


Bright Futures

A woman's guide to emotional wellness



Bright Futures for Women's Health and Wellness



This booklet is part of a series of materials called "Bright Futures for Women's Health and Wellness." This series also includes guides for young women, community organizations, and health care providers. These materials were developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Office of Women's Health, with the guidance of a 10-member panel of predominantly female mental health experts (medical doctors, psychiatrists, and researchers) from across the country. The aim of the Bright Futures project is to help women achieve better physical, mental, social, and spiritual health by encouraging healthy practices.

Like physical health, mental health exists on a spectrum. At one end are feelings of flourishing and thriving, and at the other are depressed and anxious feelings. For a variety of reasons, the field of mental health has historically focused on the negative end of this spectrum. This booklet is different. It is not about treating or avoiding depression: it is about helping women like you to feel your best.

The tips and information in this booklet are drawn from the latest research into what helps women excel in their day-to-day lives. This research suggests that coping skills (such as flexibility, feeling strong, and optimism), personal traits (high self-esteem), and resources (spiritual practices and support from family and friends) can boost women's mental wellness. As women develop these elements in their own lives, they increase well-being, satisfaction, and their overall quality of life. While this guide focuses on women's emotional wellness, it also touches on some of the more common types of depression and anxiety that many women can face from time to time. It is not intended, however, to help you diagnose or treat these or other illnesses. If you believe you are suffering from depression, anxiety, or a more serious mental illness, please see a health care professional who can help you.

This guide is designed to share this information with you and to encourage you to adopt some of the tips to improve your emotional wellness. We hope you find it helpful. When you are finished with it, please share it with the other women in your life!



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Introduction

You might have heard or read something recently about emotional wellness. Emotional wellness means you feel good about yourself, your relationships, and your purpose in life. It does not mean that you will never be sad, angry, or confused. Everyone will have some of these feelings from time to time. However, if you are emotionally well, you will have fewer lows and will be able to bounce back from sad times faster. Emotional wellness also helps you to be happier during the good times.

This guide will give you some of the best tips around to help you live better, become more balanced, and feel better about your life. Feeling good helps you do better at all your activities each day. Each woman is unique. We hope that every woman will be able to use some of this information to improve her emotional health.

The guide has three sections. Each one is important for emotional wellness. These are:

- ▶ **Appreciating Yourself**
- ▶ **Finding Balance and Purpose**
- ▶ **Connecting with Others**

This guide contains many tips. Not all of them may apply to your life right now. However, finding even one tip that will help you feel better and improve your life is worthwhile. You might also find tips in this guide that could help your friends or family members.

Remember, it will take time and work to improve your emotional wellness just like any other goal. You will have both triumphs and setbacks along the way. However, if you are patient with yourself and keep working at it, you will see improvements over time.

Happy reading!

Appreciating yourself

An important part of emotional wellness is to value who you are and what you do. Women often have many roles and responsibilities in their lives. They can be a mother, a daughter, a friend, a leader, a co-worker, a wife, a partner, a volunteer, a bill payer, a homemaker, and so on – all at the same time. These many roles and tasks can make women feel overwhelmed.

That's why it is especially important for women to take time to value themselves and all the things they do. Taking a little bit of time every day to do that can help you to do a better job at all of your tasks. It also makes you feel good about yourself!

There are many different ways you could value yourself. This guide outlines some of the most important ones and gives you tips on how to do it:

- ▶ **Build your self-respect**
- ▶ **Build your self-confidence**
- ▶ **Build your self-esteem**
- ▶ **Set your own goals and self-expectations**
- ▶ **Take care of your body**
- ▶ **Think positively**
- ▶ **Make time for activities you enjoy and that have meaning for you**
- ▶ **Learn skills that help you cope with difficult emotions and situations**

Build your self-respect

Self-respect is an important part of emotional wellness. Every woman wants to be respected. Have you ever thought about whether you are respecting yourself? This means taking care of yourself in four different ways:

- ▶ **Physically:** *Being active, eating healthy foods, getting enough sleep, and practicing good hygiene.*
- ▶ **Mentally:** *Challenging your mind, including learning about yourself and your family history.*
- ▶ **Spiritually:** *Taking time to explore your beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life. Taking time to think about how you want to guide your life by the principles that are important to you.*
- ▶ **Emotionally:** *Thinking good thoughts about yourself and others.*

Every woman can appreciate herself more. The tips in this guide can help you enhance your self-respect.



