

Wellbeing strategies

Afan's story (fictional)

Afan started working in a Parliamentarian's office several months ago. He was initially excited by the chance to contribute to Australia's democracy and work for an individual whom he greatly admired. The work was interesting, but fast paced and demanding, and Afan struggled to finish all his varied tasks. The stress of the situation set off some health issues that hadn't bothered Afan for years. Afan started to feel as though he had no control over his job and was feeling more nervous about work each day.

Afan's immediate supervisor approached him to discuss his performance, and Afan worried that he was going to lose his job. Afan's health was further impacted, which affected his ability to sleep and recover for the next day. Afan struggled with his daily routine and started withdrawing from his usual social contacts. Concerned by his circumstances, Afan contacted the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service (PWSS) for support. With the assistance of a PWSS Case Coordinator, Afan identified the triggers for his feelings, gradually re-established his daily routine, and successfully developed and implemented several strategies to improve his wellbeing.



! What is wellbeing?

Wellbeing is our sense of health, happiness and satisfaction in our life, not just the absence of illness. How we take care of ourselves can make a big difference to our wellbeing.

How do I improve my wellbeing?

There are a variety of ways to improve wellbeing and practice self-care. This doesn't mean that we're always calm, but we feel like we can ultimately deal with the challenges that come our way. Some skills that can help with this are:

- Problem solving:** When you feel overwhelming feelings by a task or a problem, try writing down the problem and the available options, then identify the most suitable one to start with. List the steps you need to take to action your plan, and regularly review how it's going.
- Goal setting:** Helps us to manage stress and deal with setbacks and obstacles. Approaches like SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) can help us plan towards our goals in a more focused way.
- Self-talk and acknowledging your strengths:** When we're under pressure, most of us focus more on the negative than the positive, which can affect our confidence. Identifying three good things you have achieved a couple of times a week, and noticing things that are going well, can make you feel better. Positive 'self-talk' can help boost your confidence and reduce overwhelming feelings. If you're not sure where to start, think about what you'd say to a friend in the same situation.
- Controlled breathing:** If it feels comfortable for you, controlled diaphragmatic breathing can help calm your body and clear your thinking. One technique is 'box breathing' – inhale deeply into your belly for a count of four, hold your breath for a count of four, exhale slowly

through your mouth for a count of four, and pause for a count of four. This can take some practice, and you might need to repeat the cycle for a few minutes to feel the full effect.

! Other aspects of our daily routine can also support wellbeing.

Go back to basics: Busy schedules, long days and lots of caffeine can leave us feeling depleted and stressed. Remember to stay hydrated, eat regular nutritious meals, keep a good sleep routine and exercise regularly. Limiting caffeine and alcohol in particular can hugely improve our mood and our ability to handle pressure.

Relaxation and taking the time to reset or unwind is key to maintaining your wellbeing. Find something that works for you – this could be having a bath, going for a walk, getting a massage, spending time in nature, listening to music, cooking a meal or calling a friend. Make sure you have a ‘switch-off’ time from work and plan an activity that clearly ends your work day.

Mindfulness is about paying attention to the present moment, and there are many ways we can do this. If you’re new to mindfulness, start small – try noticing for 10 seconds at a time how you feel in your body while you’re doing something you enjoy. Practicing mindfulness regularly can help you to enjoy the things you do more fully and positively change the way you feel about life. The PWSS can provide more information and tips on mindfulness.



How do I support someone to manage their wellbeing and practice self-care?

- Check in with the person at a suitable time and location. You might suggest meeting in a quieter part of the office or building, or going for a walk together outside.
- Let the person know what you have noticed, and ask them if they’re ok.

! Listen to what things are like for the person without expressing judgement – this is often the most powerful way we can help.

- Check what the person is already doing to manage their wellbeing, and ask if they would like help accessing other supports.

Support

The PWSS can assist you with your own wellbeing, or support you to help someone else. Our service provides independent and confidential support to all Commonwealth Parliamentary workplace participants. We build on what’s already working for you, and can help you find extra strategies to boost health and wellbeing.



www.PWSS.gov.au



24/7 Support: 1800 747 977



SMS: 0487 112 755