

# The Elements of Emotional Well-being

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'Everyone knows what emotion is until asked to give a definition' (Oatley & Jenkins, 1996:96). Yet we all use this term and seem to quickly understand what, in our experience, it relates to. Well-being emerges from our thoughts, actions, and experiences, most of which we have control over. However, due to cultural influences and our own beliefs, what we may seem to have control over gets lost in translation. Amidst these challenges, we still crave happiness as an outcome of our actions. How are emotions in particular, so connected to our overall well-being and functioning? Have you found yourself in a situation where you are forced to complete a task you dread doing that all it leaves you with is to be upset? More significantly, when someone asks, "Are you happy?" how long did you take to respond or ponder about how you truly feel?

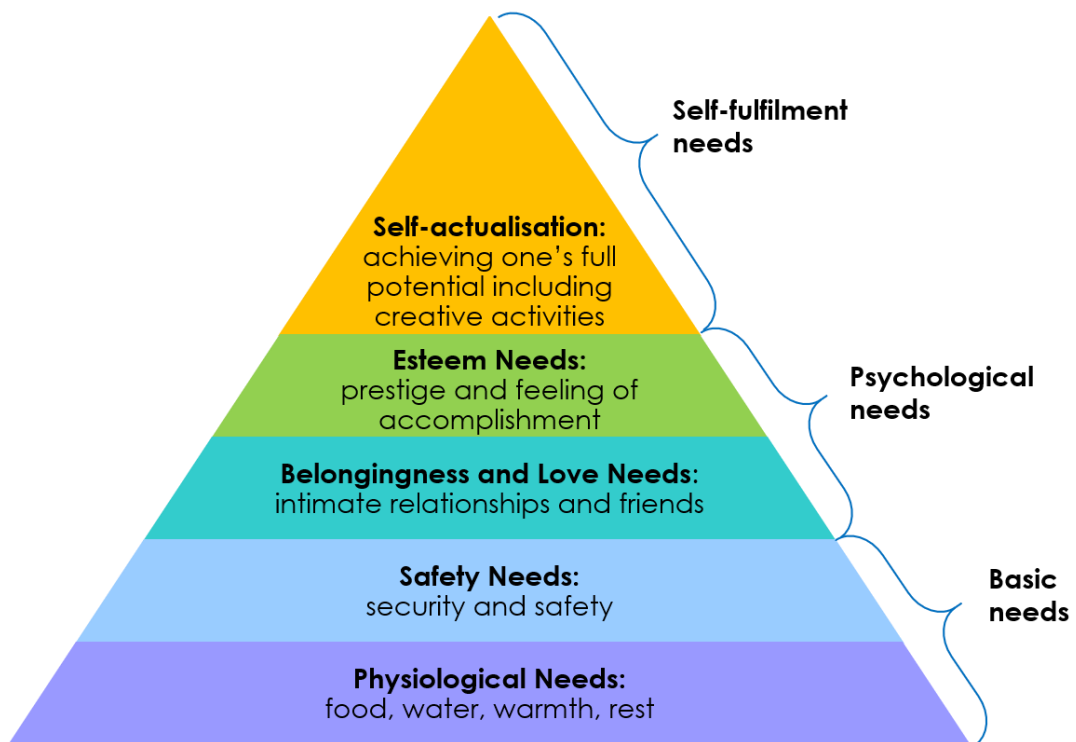
All these questions were explored at our RETA (Register of Educational Therapists—Asia) session this July, and we discovered what engineers sustainable well-being.

Well-being is a construct, and the elements that make it up defines our level of happiness and healthfulness. When we are happy, we will function optimally and flourish. Our mental, physical and social health are part of the elements of emotional well-being. Now, when we say happiness, we immediately visualise ourselves in a cheery mood and satisfied.

Well-being transcends what the external world has influenced us to perceive it to be.

Let me introduce you to two sets of well-being; hedonic and eudaimonic.

Many theories on well-being seem to cover the notion of hedonism- striving for maximisation of pleasure (positive effects) and minimisation of pain (adverse effects), quite clearly. Eudaimonia, on the other hand, however, is the notion of experience beyond just feeling good. It requires an individual to be mindful and work towards sustainability. One must understand that emotions are fleeting, and realise the human potential and actualising tendencies (famously represented in Maslow's hierarchy of needs.)



*Figure 1 Maslow Hierarchy of Needs*

In a nutshell, eudaimonic well-being motivates an individual to find purpose and meaning in their actions, and ultimately life.