***Debbie's story:** "I'm a mom who works part time and I have two little kids. Last year, there were so many demands on me I hardly ever took any time for myself. I was exhausted, and I didn't feel as good about myself as I used to. My best friend encouraged me to make some time for myself every day. At first, I thought 'No way!' but I decided to try it. I started by taking a short walk several days a week and trying to go to bed 15 minutes earlier. After I got in the habit of doing that, I started to use the time when I was driving to pick my son up from preschool to think about all the good things I do every day. These small steps have really helped. I still work hard, but I have more energy and feel better. Now I encourage my other friends to do it, too!"*

Build your self-confidence

Feeling self-confident helps you believe that you can try new things. Even if things go wrong, self-confidence helps you know that you can try to make them better. You can increase your self-confidence by setting goals that make sense, thinking positively, and being prepared.

Here are some tips to increase your self-confidence:

- **Stop comparing:** *Your abilities and talents are unique and special. Everyone has different goals in life and ways of thinking about what success means. Decide what success means for you. Try not to worry about what success means for your neighbor.*
- **Remember your good deeds:** *Think about the times when you have made a difference in someone else's life. Give yourself credit for the good things you do for others every day.*
- **Forgive yourself and learn from your mistakes:** *Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. Learn from what went wrong, but don't dwell on it.*

Build your self-esteem

Self-esteem is important to your emotional health. A woman with healthy self-esteem knows what makes her unique. She respects those things in her personality. Self-esteem helps you to feel good about yourself, no matter what other people think of you.

Tips to help you boost your self-esteem:

- **Accept your strengths, and your weaknesses:** *No one is perfect. Your strengths and weaknesses are what make you unique.*
- **Congratulate yourself:** *Honor your achievements, big and small.*
- **Encourage yourself and others:** *Think positive, kind, and loving things about yourself. Let others know the good things you feel about them.*
- **Value yourself:** *Friends and family are great, but don't depend on others to make you feel good about yourself. Value yourself no matter what other people say about you.*
- **Surround yourself with positive, healthy people:** *Choose friends who value you.*
- **Turn anger around:** *Everyone will be angry from time to time. When you get upset, try to use that energy toward positive goals instead of dwelling on the negative.*
- **Praise yourself:** *Remember at least one good thing about yourself every day.*
- **Do good things:** *Do at least one thing every day that you feel good about.*

Set your own goals and self-expectations

Many women let others tell them what they should be doing and how. To be emotionally well, you need to judge yourself by your own standards and no one else's.

Tamika's story: "I'm from a big family, and I grew up always comparing myself with everyone else. I was constantly disappointed because whenever I would get a raise at work, one of my sisters would, too, or whenever I would learn a new activity, someone else would beat me to it. But eventually, I started thinking about my life and realized that I was achieving all the things I wanted to do. It didn't matter what everyone else in my family was doing: I was leading my own life and was happy about it. Now, I try not to compare myself with other people anymore, and I remind myself to feel happy for my siblings when something good happens to them."



These tips may help you set your own expectations:

- **Define beauty for yourself:** Images of thin, glamorous women are everywhere. However, most women do not look that way. True beauty comes from inside and shines outward. Focus on the things about yourself that you think are beautiful.
- **Define your own values:** Many women believe they need to live up to the expectations of our culture. However, the only values you need to live up to are your own. Take a look at your beliefs and values. Remember how you add value to the world.
- **Focus on your strengths:** We all have strengths and weaknesses, but many of us focus more on our weaknesses. Try this trick to change your way of thinking: Each time you think about one of your weaknesses, follow that with a thought about one of your strengths.

Take care of your body

If you exercise, eat right, and get enough sleep, it will help your physical health. It will help your emotional health as well. You can improve your mood with physical activity, healthy eating, and getting enough sleep. Enough sleep will also improve your memory and help keep you healthy. Most women need about 8 hours of sleep a night.

