

Wellness to Work

A goal-directed approach to improving your wellness

About this guide

Your wellness is a critical part of your ability to thrive in a job. Whether you work here or you are served here, Ramsey County Workforce Solutions is committed to helping you pursue lifelong learning and wellness by setting and achieving goals that matter to you. This guide is meant to be a support to you in thinking more intentionally about what “wellness” means to you and whether there are some goals you would like to improve your well-being. This guide is also accompanied by a set of five short videos, which you can take some time to watch and reflect on a few different aspects of wellness. Please note that this guide is not meant to be comprehensive; there are many ways to think about and define wellness. Our hope is that this guide is a helpful starting point.

Table of contents

It’s all about setting goals.....	2
Stepping stones to wellness	3
Lifelong learning and personal growth	4
Physical well-being.....	6
Managing your stress	8
Community and personal connections.....	10
Now what? Taking your next step	12
References and other helpful links.....	13

► Begin here: An overview video

Take a few minutes to watch this introductory video which provides an overview of this guide and the four areas of wellness:

<https://youtu.be/100W36WUuf8>

Disclaimer

The content of this guide and videos series are not meant to be prescriptive. You and only you should define “wellness” for yourself. No aspect of your employment nor your standing with the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) is contingent on adhering to the definitions of wellness articulated in this guide. You are under no obligation to use these materials. It is solely your discretion to apply the content and suggestions of this guide in your life.

It's all about setting goals!

Goals are the center of how we work at Workforce Solutions. A goal is your opportunity to define for yourself what you care most about and to create an actionable, realistic plan to achieve that wish. Thinking about wellness is no different. No manager, supervisor, case manager, or anyone else is in a position to tell you how to improve your wellness. However, there are widely recognized ways of thinking about wellness and the link between one's well-being and one's ability to thrive in a job.

As you consider the different areas of wellness in this guide, think about a goal you have for yourself – one specific way you would like to improve your wellness. Make it your goal, something you truly care about and are motivated to achieve. Use the My Goal Plan worksheet (included at the end of this guide) to help you define your goal and a plan to achieve it. Below are some reminders to guide you through a meaningful goal-setting process.



Set your goal

- Aim for something you truly care about
- Consider something that is challenging but within your reach
- Be specific about your goal
- Imagine how your life would be different if you accomplished your goal



Create a plan

- Develop a detailed plan and commit to a specific time for getting started
- Break your plan down into small steps with a short time horizon
- Identify a pothole – something within your control that is most likely to get in the way of accomplishing your plan
- Identify a detour – something you could do to overcome or work through your pothole
- Combine your pothole and detour in the form of an “If pothole, then detour” statement



Do it!

- Share your goal and plan with someone you trust and ask them to check in with you and hold you accountable
- Use reminders or supports (such as an app on your phone) to help you get started, manage your time, stay organized, and stick with it



Review and revise

- Review your progress in response to these questions: What did I learn? What worked well? Where am I stuck? What got in my way? What could I do differently?
- Revise your goal, your plan, or your pothole-detour combination based on what you've learned
- Remember that, regardless of whether or not you achieved your goal, this process is an opportunity for personal growth and learning

Stepping Stones to Wellness

Consider the “big picture” of your life’s wellness. Which areas below jump out at you? Where do you feel you are on the spectrum of low to high wellness in these areas? After reflecting on your wellness, is there a specific change you’d like to make in one of these areas?