Every person is capable and has the desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualisation. Unfortunately, progress is often disrupted by a failure to meet base-level needs. Life experiences, including divorce and loss of a job, may cause an individual to fluctuate between levels of the hierarchy.

Therefore, not everyone will move through the hierarchy in a unidirectional manner but may move back and forth between the different types of needs.

Maslow looks at the complete physical, emotional, social, and intellectual qualities of an individual and how they impact our well-being.

In essence, it is about moving beyond extrinsic motivation and becoming intrinsically motivated and in doing so, we are not forcing ourselves to do things.

It is about transcending extrinsic motivation and being intrinsically motivated not to force ourselves to do things. The closer one moves towards identified intrinsic motivation, the more authentic and fulfilling one's life becomes.

We must also understand that to thrive through intrinsic motivation, which is meant to be scaffolded like Maslow's hierarchy of needs; we must start with support. When an individual knows that they are supported they feel safe psychologically and emotionally. And when these two engines are composed and levelled, the well-being of an individual isn't a far cry.

In terms of support, the presentation highlighted the importance of support through information and knowledge. No one likes to be kept in the dark. If we are "in the know" and are comforted by the knowledge that gives us a sense of direction, we are less likely to be stressed and more level-headed when making decisions.

As a Special Needs Educational Advisor, I connect with students, teachers and parents frequently. Updating parents about their child's progress and giving them information about how else they can support their child gives them comfort. It also helps reduce stress and encourages clear thinking. Given that our teaching styles and methods are diagnostic, prescriptive and tailored to meet every student's needs, we work towards simplifying technical information for parents for easy and practical understanding.

This also builds psychological safety for parents so that they understand what is being shared with them and how they can support their child confidently. Imagine having access to vital information about, and for your child, you can barely comprehend or find meaning.

It is unemotional to render well-being altering information or 'support' and not act on tailoring in accordance with needs

How is this related to emotional well-being and fulfilling basic needs? It all comes together when an individual can make sense and have clarity as to what the next