You can learn more about physical activity and healthy eating in "My Bright Future: Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Tools for Adult Women." You can download a free copy at www.hrsa.gov/womenshealth.

You don't have to make a lot of big changes to exercise more, eat better, or get more sleep. In fact, you will do better if you try to reach your goals in small steps.

Here are some tips to get you started:

- **Healthy eating habits:** *Decide on just one thing you would like to do to eat healthier. Keep doing it until it becomes a habit. Then try to form another good eating habit. (If you aren't sure what healthy eating means, here is one definition: Healthy eating means consuming a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages within and among the basic food groups, while choosing foods that limit your intake of saturated and **trans** fats, cholesterol, added sugars, salt, and alcohol.)*
- **Physical activity:** *Add a few minutes of walking or some other form of exercise to your day. Keep doing it until you have reached your goal. (One goal is to aim for at least 30 minutes of walking or other moderate physical activity on most days of the week.)*
- **Set an earlier bedtime:** *Make your bedtime 10 minutes earlier. Keep doing it until you've reached your goal.*
- **Develop good sleep habits:** *Write down your sleep habits for a week and look for ways to improve them. Once you've found the right bedtime, try to go to bed at about the same time every night. Try not to eat, drink alcohol or caffeinated beverages, or exercise right before bed.*

Think positively

An important part of emotional wellness is training yourself to be more positive or optimistic. While this may not be easy, positive thinking during tough times will help you stay hopeful. It can improve your chances of moving past your problems. It also has been linked to better health. Some people are more optimistic than others, but everyone can learn how to be more positive.

Here are some tips:

- **Seek the positive:** *When things go wrong, look for something positive. For example, if your friend cancels your dinner plans, look at it as a chance to do something for yourself. You could choose to read a book or call another friend instead.*
- **Focus on the good things:** *Even when something has upset you in one part of your life, you can still focus on the things you value in other areas. This helps you to keep perspective and to cope.*

Make time for activities you enjoy and that have meaning for you

One way to improve your overall wellness is to get involved in activities you enjoy and that mean a lot to you. You can get happiness from simple pleasures and from being active and involved.

Here are some tips to help you make time for these activities:

- **Schedule them:** *Treat activities with your friends the way you would your work or other appointments.*
- **Find activities that have meaning to you:** *Spend your time on issues or activities that you really care about. You will be more committed to them and enjoy them more!*
- **Do things with your friends:** *Make activities you care about an important part of what you do with your friends or family.*

Learn skills that help you cope with difficult emotions and situations

Coping is the way we handle difficult situations, people, and problems. It is how we survive stress or conflict. Every woman has her own coping style.

In general, there are three main ways that people tend to cope with stress:

- ▶ **Task-oriented coping:** *In this coping style, people will take a close look at the situation and take action to deal directly with the issues.*
- ▶ **Emotion-oriented coping:** *In this style, people feel emotions, express feelings, and tend to ask for help if they need it.*
- ▶ **Distraction-oriented coping:** *Here people keep themselves busy – distract themselves – in order to take their minds off their problems.*

Once you understand which of these styles you tend to use, you can try other coping styles that may help you handle difficult situations. Here are some additional tips:

- ▶ **Write it down:** *Writing down your feelings is a good way to deal with your emotions.*
- ▶ **Take care of yourself:** *Get plenty of rest. Eat healthy foods and be physically active. Stick to your normal routines, and stay away from risky behavior.*
- ▶ **Stay connected to others and share how you are doing:** *Seek out trusted family members and friends who can offer support, even over the phone or through e-mail.*
- ▶ **Ask for help:** *If you feel overwhelmed, ask friends, a social worker, a faith-based organization, or your doctor to find professional help. Strong people know when to seek help. Everyone needs help from time to time.*

Section 1:

Appreciating yourself

Activities to help you appreciate yourself

Here are some short exercises you can try to help you learn to appreciate yourself. You can do them by yourself, or with friends and family members.

Name two things you are good at:

Name two things about you that you think are beautiful (inside and out):

Think about what makes you feel good and why you feel good.

Now think about what makes you feel stressed and why you feel stressed.

Take a few moments and think about how to increase what makes you feel good and decrease what brings you stress.

What is something that you have always wanted to try? What are some small steps you can take to make it happen?