	Wellness is low	↓ Define your wellness ↓	Wellness is high
Lifelong learning and personal growth			
Career pathway	I don’t have a vision for a career I want.		I have a fulfilling career that offers me opportunities to grow.
Openness to new experiences and learning	I avoid new opportunities and experiences I’m not familiar with.		I embrace new learning opportunities. I seek out new experiences.
Feeling comfortable with yourself	I rarely feel comfortable or capable in my daily activities.		I feel confident and capable in my abilities. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.
Sense of purpose	I often feel as though my life does not have purpose. It is difficult for me to find meaning in my life.		My life has purpose and meaning.
Physical health			
Physical activity	I spend most of my days sitting and I rarely engage in physical activities.		I routinely engage in physical activity multiple times per week.
Getting enough sleep	I have an irregular or restless sleep schedule and often sleep less than 7 hours per day.		I have a regular sleep schedule of 7 to 9 hours per day.
Energy level	I have little to no energy most days and it often gets in the way of what I want or need to do.		I have enough energy to do what I want or need to do most days.
Daily self-care	I do not practice daily hygiene habits, or I am unable to do so.		I practice daily hygiene habits, such as brushing my teeth twice per day, showering, and wearing clean clothes.
Healthy eating	I do not eat (or have access to) fresh, healthy foods. I struggle to control my meal portions, or I do not have enough to eat.		I regularly eat fresh, healthy foods and control my meal portions.
Stress management			
Staying centered	I feel disconnected and anxious most days.		I feel present and grounded most days.
Being aware of your emotions	I am unaware of my emotions and feel as if I am living on auto-pilot.		I am aware of the emotions I experience most days.
Setting personal and professional boundaries	I struggle to set boundaries for myself, which leads to emotionally draining interactions with others.		I set boundaries to make sure I can take care of myself and to maintain a healthy balance in my interactions with others.
Feeling hopeful about the future	I have little to no hope about the future or my ability to change my circumstances for the better.		I am hopeful about the future and my ability to change my circumstances for the better.
Community and personal connections			
Community involvement	I feel isolated and disconnected in my community.		I feel connected and supported by my community.
Supportive work relationships	I do not have any supportive professional relationships.		Most or all of my professional relationships are supportive and rewarding.
Supportive personal relationships	I do not any have supportive personal relationships.		My personal relationships are healthy, supportive, and rewarding.

Connecting with nature

I spend little to no time outside; it is hard for me to access the nature around me.

I regularly spend time outdoors.

Pursuing wellness in lifelong learning and personal growth

▶ Start by watching a short introductory video about this area of wellness

<https://youtu.be/8FNr3u5ZJhI>

What are lifelong learning and personal growth?

We live in a world that is always changing. There are opportunities to learn something new in every experience and with every person we meet. For starters, being open to new experiences is a great way to grow—trying something for the first time, spending time with someone from a different background than your own, or practicing something to get better at it.

Your sense of purpose, or the things that matter most to you about life, are important parts of your personal growth. Whatever brings meaning into your daily life is a powerful part of your learning and growth. And, if you are clear about your purpose, you are more likely to feel comfortable with yourself as you make decisions and pursue new experiences.

A job can be another part of your lifelong learning and personal growth. Not every job is a good one, and your job may seem disconnected from the career path you would like to pursue. Still, consider how your current job or a future job could be a stepping stone to your career path. Looking for any opportunity to build a skill or try something new in the workplace is a great way to pursue your own learning and growth.

Why do lifelong learning and personal growth matter for thriving in a job?

Learning and growth are important to any job. Setting goals for yourself is a great way to be clear about what is most important to you, what you want to learn, and how you want to grow yourself. Viewing your job as an opportunity to try new things, develop your skills, and better yourself can empower you to make progress toward the career goals you have for yourself. And, employers want to hire and keep employees who are driven to learn and grow on the job.

Consider these reflection questions:

- What words would I use to describe my current job? How do I feel about my career pathway?
- How often do I try new things? How do I feel when I try something new?
- Is there an activity or experience I've been wanting to explore that I haven't made time for yet?
- What do I feel when making everyday decisions? Do I feel confident and comfortable?
- What are the things that bring purpose to my life? How often do I make time for activities or people that bring my life purpose?
- What areas of my life would I like to change?

Some ways to get started with improving your wellness in this area:

- Set a goal to try something you've never done before this week.
- Share your goal for trying something new with a person you trust – someone who can encourage and support you in your goal. Trying something new may be uncomfortable, so ask this person to affirm you as you pursue your goal. You can do this!

- Take some time to reflect on the things that bring meaning and purpose into your life. Write down a list of these things. What is one change you could make in your routine this week to spend time on one of these meaningful or purposeful things?
- Take some time to reflect on the things that would be most important to you for a fulfilling career. Write down a list of these things and rank them in order of most important to least important. How does this change the way you think about your current job or your search for a job?

Ideas and reflections:

Pursuing wellness in your physical health

▶ Start by watching a short introductory video about this area of wellness

<https://youtu.be/oE9Ad0J8eKc>

What is physical health?

Physical wellness is caring for our bodies in ways that promote our best health and ability to function. Good physical health includes things like getting enough sleep each day, eating healthy meals (and minimizing fatty or sugary foods), staying active, and maintaining good personal hygiene habits (such as brushing your teeth twice daily). Each of these contributes to our ability to be our best selves each day. Remember: you don't need to shop at pricey grocery stores or buy an expensive gym membership to take care of your physical health. Being mindful of what we put into our bodies and how we use them is the foundation for keeping our bodies in the best possible condition.¹ And, taking care of ourselves in our daily routines can have long-term benefits, too: these habits can act as a preventative measure against chronic illness and disease.

