of or wanted their child to be. "I was so hoping my child would be good at sports like I was, but they have absolutely no interest in sports." "I thought my daughter would be a really interested in science, but it has become clear to me that she doesn't have the same desire or interest that I had." "My child hates to read but has more friends than I can count. I don't know how to handle this because I was a book worm."

We have a responsibility to guide and direct each of our children but, in the end, it is about helping them grow into the person they are meant to be.

A birch tree seed does not grow into an oak tree, no matter how much guidance and direction it gets, and an oak tree will never grow into a pine tree. There is no feeling more satisfying than showing up in the world as your true self, something we all continue to work on our entire lives.

We remember when our children first began to love picking out their own clothes and then going out in public in the most creative outfits imaginable. At such moments, after taking a deep breath, it was easy to look at them and think, "There is truly 'no one who is more youer than you!'" Most young children do not look to others for approval of their style; they know what they like and what makes them feel good, and that's that.

And, it's not just two-year-olds who like to put together creative outfits, as any parent of a teen knows all too well. Teens are also trying to express their unique identity by literally trying on different ways of presenting themselves to the world. There are limits to what parents may allow in terms of how their adolescent dresses, but if we can be generous with those limits and not get too reactive when those limits are tested, these young people can continue to safely explore this part of who they are and how they want to be seen in the world. They can be free to be who they truly are.



2. We Are Our Child's Most Important Teacher and Compass

We play many roles in the lives of our children, most especially that of teacher. In a sense, every child is home-schooled, learning at home most of the important lessons in life, such as values, ethics, how to view and treat others, and how to be a good citizen in the world. Other teachers in our children's lives reinforce these types of lessons, but we are the ones who will always be our children's most important teachers.

Our children will have many teachers in their lives, but none more important than us as their parents or care-givers.

We also serve as compasses for our children. They are following our direction each and every day. When we live out of our core values, we are modeling living into an essential role as a trusted guide.

A navigational compass works through the influence of a force outside of the compass, magnetic north, which acts upon the compass itself. When the compass is free from other magnetic forces or fields acting upon it, it will always point north.

There are many forces acting upon and even pulling on us, and it can be all too easy to become disoriented and find ourselves heading in a direction other than our True North. We may be influenced by social media, our culture, and peer pressure, rather than listening to our own heart. Our children have the same challenges.

Nowhere is the state of our own mental and emotional wellness more apparent than in the way we interact with our children. When we are oriented toward our True North, our interactions with our children are more likely to be loving, patient, and kind. On the other hand, when we are pulled in multiple directions and when we are not oriented toward True North, our children may suffer.

It is important to remember that no matter what is going on in our lives, our children are always watching and learning from us.

The process of checking our bearings and reorienting our lives when necessary, and modeling that for our children, is the essence of living a mindful life.



3. Rethinking Discipline

We often hear parents talking about how to discipline their children. They wonder what is appropriate for the age of their child and for the trouble the child has gotten into. Should the punishments get more severe as a child ages and the trouble is more serious? “How do I discipline my two-year-old son when he runs out into the street? What about when my ten-year-old daughter lies about what movie she and a friend have watched? Or when my teen steals money out of my wallet?” We love these questions because they give us a chance to discuss the true meaning and role of discipline in raising a child.

The word *discipline* means to *teach*. It does not necessarily mean to punish, as many people think. For example, a discipline is a branch of knowledge one typically studies in higher education; and a disciple is one who is taught, a student. These two definitions imply that both teaching and learning are an important part of discipline.

One common definition of discipline includes a link to punishment and/or consequences for bad behavior. Punishment by itself is merely a penalty for an offense, and learning how to do things differently next time is not always the goal. If we get caught in a cycle where we are regularly punishing and scolding our children, then we may need to step back and take a fresh look to how we think about and use discipline. To think of disciplining as teaching is new for some of us yet, over time, it can change the way we parent.

One of the first things we will discover when we shift our thinking to discipline as teaching rather than punishment is that teaching takes more patience, effort, and time. No wonder it sometimes seems easier to just dole out punishments. Whether we are teaching our child how to handle a disagreement, how to tell us that they are struggling with a subject at school and need help, or how to deal with whatever it is that makes them want



4. Which School of Parenting Did You Attend?

One of our primary roles as a parent is that of teacher. In order to become a teacher, one must first attend some sort of a school in order to learn the material they will be teaching. We all attended a school of parenting: the family in which we were raised. There we were taught what it means to be a parent and a family, and we carry those lessons with us to this day. The adults who raised us were our primary teachers, and we spent thousands of hours in their “classroom.” Now as parents, and often without being aware of it, our approach to parenting mostly likely repeats much of what we experienced as a child.

Some of us were fortunate to have attended a wonderful “school” of parenting with wonderful, loving teachers. Some of us were not so fortunate. None of us chose the family—the parenting “school”—into which we were born. And whatever our experience, we had no choice but to internalize that experience: one based on love or one based on fear, and often somewhere in between.

The graphic illustrates this by showing the two core emotions: love and fear, as well as the other emotions that derive from them. They are presented on a teeter-totter to emphasize the constant need for us to decide which end of the teeter-totter we weigh most heavily as parents with our words and actions.