Finding balance and purpose

An important part of being emotionally well is finding a sense of balance, meaning, and purpose in life. This balance and purpose will be different for each woman. However, for most women it may involve some of the same steps:

- ▶ **Self-discovery**
- ▶ **Developing a personal mission statement**
- ▶ **Setting goals**
- ▶ **Adapting to adversity and change**
- ▶ **Learning skills that help you deal positively with stress**
- ▶ **Increasing your confidence**
- ▶ **Nurturing your spirit**

This section gives you advice and tips on how to do each of these things. Keep in mind that finding a sense of balance and purpose in your life is a journey. It might mean different things to you at different times in your life, but thinking about these issues will help you to be more emotionally well.

Li's story: "There have always been so many things I wanted to do in life, but I had a hard time deciding what to work on first. I would spend a little time on this, a little on that, but I wasn't accomplishing any of my goals. One of my co-workers suggested that I take the time to write down all my goals and then decide which ones were most important and work on those a little bit at a time. I had a hard time choosing where to start, but when I did, it really helped. I'm not doing as many things as I used to, but I'm really making progress on what I am doing. And I feel a lot less stressed out about my life."



Self-discovery

Self-discovery helps us take a look at our values and dreams so we can be sure we are working toward the right goals. One way to do this is through writing. Writing not only helps self-discovery, but it also can be good for your health. Don't worry about complete sentences or grammar. Just let your thoughts flow from your mind, through your pen, and onto the paper. If you have a creative style, add drawings and use colorful pens!

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ▶ I am happiest when...
- ▶ I am proud of myself because...
- ▶ I was born to...
- ▶ I can simplify my life by living without...
- ▶ In my dreams, I...
- ▶ I believe in my abilities to do great things because...
- ▶ I feel strongest when...
- ▶ I'm proud of my family or community because...

Section 2:
Finding Balance and Purpose

Developing a personal mission statement

Do you ask yourself, "Why am I here? Who am I? What is my purpose in life?" These are good questions to ask. The meaning and purpose of life is unique for every woman.

A personal mission statement describes how you want to live your life. One way to develop such a statement is to imagine your 80th birthday. Think about what all your friends and family would say about you. Write your own life mission statement, and update it as your life goals change.

Here are two examples of a mission statement:

- Each day of my life, I will work to understand myself better. I will take time to smell the roses, enjoy simple pleasures, care for my body, nourish my mind, undertake challenges that come my way, and be proud of those things that make me unique.*
- My purpose is to express my love for life by appreciating the small things, loving my family, and prioritizing my work. I will welcome each day with a smile.*

Setting goals

By setting and meeting realistic goals, your life will have more meaning and purpose. You will have a better understanding of how to move forward. If you have several goals, list them in order of importance. That helps keep you from feeling overwhelmed. It also helps you keep your attention on your most important goals.

Remember, setting goals is a lifelong process. Once you have completed one goal, you can start on another!

You can use the following steps to set any personal or professional goal:

- ▶ **Write down your goal:** *Write your goals in a positive way. For instance, write, "Learn to do well," not, "Do not make mistakes."*
- ▶ **Set a deadline for achieving the goal:** *Make your goals precise. Include dates, times, and amounts so that you can see how well you are doing.*
- ▶ **Know your obstacles:** *List the obstacles you need to overcome in order to accomplish your goal.*
- ▶ **Identify who can help:** *Write down the names of people and groups you need to work with to reach your goal.*
- ▶ **Identify what you need to know:** *List the skills, knowledge, and experience required to reach your goal.*
- ▶ **Create an action plan:** *Develop a plan for learning the skills you need to reach your goal.*
- ▶ **Know the reason:** *Write down the benefits of achieving your goal.*

Setting goals is important, but make sure your goals are realistic. For instance, if your goal is to get more sleep, don't try to go to bed an hour earlier right away. Instead, set smaller goals of going to bed 5 or 10 minutes earlier each night. In other words, take small steps and keep on taking them every day. Celebrating your small goals along the way will keep you on the road to achieving your larger goals!