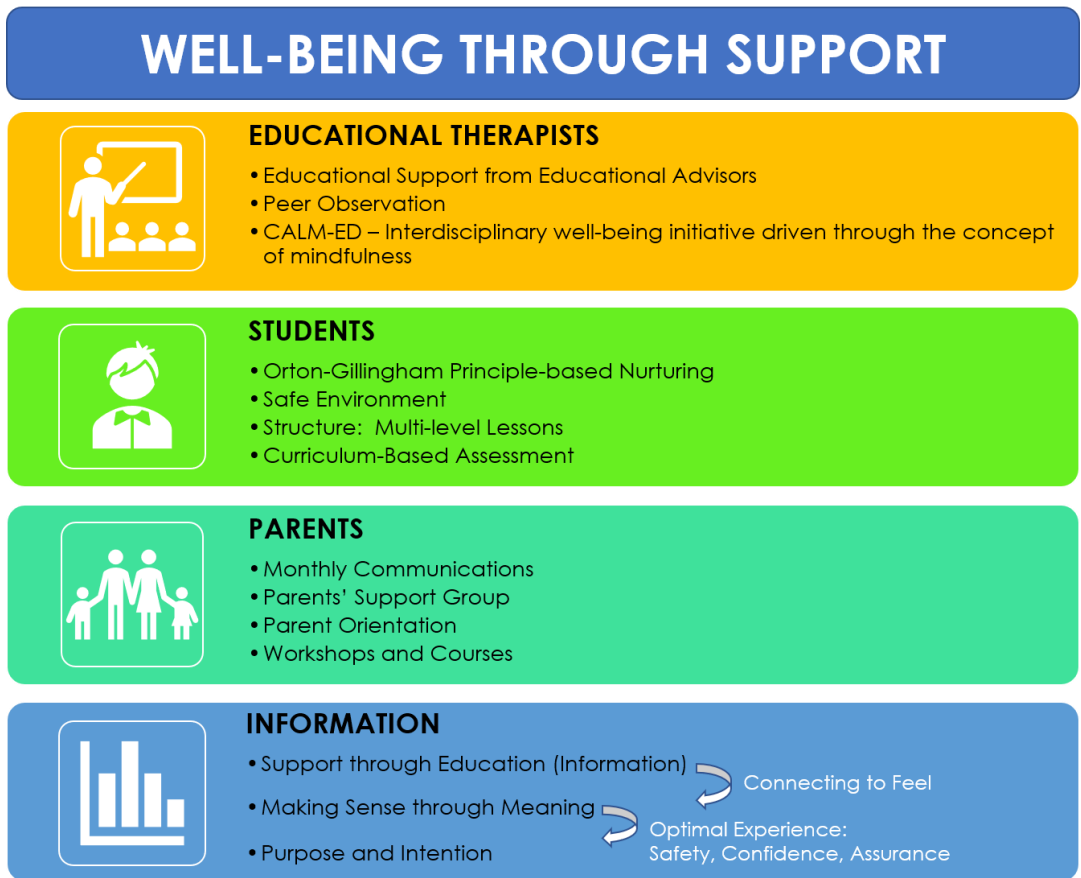


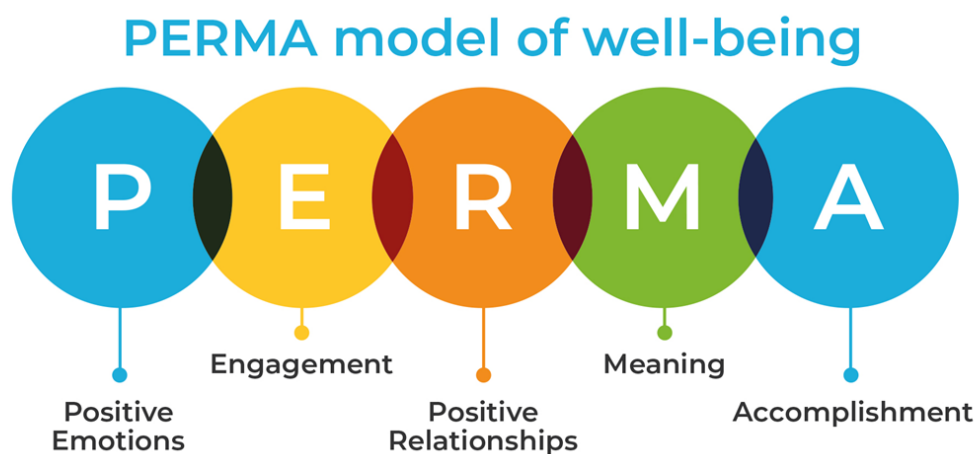
Figure 2 Well-Being Through Support

course of action can be. Figure 2 shares how information- as a form of education, supports parents, students and our Educational Therapist through various mediums. It starts with the comfort of the knowledge that one has support. A stage where one feels the stress of not knowing alleviating slowly, regulating the neurochemicals and physiological functions.

Next, as we are more composed, we start establishing a connection to make meaning of what we have in front of us-the support. Eventually, this leads one to be purposeful & intentional to function optimally and feel at ease. What happens when you are at ease? 1) You breathe better, 2) Your body receives positive feedback, 3) Your blood pressure synchronises with the heart & lungs, and your brain is driven to transmit the right messages to the neurotransmitters dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine.

In a nutshell, our environmental well-being be it physical, mental or emotional plays a vital role in our overall well-being. We cannot care for one and miss the other. They are engineered to work together and help us achieve good health. So start easy and small. Educate yourself about your receptiveness to the kind of support you work with that makes you feel comfortable and driven to flourish. Let's explore the PERMA model and understand a crisp and objective way to well-being next.

Well-being and its quality can be measured through PERMA, which is eudaimonic in nature. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive brain psychology, created a five core component of mental well-being and happiness. Seligman accepts that these five components can help individuals move in the direction of a life of satisfaction, joy, and meaning



### **P – POSITIVE EMOTION**

Focusing on Positive emotions is the ability to remain optimistic and view our life from a constructive perspective. In our life, there are "highs" and "lows" and focusing on the "highs" reduces the chances of us developing depression. It also allows us to enjoy daily tasks and preserve with the challenges we face by remaining optimistic about eventual outcomes.

### **E – ENGAGEMENT**

When we are effectively engaged with an activity, our body is filled with neurotransmitters and hormones that lift's one sense of well-being. This engagement

allows us to be present and incorporate the activities where we find calm, happiness and focus. Individuals as a whole need something in our lives that retains us into the present moment, making a 'flow' of happy submersion into a task. Such 'flow' of engagement extends our insight, abilities, and emotional capacities.

## **R - RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationships and social connections are vital to have a meaningful existence. We have a need to establish healthy associations. Associations that advocate affection, intimacy, powerful emotions and physical interplay with other individuals brings us joy and equip us with reinforcements during hard times that needs resilience. There is a need to know we belong in a group to feel secure and appreciated.