Why does physical health matter for thriving in a job?

Physical health is extremely important to a job. Think about it: when you don't get enough sleep, or you eat too much junk food, you may find yourself feeling sluggish and not fully present. Several research studies that have looked at the association between health and employment have found that poor health can make finding a job more difficult.² Making conscious choices to be active—such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or walking for 30 minutes each day—can increase our energy levels, help us be more focused on the job, and reduce long-term risks for major health problems.

Consider these reflection questions:

- What are my regular sleeping patterns? How often do I feel “rested”?
- What foods do I eat most often? How do I typically feel after I eat a meal?
- On average, how physically active am I? How many days of the week do I engage in activity or movement that raises my heart rate?
- To what extent do I identify with the word “healthy” to describe myself?
- How would I describe my general level of energy? How might I like my energy level to be different?

Some ways to get started with improving your wellness in this area:

- Set a goal to do something active every day for 30 minutes this week: play a game of basketball, go for a walk, run around the park with your kid, or walk the stairs in your apartment building. You could even break up your 30 minutes into three 10-minute activities.
- If you're able, take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator and walk rather than drive whenever possible.

- Set a goal to add one hour of sleep to your current sleep routine this week. Consider things you might need to change about how you spend your time before bed and when you wake up in order to make this happen.
- Connect with your closest community center and try being active with others in your community! You can encourage each other to be more physically active.
- Learn to recognize warning signs when your body begins feeling ill
- Identify one unhealthy food you tend to eat regularly (such as chips, a soda, or candy). Set a goal to replace that unhealthy food each time you would normally eat it this week with a healthier choice (such as a banana, an apple, or carrots).
- Set a goal to brush your teeth twice each day if you don't already.
- Practice safe sex and visit your nearest community center or health clinic to inquire about free resources.
- Explore the National Institutes for Health's Physical Wellness Toolkit.

▶ Check out the toolkit for more ideas for maintaining a healthy lifestyle
<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/physical-wellness-toolkit>

Ideas and reflections:

Pursuing wellness in stress management

▶ Start by watching a short introductory video about this area of wellness

<https://youtu.be/Zt1CKFv1hR4>

What is stress management?

“Stress is your body’s natural reaction to any kind of demand that disrupts life as usual” – and this can be a short-term, isolated event like being stuck in traffic, or long-term, such as dealing with relationship problems, a job with poor working conditions, or chronic sickness.² Stress management is our ability to effectively deal with these inevitable stressors that we all face as we go through life. We may not be able to control whether or not a stressful event occurs in our lives, but we do have some control over our reactions to these stressors.

Coping strategies, practices, and techniques can help us better manage and reduce stressors in our lives. Studies have shown the positive effects of stress management techniques on our physical and mental health.³ By learning new ways to identify and address stress, we can lead more productive and healthier lives. For example, we might manage stress by staying centered and grounded through breathing exercises, or connecting with something that brings us a sense of purpose. Being more aware of our emotions and experiences by intentionally checking in with ourselves and our reactions to events is another powerful way to manage stress. Setting boundaries in our relationships to ensure they are healthy and nurturing is also important and can help us feel more supported, confident, and in control of our lives.

There are many different ways to effectively manage stress. What works for you might look very different from what works for your partner or your friends. Consider trying a few different strategies to find what works best for you!

Why does stress management matter for thriving in a job?

Looking for a job, or even a job itself, may be a source of stress. Even the best workplace involves stress, and our ability to manage that stress is critical to our ability to thrive in a job, and succeed in a career. When our stress feels out of control, our bodies naturally tend to function from a mindset of “survival,” which may compromise good decision-making and productivity. Having effective tools, techniques, and resources helps us not to crumble when we encounter stressors.

Stress can make finding and keeping a job difficult, but you may find that incorporating stress management techniques into your life will help you better manage these challenging situations. Although some level of stress is normal in everyday life, we should all be aware of our limits and proactively work to manage stress as best we can.

Consider these reflection questions:

- How do I experience stress? How does stress affect my mental, emotional, and physical well-being? How do I know when I’m stressed?
- What are my sources of stress? Who are the people or what are the resources in my life that I might draw on to reduce my stress?