Adapting to adversity and change

Resilient people know how to bounce back from hardships and find ways to grow from bad situations. They do well with change, and they gain strength from misfortune. The good news is that being able to adapt and change can be learned by focusing on three things:

- ▶ **Outside supports:** *These include people you trust and resources that make a person feel safe and free to grow. Know who you trust, and turn to those people in difficult times.*
- ▶ **Inner strengths:** *Another way to help yourself adapt to change is to find the strong points of your personality and use them. Know your best personality traits such as a positive outlook, kindness, or confidence. Draw on those traits for strength when you need it.*
- ▶ **Learned skills:** *You can develop skills to make yourself more adaptable or flexible. Know what skills you need in challenging times and work to develop them when things are going well for you. For example, if you don't think you communicate well, ask a friend to help you better express your feelings.*



Christen's story: "When I am feeling overwhelmed and know that I need to give myself a break, I turn off my phone. I try to slow down a little bit by going for a long walk or taking a bike ride to clear my head and look at nature. Sometimes, I like to put on my sweats and slippers and curl up with a good book, or write, draw, or play my guitar – anything to feed other parts of myself so that I feel re-energized. At times like these, I draw on my beliefs for comfort and strength."

Learning skills that help you deal positively with stress

Every woman deals with stress. Some stresses are smaller (like trying to find a parking space when you are in a hurry), and some are larger (like dealing with a divorce). No matter the size, knowing how to deal with stress is an important part of being emotionally well.

Here are some tips for dealing with stress:

- **Know how you react:** *Think about how you respond in times of stress or change. Do you like the way you respond? How can you change it?*
- **Seek guidance:** *Ask others – such as friends, faith-based advisers, counselors, or family members – how they respond to stress. Try what seems to work well for them.*
- **Make a plan:** *Think about how you want to respond to stress. Write down the names of people you would seek out for help.*
- **Be ready to change:** *Think about how open-minded and flexible you are when it is time for a change. Think about how you can accept change in times of stress.*

Increasing your confidence

Confidence is your belief in your ability to reach your goals. Women who are emotionally well have a strong belief that they are able to succeed.

Here are three ways you can feel more confident:

- **Doing what you do best:** *The best way to begin feeling more confident is to focus on the things you already do well. If you don't know what things you do well, ask your friends and family. Then focus more of your time on those things, and congratulate yourself for your successes. This will give you more confidence.*
- **Seeing others do it:** *Seeing someone like yourself succeed will help you believe that you can do it, too. If there is something you have always wanted to do but you are not sure you can do it, then find another woman who is doing it. Ask her if you can watch. Then, see if she will help you get started!*
- **Use your emotions:** *If you have a hard time starting something, use your emotions to help you take action. It's OK to be excited, nervous, or afraid about something new. Accept those feelings and use them to help you get going.*

Nurturing your spirit

It is easy to know when we feel physically tired, but it takes time to know when we feel emotionally tired. Caring for your spirit is taking a conscious break to renew the soul. It means taking time to tune out the world and to reconnect with yourself. Women who take time to nurture their spirits tend to be more emotionally healthy.

Here are some ideas on how to slow down, turn your focus inward, and recharge:

- ▶ *Sip a cup of hot tea or hot chocolate, or drink a glass of cold lemonade.*
- ▶ *Take a long shower or bath. Pamper yourself.*
- ▶ *Write down your thoughts, or express yourself through art or music.*
- ▶ *Meditate or pray.*
- ▶ *Sit quietly and feel yourself breathe.*
- ▶ *Take a break to read a book or magazine.*
- ▶ *Take a walk and look at nature. Focus on enjoying the simple beauty of the world around you. Think about what it means to achieve personal peace.*
- ▶ *Use a calendar to organize your time, and write in some time for yourself.*



Section 2:
Finding Balance and Purpose

Activities to help you find balance and purpose

Here are some short exercises you can do to help you find balance and purpose in your life. You can do them by yourself, or with friends and family members.

What is your personal mission statement?

How do you manage stress, and how could you do it better?

How could you make more time for yourself?

Write down and plan for one of your personal goals:

What is your goal?

When do you want to achieve your goal?

What are your obstacles?

Who can help?

List the skills and knowledge you need to reach your goal.

Make an action plan.

List the benefits of the goal.