Like a teeter-totter, at times we will find ourselves going back and forth between love and fear. It is so easy for fear to overpower love, and for us to parent out of our fears, especially if this is how we were parented. Yet with practice and with commitment and perseverance, we can learn to parent primarily out of our love rather than out of our fear. When we do this, we will have a much better chance of positively influencing our children, not just for today, but for a lifetime.



Step Two: Listening to Yourself

In this section, you will have an opportunity to pause and listen to yourself and reflect on how you as a parent are doing in this area of wellness. First, you are invited take a brief Self-Assessment, and then respond to the reflection questions that follow.

Please take a few moments now to rate the ten statements on the following Work and School Parenting Self-Assessment. This Assessment isn't for anyone else to see unless you choose to share it with them. This is a safe place where you have an opportunity to listen to and better know yourself.

This is intended to be a resource to support you as you pay attention to how you think things are going for you and your family in this important area of life. As *you* complete the Wellness Self-Assessment you may become aware of where you are currently feeling out of balance. This knowledge can help you decide what next steps you are ready to take that will help you and your family find more balance.

Be honest with yourself, yet gentle, as well. There are no right or wrong answers; the results are not in anyway a judgement of you as a person or a parent. You are who you are, and this is one way for you to see how you have been tending to this part of your family's life together. Don't spend too much time thinking about each response, just enough to rate each statement as honestly as possible so that your responses can be helpful if you want to refer back to them later on.



▶ Work and School Self-Assessment

The ability to balance work, school, and other responsibilities at home in order for everyone in the family to thrive at work, school, and in the rest of life.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on p. 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see p. 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes			Half of the Time			Most of the Time			Always
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I encourage and support my children in being who they are discovering themselves to be. _____

I see, appreciate, and celebrate the unique gifts that my children possess. _____

Knowing I am my children’s most important teacher, I model positive values around work, school, and home-life balance for my children. _____

I model the importance of learning by being a life-long learner myself. _____

I am aware of my child’s school responsibilities and make sure they have the time, materials, and support needed to fulfill them each day. _____

I lift up my child’s strengths at school as much as I do their challenges. _____

The role of grades and other measures of performance in our home is balanced and affirming for all involved. _____

I connect with my children’s school and teachers in a way that is supportive and appropriate for the age of my children. _____

I am open to learning from my children. _____

I make sure my children know I care about their life at school by supporting their school related activities. _____

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mapping Your Current Reality

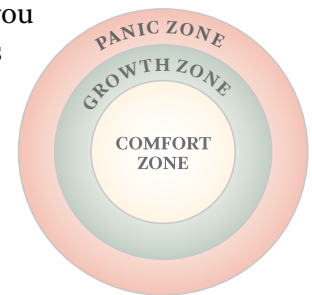
In this section we invite you to map your current reality using three models of growth and change that we introduced on pp. 20–21. As you consider the area of well-being we are focusing on in this chapter, think about where you are in the process of growth and change. For example, if you don't feel that you need or have even considered make any changes in this area of your life as a parent, you're likely in the precontemplation stage for #1, the Comfort Zone in #2, and perhaps at the upper left side of the J Curve in #3. It is important to keep in mind that we are all in different stages of change in each area of well-being.

We encourage you to mark in some way where you are in these models. We hope this is a helpful way for you to learn and discover more about where you find yourself right now in the process of change in this area of well-being. As we've mentioned before, this is a present-moment snapshot of where you find yourself in this area of well-being. Remember, there are no "right" or "wrong" or "good" or "bad" responses. Using tools like these, you will be able to measure and track your growth over time.

1. **Stages of Change.** Circle the stage you feel best describes where you are right now in your thoughts about making a change in the area of work and school as a parent. Learn more about the Stages of Change on p. 163.



2. **The Three Zones.** Place an "x" or other mark in the Zone you feel best describes where you find yourself right now as you consider making the change you have in mind. Learn more about the Zones on p. 164.



3. **The "J" Curve.** Most people expect that if they choose to make a change, things will automatically get better, but in reality things frequently get harder before they get better. This is why many people are tempted to go back to the familiar. Here we invite you to place an "x" or other mark in whatever place along the J Curve that best represents where you are in the process. Are you finding it to be more challenging than you expected? Learn more about the J Curve on p. 165.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

Reflecting

The following questions will be helpful as you think about how you and your family are doing in the areas of work and school. You might also reflect back on the work that you have done previously in your own career or education. Feel free to respond to all, or only to those that apply to you at this point in your life. And keep in mind that your responses are intended for your personal reflection, and there's no obligation to share your answers with anyone, unless you decide to do so.

As you mapped your current reality on the previous page, did you discover anything new about yourself or your family in the area of Work and School and parenting? Were there any surprises? Ah-ha's? Describe.

Go back to the Self-Assessment you took on p. 144. Was there anything that stood out to you? Why?

In what particular ways did you express your individuality as a child, teen, or young adult? Were your parents supportive of what you did, or did it create a conflict between you?

How do you see your children trying to express their individuality right now? Are you handling it in a way that will enhance their well-being? Describe.

Is there a next step you would like to take now to greater support your child in being who they are discovering themselves to be?

Who or what are some of your important teachers about life? How does that impact your family now? How did you choose them to be your guides or teachers?

Good teachers work on improving their lessons and skills in order to better serve their students. Knowing that you are your child's most important teacher, is there a next step you would like to take to improve your skills as a teacher of your own children?