- What are things I do to take care of myself (i.e. eating healthy, sleeping, drinking water, being physically active)? What habits, activities, or thoughts interfere with my personal self-care? What changes could I make to address these areas?
- How could I make some time each week to do one thing I love?
- When do I feel hopeful? What things in my life bring me hope? What could I do to increase the amount of hope I feel?
- In my relationships with others, how often do I feel that others take advantage of me? What could make my relationships with others feel healthier and more supportive?
- How do I know when I've reached my limit? How do I typically respond when others ask something of me?

Some ways to get started with improving your wellness in this area: ⁴

- Ask someone who knows you well and whom you trust to describe the ways you act when you are under intense stress. Consider one way you could respond differently to stress and set a goal, with support and accountability from this person.
- Take a few minutes to reflect on the things that cause stress in your life. Write them down in a list. For each stressor, think about one thing that is within your control to better deal with or work through that stressor.
- Learn your own stress signals – these can be physical reactions to stress such as fatigue, dry mouth, upset stomach, overeating, and muscle tension (see welcoa.org for a full list).
- Explore mindfulness or meditation techniques for 5-10 minutes three times in a week.

▶ Check out these free video resources on mindfulness techniques:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0_KRcRNpsSBWpRejlwdlWBx95q8tEPpQ

- Explore some body movement and stretching routines that you can use just about anywhere to de-stress.

▶ Check out these free video resources on body movement and stretching routines:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0_KRcRNpsSCaLbowY0bTZ3yiUWcm89cb

Ideas and reflections:

Pursuing wellness in community and personal connections

▶ Start by watching a short introductory video about this area of wellness

<https://youtu.be/gbL9ExXkNMc>

What are community and personal connections?

Healthy, supportive relationships are important to a happy and fulfilling life. Our social connections to others have a considerable impact on our wellness – either positively or negatively. These personal and community connections involve our interactions with people and the environment around us. Our relationships often give us a sense of purpose, and provide strength and support. Nurturing healthy relationships in our lives takes time, though, so we have to be intentional about them. Exploring our connections may require personal reflection on what our needs are. We may also have to set some boundaries with loved ones and coworkers to maintain a good balance.

It's also important to consider our relationship to our community as a whole and to the natural world around us. Feeling connected and safe in the communities where we live affects our well-being. Sometimes, where we live and the safety of our community may not be within our control. However, there are still opportunities to actively engage with the people we share spaces with and to the nature around us. Consider your strengths and the resources available to you. How might you be able to use them to support the community you live in?

Why do community and personal connections matter for thriving in a job?

Our communities and the people in them have a large effect on our lives and our jobs. Many people find jobs because of someone they know. The communities we interact with on a daily basis can lead to different opportunities and connections. When we expand our social networks and cultivate healthy relationships, we may better position ourselves for the job or opportunity we want. Our connections are also important for career growth and in making our job meaningful. Our coworkers can “make or break” a job. Personal relationships outside of work can help us navigate stressful times at a job by talking through a difficult situation or offering advice. Whether it be connecting with a friend or a coworker, our jobs are shaped by those around us.

Consider these reflection questions:

- Who are the people in my life that I feel most connected to? What would I like to change about these relationships?
- What do I like about my community and the neighborhood I live in? How am I connected to others in my community? What would I like to change about my connections to my surroundings?
- How would I describe my relationships with others? At work, at home, and/or in the community? What would I like to be different about any of these relationships?
- How often am I outside? How do I spend my time outdoors? How do I feel when I'm outside? What types of things would I enjoy doing outdoors, possibly with others?

Some ways to get started with improving your wellness in this area:

- Reach out to a supportive friend or family member and consider setting up a regular time to talk.
- Think about your unmet needs. Practice thinking through these needs by writing them down in a journal. Think about expressing your needs to important people in your life who may help you meet them. What is a good way to communicate these needs to them? Practice voicing these needs to yourself first. When you feel ready, share them with a supportive friend. Try this process again, but with difficult emotions and situations you may be experiencing.
- Plan a family game night this week.
- Plan an outing to a nearby park, playground, or another outdoor space.
- Visit a nearby community center and check out opportunities and events they have coming up
- Connect to your local parks and recreation department to find green spaces in your area!