## **M - MEANING**

Having an answer as to "why are we on this earth?" is a key ingredient that can drive us towards fulfilment. There are many things that provide meaning to our lives. Religion and spirituality provide many people with meaning, as can working for a good company, raising children, volunteering for a greater cause, and expressing ourselves creatively.

## **A - ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Goals and ambitions allow us to attain things and provide us with a sense of accomplishment. Hence, realistic goals need to be set and just putting in an effort to meet the goals provides us with a sense of satisfaction. When we finally attain the goals, we will feel a sense of pride and contentment. Having accomplishments in life is important to push ourselves to thrive and flourish.

## **PERMA FOR CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING**

Being aware of the PERMA model might help you consider the meaning and fulfillment that you need in your life. The next step is to integrate this model with yours/your child's daily life. The table below explains some examples on how the PERMA model can be used to help your child lead a more comfortable, healthy and happy life.

<p><b>P</b> Positive Emotions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Ask what went well at the end of each day</li> <li>◆ When praising your child, be specific as to what he/she did well</li> </ul>
<p><b>E</b> Engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Help your child identify their strengths</li> <li>◆ Encourage them to increase learning challenges once they have mastered a new skill</li> </ul>
<p><b>R</b> Relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Teach effective communication skills such as empathy, active listening and non-verbal cues</li> </ul>
<p><b>M</b> Meaning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Help your child identify values (things that are important to them)</li> <li>◆ Encourage them to volunteer their time, knowledge or a possession as a way of helping another person</li> </ul>
<p><b>A</b> Accomplishment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Help your child to set daily and weekly learning or social goals</li> <li>◆ Frequently recognize achievement eg charts, certificates, ceremonies, letters home</li> </ul>

## 5 WAYS TO WELL-BEING

Developed by The New Economics Foundation (NEF), the five (5) ways to Well-being are simple actions you can do in your everyday life to help you feel good and function well. These five ways can be used by both the young and the old alike.



**CONNECT** – Being able to connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Broadening your social networks and range of relationships is vital and you need to take the time to establish connections.

**BE ACTIVE** – Being active can increase your psychological well-being by keeping your mind and body engaged. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.

**KEEP LEARNING** – Learning new things is associated with higher levels of emotional and psychological wellbeing. Learning new skills can also give you a sense of achievement and a new-found confidence. You can try something new like riding a bike, playing an instrument or cooking your favourite meal.

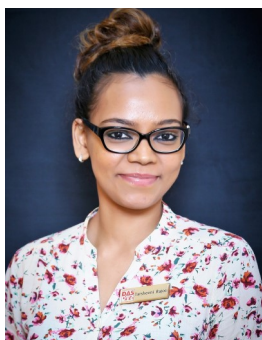
**GIVE TO OTHERS** – even the smallest act can count, whether it is a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks. Seeing yourself and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates a connection with those around you.

**BE MINDFUL** – be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". Be aware of new sights, smells and sounds as you do your daily activities. Focusing on the "here and now" can help you feel calm and leads to stress reduction.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### **HARSHEENI RAJOO**

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*Harsheeni joined the Dyslexia Association of Singapore in 2013 and has over the years been teaching and working with students with dyslexia and other co-morbidities such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder and Speech and Language Impairment. As a Math Dual Specialist, Harsheeni works closely with students dealing with fundamental mathematical challenges and Dyscalculia. As an Educational Advisor, Harsheeni works closely with the Educational Advisory Team to promote well-being amongst Educators through CalmEd- a mindfulness-based training Programme. She is an advocate of health and well-being at the DAS and believes that it is vital for Educators to apply mindfulness which is imperative to have in a career that mentally and emotionally fulfils, challenges and centres us. Harsheeni holds a Bachelor of Communication from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. She also holds a Specialist Diploma in Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) from the DAS Academy and a Certificate of Mathematics Teaching from Marshall Cavendish Institute. Additionally, she is a certified yoga instructor and a mindfulness practitioner.*



### **MADINAH BEGUM**

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*Madinah has been with the DAS since 2014. She provides intervention for learners with dyslexia on the Main Literacy Programme and iReaCH. She is also dual-specialised in the Prep2PSLE programme. In addition, she is an Educational Advisor who works closely with the Educational Advisory Team to promote mental and emotional well-being through Talk-O-boTics - a counselling-based training programme. She is an advocate for welfare in DAS and believes that it is vital for everyone to have a safe and confidential place to talk about their issues and to be empowered with the right tools and skills to cope with their problems. She has set up initiatives like Heart 2 Heart – an informal chat platform; that enable staff from different departments to come together to share their experiences and difficulties they are facing in the current COVID-19 crisis.*