How could a shift in thinking about discipline as teaching rather than as punishing influence the way you deal with a particular unwanted behavior you are seeing in your child? Be specific.

What kind of parenting school did you attend? What did you learn that you want to teach your children? What would you like to do differently? Why is that?

We hope you have experienced benefits by learning more about the relationship and balance between work and school and your role as a parent. It is important to take time regularly to reflect on where you currently find yourself and your family in this area. We hope this step of learning and reflecting has been helpful and meaningful. Now let's take the next steps toward living it.

Step Three: Living It

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life with your family in the area of work and school.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be as a parent in this area of well-being.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change in the area of work and school. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source. Write your chosen quote here.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | Have you had previous success in making positive changes in this area of your life that can now serve as hope and inspiration for you? Describe.

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or in your family might arise as you seek to make changes in this area? Remember resistance to change is normal.

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. (see worksheet on next page). Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps.

SMART Step | List the SMART Step from the worksheet on the following page that you will take within a specific time frame (we suggest no longer than two weeks from now) that will move you toward your main goal.

SMART Step Worksheet



Area of Wellness:

Work and School

Date: _____

<p>Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.</p>	
<p>Specific: What exactly will you do? Think <i>who, what, where, when,</i> and/or <i>how</i> you will do this.</p>	
<p>Measurable: Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.</p>	
<p>Achievable: Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.</p>	
<p>Relevant: Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this <i>why</i> to your core values for inspiration and motivation.</p>	
<p>Time-bound: Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.</p>	
<p>Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?</p>	<p>Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?</p>
<p>Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.</p>	

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

11. The Journey Continues

By now it is likely that you have read most, if not all, of this *Notebook*, reflected on your life as a parent, and perhaps created some SMART Steps for yourself and your family. In doing so, you have demonstrated a strong commitment to your well-being, as well as the well-being of your family. You have helped your family in ways that may already be apparent, or in ways that will become more so over time. It takes courage to engage in honest self-reflection, and we applaud you for what you have committed to and what you have accomplished. If you have made it this far, you have likely committed to making positive changes for you and your family. Congratulations!

Next Steps

Now that you are familiar with the concepts in this *Notebook*, you might want to invite other parents to read through the book together, with you as the facilitator and guide for the discussions. Our hope is that this *Notebook* can be a catalyst for parents to gather, talk, reflect, and make adjustments in their habits, if needed. These honest conversations, and the support parents will receive from one another, will build stronger families and communities of support for everyone.

We invite you to revisit this guide anytime you want to remind yourself of the insights you have gained and the intentions you have set. And, if you have not yet taken the Self-Assessments for all eight areas of well-being and explored each area of wellness, now would be a good time to do that.

We recommend that you retake each Wellness Self-Assessment from time to time, perhaps every six months or so.

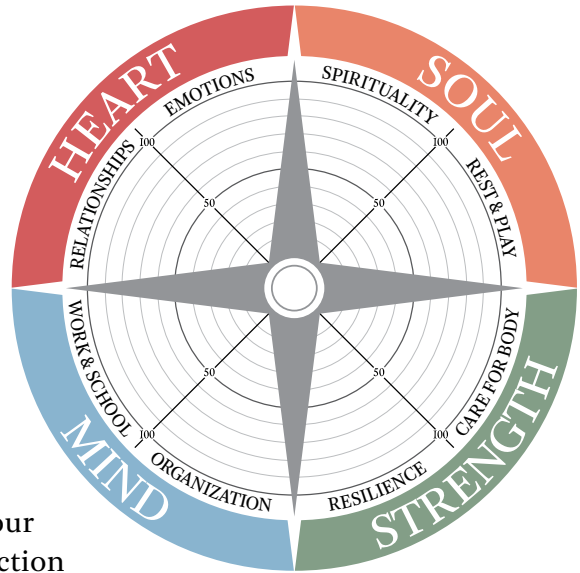
This will provide a regular opportunity for you to reassess your current reality, while also allowing you to see and appreciate your progress on the journey toward greater wellness. Remember, progress, not perfection! Your responses will provide a present-moment snapshot of where you are in each of the eight areas of wellness, and from those results



you can decide if there is an area of wellness you want to focus on at this time in your life. After you retake the Self-Assessments, we hope you'll set aside time to respond to the reflection questions on the facing page.

1. To begin, re-take all eight Self-Assessments.

- Page 30: **Relationships**
- Page 46: **Emotions**
- Page 62: **Spirituality**
- Page 78: **Rest and Play**
- Page 94: **Care for the Body**
- Page 112: **Resilience**
- Page 127: **Organization**
- Page 144: **Work and School**



2. Then, shade in the areas of health on the compass on p. 162 with your total scores.
3. After you have shaded in your compass with your results, take some time to respond to the reflection questions on the next page.

Free Resource Downloads Available on Our Website

You will find several free resources available on our website, including:

- A downloadable and writable Self-Assessment PDF file
- Blank Self-Assessment Compasses to use to record your results
- SMART Steps worksheets
- Mapping Your Journey pages

Download these and other resources on our website: WellnessCompass.org.

Reflecting

Were you surprised by any differences between the first time you took the Assessment and now? Give an example.

Did you notice an improvement in your life in any of the areas? If yes, give an example. If no, why do you think that is?