Connecting with others

Women can find many different ways to connect. You can connect to others through your neighborhood, your ethnic group, a club you belong to, or your group of friends. Connections are an important part of emotional wellness.

Connections with others can help you have a sense of belonging. Other people can help you find meaning in life and feel valued. They can benefit your health. Being connected to others can help you fight depression and give you a better quality of life.

This section of the guide will give you tips on how to form connections and develop and maintain healthy relationships:

- ▶ **Find a connection**
- ▶ **Identify with your racial, ethnic, or cultural background, and learn about other cultures**
- ▶ **Connect with children**
- ▶ **Learn about healthy relationships**
- ▶ **Learn about empathy and its importance in relationships**
- ▶ **Learn how to be more mindful of other people and their situations**
- ▶ **Develop patience**
- ▶ **Be safe in relationships**
- ▶ **Give help to others in need**

Find a connection

As humans, and especially as women, we have a deep need to feel connected. Think about your many relationships: family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and people you see every day. No matter how close or casual, those connections are all important. Our connections to others shape our thoughts and feelings. Every woman needs connections.

Here are some things you can do to feel more connected:

- *Volunteer in your neighborhood or community. Check with your local government or local community organizations for opportunities.*
- *Pick up a local newspaper and attend an advertised community event with a friend.*
- *Attend events or take classes at a local community or senior center.*
- *Sign up for an exercise class.*
- *Attend a PTA meeting.*
- *Spend more time with your friends. Make an effort to call and write them more often.*
- *Accept offers of assistance. Offer to trade favors, such as babysitting or cooking, with others.*

Section 3:
Connecting with others

Identify with your racial, ethnic, or cultural background, and learn about other cultures

Some people may draw strength from their racial, ethnic, or cultural communities. Our racial, ethnic, and cultural histories tell the stories of where we came from. Taking pride in your heritage is a good way to connect with others. Along with learning about your own background, a great way to make connections is to learn about the backgrounds of those around you.

Here are some ways to learn more about your history, or that of those around you:

- Interview a family member or friend.
- Go to a cultural event in your community.
- Research issues related to race, ethnicity, or culture on the Internet or at the library. You could try to find out more about your last name or family history, or that of a friend or neighbor.
- Coordinate an ethnic potluck at your workplace.
- Read a book or visit a Web site about your culture, or that of a friend or neighbor.

Connect with children

Children are an important part of the lives of many women. They could be your own children or grandchildren. They could be those of a friend or family member, or children you see in your community. Staying involved in the lives of children can help you build a strong emotional life.

Here are some ways to help you stay connected to the children in your life:

- When talking to children, get to their level. Make eye contact to show them that they are important to you.*
- Ask kids about their schoolwork, their friends, their dreams, and their feelings in general. Share your thoughts and feelings with them, too.*
- Write a note to the children in your life to let them know you care about them and will be there for them.*
- When you have to be away from your own children, make certain you stay connected. Call them regularly when you are away from home, or leave a note of love in a spot where they will find it. Staying connected is not only good for them, it is good for you, too!*

Learn about healthy relationships

Having connections and a social support system is one of the best ways to improve your emotional health. It makes you feel good just to be able to talk to friends and family members. The best connections are part of healthy relationships. Here are a few ingredients for a healthy relationship:

- ▶ **Respect:** *Value yourself and the other person in the relationship.*
- ▶ **Mutuality:** *Healthy relationships go both ways. Both people give to each other and receive from each other.*
- ▶ **Communication:** *Be able to talk with, and listen to, other people. Share information so others can get the chance to know you. Ask questions so you can get the chance to know others.*
- ▶ **Honesty:** *Honesty is a sign of respect in healthy relationships.*
- ▶ **Trust:** *In healthy relationships, people earn your trust.*
- ▶ **Flexibility:** *People and situations change. Being flexible keeps relationships strong.*
- ▶ **Dependability:** *Follow through on the things you say you will do. Be a dependable friend.*

Additional qualities of healthy relationships are discussed next.

Learn about empathy and its importance in relationships

Empathy is being able to understand what another person is feeling. It means to “put yourself in someone else’s shoes.” It is a key part of a strong relationship. Empathy makes people feel listened to and understood. Seek friends who are empathetic, and learn how to be empathetic.