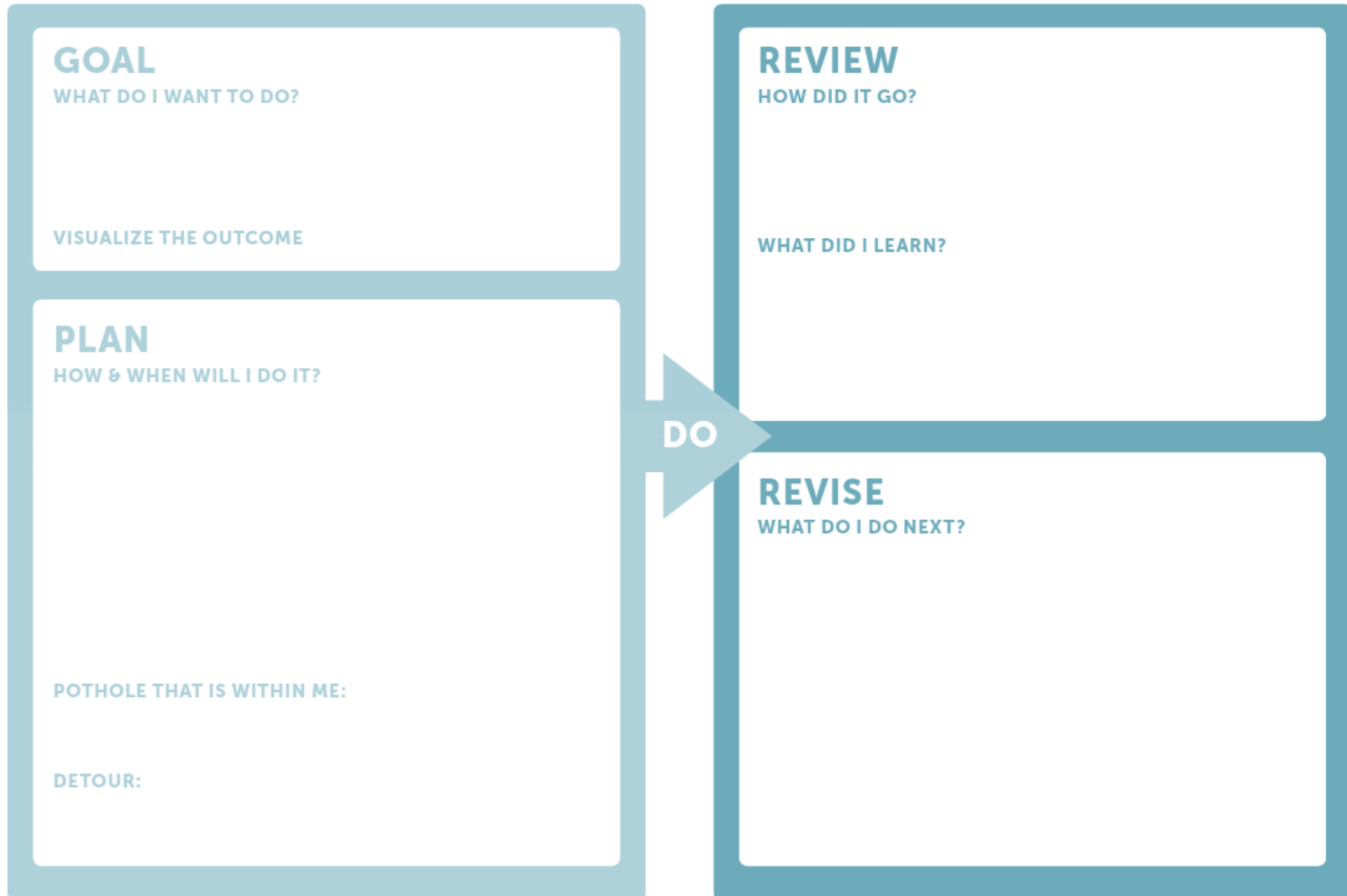
▶ Check out what Ramsey County has to offer:

<https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/parks-recreation>

Ideas and reflections:

Now what? Taking your next step...

Now that you've spent some time working through this guide, you may be ready to make a change in a particular area of your life. Use My Goal Plan to create a way forward.



References

- ¹ University of California, Davis: Physical Wellness. <https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/wellness/physical>
- ² Stronks, K., et al 1997. <https://academic.oup.com/ije/article/26/3/592/742175>
- ³ American Psychological Association: Listening to the warning signs of stress <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-signs.aspx>
- ⁴ Murphy, 1996. <https://doi.org/10.4278/0890-1171-11.2.112>
- ⁵ American Psychological Association: A Stress Tip Sheet <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2007/10/stress-tips.aspx>

Other helpful links

- <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/index.aspx>
- <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/economic-stress.aspx>
- <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-myths.aspx>
- <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-management.htm>
- <https://www.welcoa.org/blog/benefits-stress-management-employees/>