What about any areas you just weren't ready to do anything about in response to your scores the first time you took the assessment? Do you feel differently now? In what ways?

If there was anything you *could* say to your previous self from where you are right now, knowing what you now know, what would it be?

If there was anything you *could* say to your future self, knowing what you now know, what would it be?

Final Thoughts

We hope this *Notebook for Parents* has been helpful to you on your journey toward being an integrated parent, and a healthy model and guide for your family as you continue to create a life of wellness and wholeness.

Your commitment to the process of self-reflection and practice show how highly you value your role as a parent. The process of self-reflection and creating new habits is a life-long commitment—not just for parents, but for anyone who desires to live a life of increased awareness and positive growth. We now know how essential self-care is to the quality of our parenting, and how important it is to make taking care of ourselves a high priority.

We have learned that being well is a journey and not a destination. Like parenting itself, each of us, our children, and our life together, are always changing. There always will be more to teach our children, and always more to learn ourselves. And there always will be more that we can do to strengthen and expand our own villages of support, and those of the parents and families in our communities.

Please remember to continue to pay attention to your life. Pay attention to the people you care about and to those who care about

you. Pay attention to the gifts in your life and be grateful for them. Pay attention to any signs that you are not heading where you want to be heading, that your life is out of balance, and commit to doing something about it. We hope that you enjoy every step of the journey and remember that walking with others makes the trip easier, more meaningful, and more fun.

There is no greater joy and privilege than the gift of being a parent. We thank you for the honor of supporting you and walking with you on a small part of your journey.



Ways to Stay Connected

Following are additional ways we offer ongoing support for your journey of whole-person wellness.

- **Wellness Compass website.** Here you can find additional resources, including blank Self-Assessment Compasses to use to record your results, Self-Assessments, SMART Steps worksheets, and Mapping Your Journey pages. Download these and other resources on our website: WellnessCompass.org.
- **Wellness Compass Podcast.** This podcast is hosted by Holly Hughes Stoner and Scott Stoner, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists, Co-Directors of The Wellness Compass, and the co-creators of its wellness resources. Every Friday, Scott and Holly help listeners better navigate their lives and relationships with greater awareness and intention. Each 20-minute episode provides an opportunity for a deeper discussion of the topic found in the weekly Wellness Compass Column and is based on the eight areas of wellness featured on our wellness compass. Either listen on our website, or subscribe to the weekly podcast through any podcast app (search for “The Wellness Compass”).



The focus and intention of the Wellness Compass resources are to provide education, tools, and strategies we can use to navigate our lives and our relationships with greater awareness and intention.

About the Authors

The Wellness Compass Initiative is a collaborative effort of D. Scott Stoner and Holly Hughes Stoner. Married for over forty years, Scott and Holly are Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs), each with more than four decades of experience helping individuals, teens, couples, parents, and families. Learn more about our resources and our coaching, training, and consulting services at WellnessCompass.org. There you will also find a variety of resources for adults, parents, teens, and kids on our website.



Resource Appendix: A Deeper Dive

The following sections provide a more expanded definition and exploration of some of the key concepts and resources in this *Notebook*. They include:

- The **Parent Wellness Self-Assessment**. Here we include samples and a blank one for you to fill out with the results from your Self-Assessments in each area of wellness.
- **Mapping Your Current Reality** using three models that describe the process of growth and change.
- **Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change**. Here you are invited to listen to yourself to decide what changes you are ready to make.
- **How to create SMART Steps** that will bring a greater sense of well-being and wholeness to your life.
- **SMART-Step worksheets**. These will help you identify those small steps you are ready to take.
- **Why SMART Goals are important**. What research tells us about their importance.

Parent Wellness Self-Assessment

The **Parent Wellness Self-Assessment** is designed to help you listen to the whispers in your life, and the life of your family, right now. Our lives are always speaking to us. The question is, are we listening? This is your opportunity to listen.

The Parent Wellness Compass Self-Assessment—like a mirror—will reflect back to you your current state of balance and wholeness. The results are a present-moment snapshot of your life right now, revealing where in the garden of your life you have been watering and tending, and which areas could use more of your attention.

Let's take a look at sample scores from the Wellness Compass Self-Assessment. We hope these assessments will become your trusted compass and guide for the next steps on your journey toward wellness and wholeness.

Parent Wellness Self-Assessment

Sample Scores

Relationships Self-Assessment

The ability to create and maintain healthy, life-giving connections with others.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on page 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see page 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes			Half of the Time		Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

I model healthy relationships for my child.										<u>5</u>
Our family talks about important issues affecting us, even when it may be uncomfortable to do so.										<u>4</u>
I work to help my children recognize relationships that are unhealthy and, when necessary, help them choose other relationships.										<u>6</u>
I think before speaking to my child when emotions are high.										<u>4</u>
The way I regularly interact with my children is helping to build loving and healthy relationships.										<u>4</u>

I am satisfied that our family is not overly connected to email, phones, social media, or computers in ways that interfere with relationships.

I set a good example for our family by saying I'm sorry when I hurt someone, and encouraging my children to do the same.

I am able to resolve conflict with my children in a productive way.

I feel confident that our relationships with family, friends, and community are creating a strong, caring community for our family.

Our family works together as a team to resolve problems or conflicts.

TOTAL

30

The Well

Care for the Body Self-Assessment

The ability to build healthy habits and practices regarding our physical well-being.