Here are two steps you can take to show empathy: 1) give a brief reply that captures the situation; 2) add an emotion.

*Suppose a friend tells you how she had to stay late at work and missed an important event. You can say, “When you could not leave work on time, you must have felt **frustrated**.” This shows that you are really listening and trying to understand how your friend is feeling.*

***Maria’s story:** “Recently, I got into genealogy. It’s fun to learn about all the women in my family and their histories. It makes me feel really connected with my heritage. I tried to get my best friend into it, but her parents are divorced and she’s not close with her father’s side of the family. She admitted that the thought of exploring her family tree both excited and saddened her. I hadn’t even thought about how hard that might be for her. So, I suggested we just trace her mother’s side of the family as a start and see what kinds of interesting things we could discover. We had a great time, and I could tell she really appreciated my sensitivity.”*



Learn how to be more mindful of other people and their situations

Being mindful means having your mind present in a situation. That means thinking about what is going on and being aware of your feelings in the moment. A mindful person thinks about and cares about other people's feelings while also being aware of her own feelings.

Here are some ways to be mindful:

- **Be present:** *Be aware of your own thoughts and feelings.*
- **Show respect:** *Listen to your friends, and really consider their thoughts and feelings.*
- **Be considerate:** *Think about the needs of others and help them when you can, even before they ask for help.*
- **Rejoice together:** *Be glad for your friends when good things happen for them, even if your own life is not going well. Wish others the best life has to offer.*
- **Be aware:** *Think about how your actions and reactions affect the people around you.*
- **Honor yourself:** *Make sure that your actions are consistent with your own beliefs and values.*

Develop patience

Patience is accepting the things you cannot change. It means being peaceful, content, satisfied, and willing to enjoy the moment. When you are patient, you can wait without feeling anxious or frustrated. You will be more caring, understanding, and accepting of others. Patience is an important part of healthy relationships. Patience does take practice, especially in a fast-paced world.

Here are some tips to help you be more patient:

- *Think of a difficulty or a long wait as a chance to practice your patience.*
- *Accept that other people's mistakes will sometimes affect you, just as your mistakes may affect other people. Be willing to wait for others, just as you would want them to wait for you.*
- *Accept and forgive yourself when you become impatient. Make up your mind to work on it for next time.*

Be safe in relationships

Relationships that are healthy and safe are built on mutual honesty and respect. That means each person listens to the other's thoughts and opinions without making a judgment or finding fault. In this kind of relationship, it is OK to disagree and argue sometimes. However, both people ought to be able to talk about the issues and find a compromise, even if you agree to disagree.

Think about one of your relationships. Then, read these questions. Check yes or no based on your situation. The more times you check yes, the healthier your relationship.

- Yes** **No** *Do you feel good about yourself when you are around that person? (The person should not make you feel worried, sad, mad, or scared.)*
- Yes** **No** *Is your relationship balanced? Is there an equal amount of give and take? (You should not find yourself giving more attention to the other person than he or she gives to you.)*
- Yes** **No** *Do you feel safe around the other person? (The person should not make you feel scared, unsafe, or pressured.)*
- Yes** **No** *Do you feel that you can trust the other person? (You should be able to depend on the other person.)*
- Yes** **No** *Does the other person support you when you make a mistake? (The other person should not find fault with you all the time, or call you names.)*

*If you think you might be in relationship that is not healthy for you, let someone know. With help, you can get out of it or make it better. If you think you may be in a relationship at home that is not safe, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at **1-800-799-SAFE (7233)** or **1-800-787-3224 (TTY)**.*

Give help to others in need

Staying connected also means offering help to others. If your friend is in need, offer to find help for her. Listen with sincere interest, and try not to judge. You can find information on how to help friends in need from many places:

- ▶ *Your doctor or health care provider*
- ▶ *A faith-based advisor*
- ▶ *Your local government*
- ▶ *The local library*
- ▶ *The phone book – look for the YWCA or county services*

Audrey's story: "I'm really busy helping my kids and my grandkids, and over the years I realized I didn't have as many friends of my own as I used to. I missed having other women to talk with. So I started taking a class at our local senior's center. At first, it was really hard to make new friends. I'm 62 and have lived on my own a long time, so I'm pretty set in my ways. But then I realized I needed to spend time listening to the women I met, asking them questions, and being open with them so they could get to know me. Now I have several new friends, and we love to get together after class and chat over a cup of coffee."