Respond to the following 10 statements with a number between 0–10, based on the following scale. Then, transfer the total to your Wellness Compass on page 162. If it does not apply to you, give yourself a “10” for that statement (see page 160 for examples).

Never	Sometimes			Half of the Time		Most of the Time		Always		
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

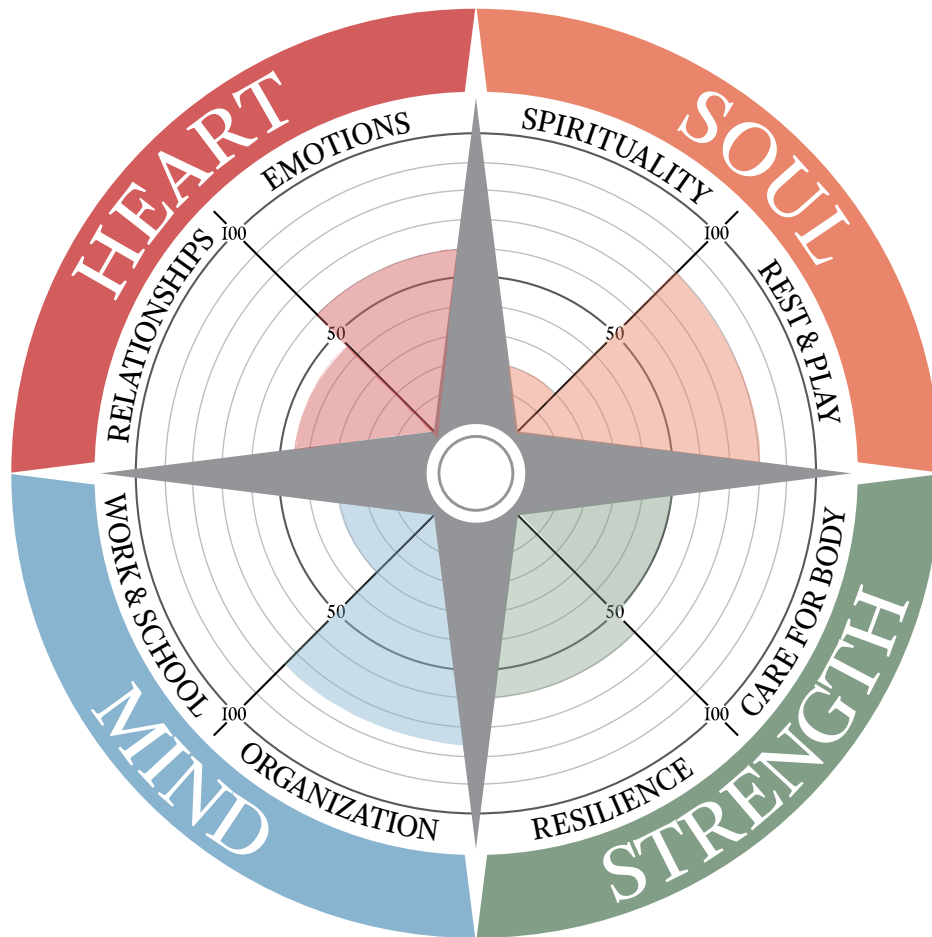
I strive to be a good role model for my children in terms of caring for our bodies.										<u>5</u>
I am teaching my family to recognize and avoid choices of all types that are not healthy.										<u>5</u>
I go to the doctor and dentist for regular checkups, and have my children do the same.										<u>5</u>
My family and I prioritize the sleep we need to function at our best.										<u>6</u>
I model listening to my body and making healthy adjustments as needed, and teach my children to do the same.										<u>4</u>
I model a healthy approach to sexuality for my children.										<u>5</u>
I do my best to make sure we all eat a healthy diet.										<u>4</u>
I model healthy decisions regarding the use of alcohol, other drugs, and tobacco.										<u>5</u>
I do my best to make sure that both my children and I get the exercise we need on a regular basis.										<u>6</u>
I care for my body in such a way as to have enough physical and mental energy to be the parent I want to be.										<u>5</u>
TOTAL SCORE										<u>50</u>

94

The Wellness Compass Notebook for Parents

Parent Wellness Self-Assessment

Sample Results based on Sample Total Scores

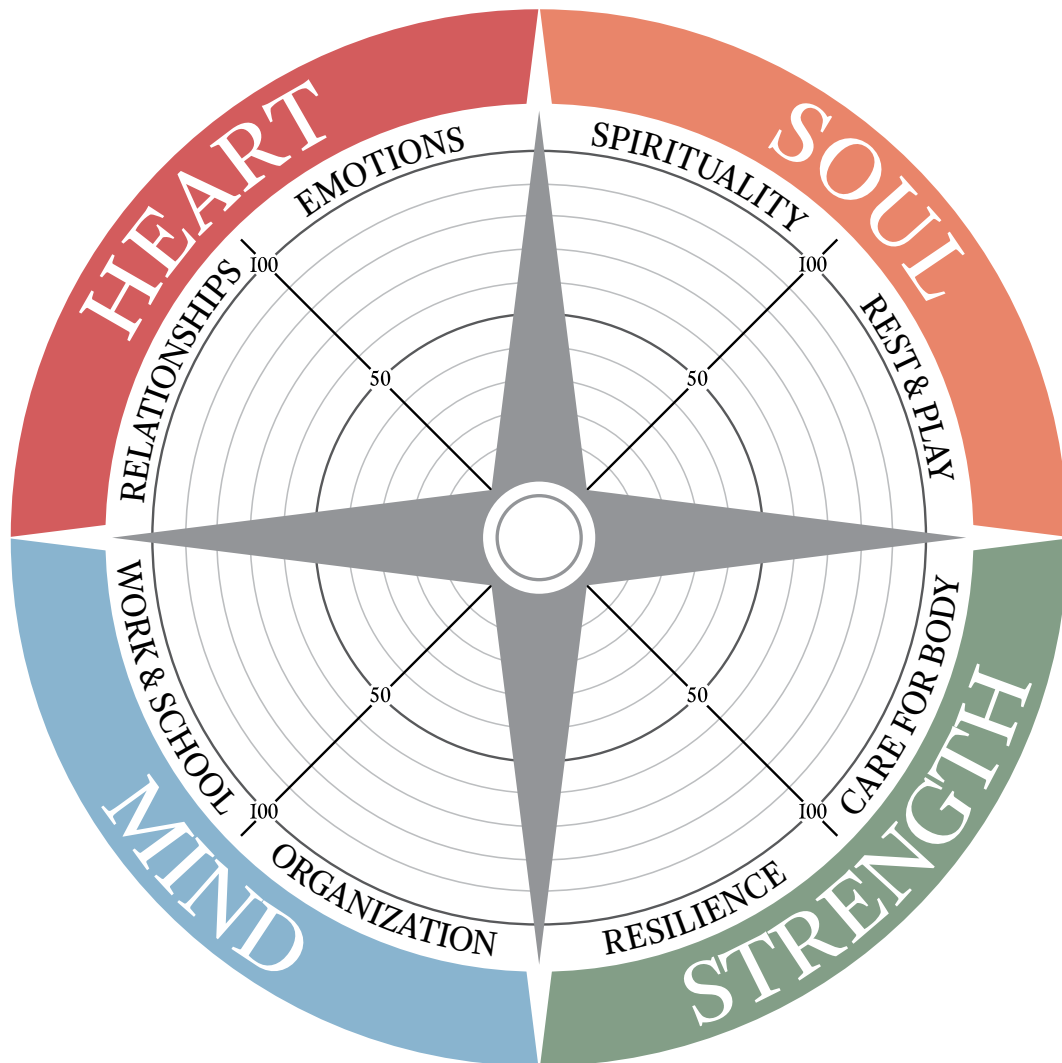


In *Step Two: Listening to Yourself* in each chapter, you are invited to complete a Self-Assessment related to one of the eight areas of well-being, responding to ten statements with a number between 0 (Never) and 10 (Always). Once you have arrived at your total score from each self-assessment, shade in that section of the compass (0 is at the center, 50 is halfway out, and 100 is at the outer edge) on p. 162. Remember, your scores are not “good” or “bad,” nor are they “strong” or “weak.” The self-assessment is simply a “snapshot” of your life at this very moment. It might be helpful to think of the Compass as a garden. Your results show areas of the garden you have been watering, and which areas may be in need of some additional watering.

For additional blank Self-Assessment Compasses to use to record your results, Self-Assessments, SMART Steps worksheets, or Mapping Your Journey pages, download these and other resources on our website: WellnessCompass.org.

Parent Wellness Compass: *Your Results*

In *Step Two: Listening to Yourself* in each chapter, you are invited to complete a Self-Assessment related to one of the eight areas of well-being, responding to ten statements with a number between 0 (Never) and 10 (Always). Once you have arrived at your total score from each self-assessment, shade in that section of the compass (0 is at the center, 50 is halfway out, and 100 is at the outer edge). Remember, your scores are not “good” or “bad,” nor are they “strong” or “weak.” The self-assessment is simply a “snapshot” of your life at this very moment. It might be helpful to think of the Compass as a garden. Your results show areas of the garden you have been watering, and which areas may be in need of some additional watering.



Mapping Your Current Reality

We included three resource models in **Step Two** of every chapter to help you to better understand change itself, and to help locate where you are in the process of growth and change in each area of wellness. Here are the more detailed and expanded definitions of those models.

1. Stages of Change

It is helpful to understand that change is a process that moves through typical stages. The Stages of Change model below outlines five stages that occur whenever a person, group, or organization seeks to create change. Identifying what stage we are in is essential in supporting ourselves and others where we are, remembering that this is a process and a journey, not a destination. This is as true of organizations and communities as it is for individuals. It is also important to keep in mind that it is common to find ourselves in different stages of change in different areas and stages of our lives.



—graphic adapted from *The Transtheoretical Model*, Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992

Precontemplation. This is the entry point into the change and growth process. At this stage we may have not yet considered the prospect of change and are unlikely to perceive a need for change. Here we are not likely to respond positively to suggestions to change when we can't yet see its importance.

Contemplation. At this stage we have some initial awareness or whisper of a need or desire to change and grow. Often a state of ambivalence where we both consider change and reject it simultaneously. The Self-Assessment we complete in Step 2 will likely move us into this stage in regard to a particular area of wellness.

Preparation. The focus begins to shift from the need/problem to possible solutions, from the past toward the future. This is the stage where we are ready to consider making a change, and are motivated to seek resources that help support the intended change and growth. Talking with others to gain information and support, along with making a plan, are also part of this stage.