Section 3:
Connecting with others

Activities to help you connect with others

Here are some short exercises you can do to help you connect with others. You can do these activities by yourself, or with friends and family members.

List some parts of your racial, ethnic, or cultural background that shape you in positive ways:

What are some needs in your community? How could you get more involved to help?

How patient are you? Rate your patience level on a scale of 1 to 10. 1 means you have no patience at all and 10 means you have lots of patience: _____

How do you feel when you are impatient? What would help you be more patient?

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide! We hope it has encouraged you to spend some time thinking about emotional wellness. Emotional wellness helps you feel good about yourself, your relationships, and your purpose in life. It has been linked to better physical health and to overall life satisfaction.

The tips in this guide can help you learn to appreciate yourself. They can help you find your balance and purpose in life and connect with others. All of these actions will help you feel better about yourself. Remember, emotional wellness is a goal in itself, just as physical fitness is a goal in itself.

You can learn to feel your best! We hope this guide helps you along the way. When you are done with it, please consider sharing it with a friend.



Resources

The following DHHS resources provide general information about women's health:

- **GirlsHealth.gov** *promotes emotional and physical health for teenage girls and provides information about body, fitness, nutrition, bullying, and other issues.*
WEB www.girlshealth.gov
- **MyPyramid.gov** *advances and promotes dietary guidance for all Americans, including customized guidance for women based on age and activity level.*
TEL 888-779-7264 WEB www.mypyramid.gov
- **National Women's Health Information Center** *lists health organizations, campaigns and events, publications, and more.* TEL 800-994-9662 TTY 888-220-5446 WEB www.womenshealth.gov
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of Women's Health** *works to raise awareness of women's health issues and to promote activities that will improve the health and safety of women.*
TEL 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) TTY 888-232-6348 WEB www.cdc.gov/women
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, WISEWOMAN** *provides women with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to prevent heart disease and other chronic illnesses.*
TEL 800-CDC-INFO (232-4636) TTY 888-232-6348 WEB www.cdc.gov/wisewoman
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Office of Women's Health** *provides leadership and guidance in developing policy and in establishing goals and priorities for women's health issues across the lifespan.*
TEL 888-ASK-HRSA (275-4772) TTY 888-877-4TY-HRSA (489-4772) WEB www.hrsa.gov/womenshealth
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health** *works to improve the health and well-being of women in the United States through its programs by educating health professionals and by motivating behavior change in consumers.*
TEL 800-994-9662 TTY 888-220-5446 WEB www.womenshealth.gov/owh

- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development** *conducts and supports research on all stages of human development, from preconception to adulthood, to better understand the health of children, adults, families, and communities.*
TEL 800-370-2943 TTY 888-320-6942 WEB www.nichd.nih.gov

This booklet is about promoting emotional wellness, but some women might need help overcoming anxiety or depression. If you or someone you know might be depressed, the following resources can help:

- **Anxiety Disorders Association of America** *provides information about anxiety disorders and treatment.* **TEL 240-485-1001 WEB www.adaa.org**
- **Freedom From Fear** *provides information about anxiety and depression and resources to obtain help.* **TEL 718-351-1717 ext. 24 WEB www.freedomfromfear.org**
- **National Mental Health Association** *provides information about mental health, including programs, news, advocacy, and mental health information.* **TEL 800-969-NMHA (6642) WEB www.nmha.org**
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** *has trained crisis counselors to assist callers with emotional distress.* **TEL 800-273-TALK (8255)**
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health** *provides information about mental health and mental illness, news releases, clinical trials, and more.* **TEL 866-615-6464 WEB www.nimh.nih.gov**
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** *provides information on:*
 - *substance abuse problems - National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information* **TEL/TTY 800-729-6686 En Español 877-767-8432 WEB www.ncadi.samhsa.gov**
 - *mental health problems - National Mental Health Information Center* **TEL 800-789-2647 TTY 800-433-5959 WEB www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov**

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