Action. We are ready to change/grow and have begun concrete steps to make the change a reality. This is where SMART Steps come in. The actions taken are focused and achievable. The motto for this stage is, "you have to do different to get different." It is also at this stage that we are most vulnerable to stumbling so there is a greater need for support and encouragement.

Maintenance. Having maintained the desired change and growth for an extended period of time (usually three to six months), there is good evidence that the change will be a lasting one. The change has become a new habit, something that doesn't require a great deal of conscious thought and energy to maintain.

It is important to remember that we can move between any of the stages at any time as we work to grow and change in any area of wellness.

Because change is uncomfortable, this process is rarely linear; more often, it is “two steps forward, one step back.” Imagine a teeter-totter between these stages to better understand the idea that ambivalence is expected as we first shift toward the next stage, and then sometimes shift back. This is why the support of others is crucial to help us keep moving forward

At any point we can return to the Stages of Change model to identify where we currently are, and then begin again. It is reassuring to know that this movement is a natural part of the process of growth and change.

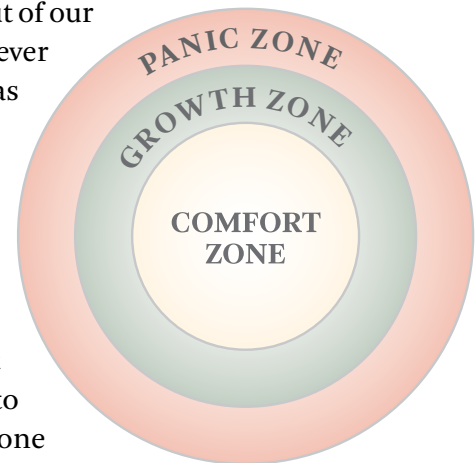
2. The Three Zones

Every individual, relationship, family, and organization functions within a set of patterns and habits. Over time, these patterns and routines, which are necessary for our day-to-day functioning, become familiar and very comfortable. This **Comfort Zone** works like a set of unwritten rules about how things should be. For example, many people are uncomfortable with conflict and so families (and organizations) have an unwritten rule that conflict will not be talked about openly or directly.

In the graphic below, we can see that in order to grow, we need to risk moving out of our Comfort Zone.

We can move out of the Comfort Zone in one of two ways: We either move there proactively and intentionally, or we are forced to move there because of life circumstances. Either way, it is important to note that all growth initially is uncomfortable because it requires us to move out of our Comfort Zone. For example, a person who has never been assertive is going to be very uncomfortable as they begin to practice assertiveness.

The **Panic Zone** is what we approach if we try to grow or change too much, too fast, or if something big happens, usually out of the blue, that changes our world. Either way, we are likely to feel panic if we are pushed out of our Comfort Zone. For example, a person who has refused to update their job skills (choosing the Comfort Zone over the Growth Zone) is let go by their employer, which throws them into the Panic Zone. The lesson from this is that if we rigidly defend our Comfort Zones, refusing to be proactive about growth, we will usually end up finding ourselves thrown from the Comfort Zone into the Panic Zone sooner or later.



When individuals, families, and organizations intentionally and regularly stretch themselves into the **Growth Zone**, they not only minimize their chances of getting thrown into the Panic Zone, but they also continuously expand their Comfort Zones, giving them greater flexibility and sense of well-being. As we spend more time in the Growth Zone, over time, it becomes our new Comfort Zone.

3. The “J” Curve

Change tends to come in one of two ways: planned or unplanned. It is a given that unplanned changes will be stressful. A job loss, an unexpected health diagnosis, an accident, the sudden death of a friend or loved one, a natural disaster, or the sudden end to a relationship are examples of some of the most stressful events any of us will encounter. No one ever plans or chooses these events, which only adds to the stress they create.

What is perhaps not as well understood is that even changes that we desire and plan, those we choose for very positive reasons and happily anticipate, can also be very stressful. Beginning a new romantic relationship, starting a new job, moving to a new community, adding a baby to the family, retiring, or changing staff in an organization are all changes that, while planned and chosen, still create stress.



—Adapted from *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall*, by Ian Bremmer, 2006

The J Curve is the single most helpful concept in explaining why and how change, both planned and unplanned, creates stress.

Note that the J Curve has a vertical axis showing “Stability,” and a horizontal axis showing “Resilience/Growth.” The dotted line shows what we would like to experience when positive change is planned and freely chosen. While we may expect positive, planned change to follow this path, the reality is that *all* change initially creates a period of instability. The J Curve illustrates this well by showing the initial movement toward resilience and growth is accompanied by an initial decrease in stability and an initial increase in discomfort. This dip helps explain why we often want to return to how things were before. Hang in there! With commitment and time, we will turn the corner and move toward greater growth and stability.

Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change

Using the *Mapping Your Journey of Growth and Change* resource in each chapter, you are invited to listen to yourself to decide what changes you are ready to make.

“You Are Here” | Describe where you are right now in your life in this area of wellness.

“Wish You Were Here!” | Describe what it will be like when you are where you want to be in this area.

Inspiring Quote | Choose an inspiring quote that will motivate you as you navigate the next steps on your journey of growth and change. This quote could be from a song, a poem, a famous author, a spiritual text, or other source.

Mindfulness/Centering Practice | Write down a centering practice you would like to try that could support you in your efforts as a parent in this area of well-being. To help, we have included a list of suggested practices on p. 16.

Support from Others | Are there others you trust and respect whose support and feedback you will want or need? List them here.

Previous Successes | What previous successes do you have in making positive changes in this area of your life that can serve as hope and inspiration for you?

Challenges | What resistance within yourself or others might arise as you seek to make changes?

Overarching Goal | List one or two goals that you have for yourself and/or your family in this area. They may be long- and short-term goals. Remember that both long- and short-term goals must each be addressed by starting with small steps. You might want to revisit your response to “Wish You Were Here.”

SMART Step | List one or two SMART Steps you will take within a specific time frame that will move you toward your main goal. A SMART Step is a step that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

SMART Steps

Each chapter includes a section where you get to decide what you are ready to do in one area of well-being. You will be taking specific actions—SMART Steps—that will bring a greater sense of well-being and wholeness to your life. The SMART-Step worksheets will help you identify those small steps you are ready to take, and offer the support you'll need to make a positive change.

Here's how. Once you've shaded in your score from one of the Self-Assessments on your own compass on p. 162, you will be invited to identify one thing you can commit to doing that could improve your score (see sample on the following page).

Characteristics of SMART Steps and How to Create Yours

S Specific

This is the place to write exactly what you want. Think *who, what, where, when,* and/or *how* you will do this. Be very specific. We tap into the power of the mind to focus when we are very detailed at this step.

M Measurable

How will you know you've been successful? Make sure that what you write here is measurable by some metric other than by want you want. Describe in detail what that is here.

A Achievable

Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. To set yourself up to succeed, you might want to start with a smaller goal and work your way toward a bigger one. Next, describe how you will concretely make it happen. What obstacles might you encounter as you work toward this SMART Step? Also think about your resources, what you might need to overcome any challenges along the way (there's a place on the worksheet for you to list these). Thinking through possible obstacles and solutions helps you to determine if this goal is achievable at this time in your life. Be honest here.

R Relevant

This is a very important step where you identify your *why* for your goal. Ask yourself why is this so important at this time in your life. The more you can connect your *why* to your core values (more on core values on pp. 56–57), the more inspiration and motivation you'll be able to draw on as you take next steps.

T Time-Bound

Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. It is much easier to adjust this if needed, but knowing when you are aiming for is a very important step in the process of reaching your SMART goal.

Area of Wellness:

Care for the Body

Date: 7/30/25

Overarching Goal: What do you really want in this area of wellness? Can be a short- or long-term goal.

Having noticed lately that I get winded when I play running games with my kids, I know I need to get more exercise. I have always loved running, even though I haven't run in several years.

Specific: What exactly will you do? Think *who, what, where, when, and/or how* you will do this.

Tomorrow I am going to sign up for a 5k that happens in two months. This will help motivate me to stay on track. After I register, I will download the couch-to-5k (C25K) guide to support my goal.

Measurable: Describe in detail how you will know when you have been successful.

I will successfully complete the 5k in two months in under 30 minutes.

Achievable: Choose something you know you can do, or at least are reasonably sure you can do. Then describe how you will concretely make it happen.

I'm sure I can fit this into my schedule because my partner is around on the weekends to be with the kids and I'm an early riser.

Relevant: Explain why this is so important at this time in your life. Connect this *why* to your core values for inspiration and motivation.

I have always loved running and the energy I had when running was a regular part of my life. I know it will give me more energy to enjoy my family, the most important people in my life.

Time-bound: Make sure you have a clear start date and deadline, or timeline, for your SMART Step. Add it here.

I will begin training tomorrow, following the six-week C25K schedule, and be ready to run a 5K in two months.

Possible Obstacles: What challenges might come up for this SMART Step?

I have a long commute and am often tired when I get home, especially on nights when my kids have extra activities.

Possible Solutions: What are some options and/or resources to consider?

I can get up an hour earlier two mornings during the workweek. I can also train on the weekend when I have more time and energy.

Accountability Partner: List someone you trust and respect with whom you can share your SMART Step.

my partner and sister

Keeping in mind the cautionary quote, *out of sight, out of mind*, once you've identified your SMART Step, make sure to write it down and keep it where you can see it often.

As you travel this road on your journey of growth and change, it is important to take time to celebrate every small win along the way. You are making choices every day that will bring a greater sense of balance and well-being to your life.

For more on the importance of the SMART-Step process, see pp. 167–169.

Why SMART Goals are Important

Your journey toward living a healthier, more satisfying, and meaningful life happens one step, one goal at a time.

Research shows that there are several concrete steps we can take to maximize our chances of making lasting positive healthy changes. As you can see from the graphic, there is a dramatic increase in the likelihood of us reaching our most important goals when we take certain steps, consistently each and every day. **When we set a goal**, either in our minds or out aloud to ourselves, we increase our chance of success by 6–8%. **When we write our goal down**, we boost our chance of success by 25–30%. **When we tell someone else our goal**, our chance of success increases to 55–60%. **When we choose an accountability partner**, someone whose feedback we value, our chance of realizing the growth and change we desire goes up to 85% *or more*. Better yet, **when we commit to regular check-in's with our accountability partner**, we increase our chances an astonishing 95%.



