Wellness: Eight Ways to Be Okay

Keep this. It's the whole course in writing: where the eight dimensions came from, what each one means in SAMHSA's words and in real life, a few openers for each one that let a person find their own version, the four people in the course and what they picked, and how to write it down afterward. Both tests are open-handout.

Quick thing before you start. Probably a good idea to check your own agency's ethics and boundaries first. Makes sense, right? What's here is general peer support, from what we've run into at different agencies. If your agency does it differently, your agency wins.

How the two hours are built

The reading, *The Eight Dimensions, in Real Rooms* (this handout)	**30 min**
The course guide, both halves (this handout)	**20 min**
Video part one: emotional, physical, social, financial	**11 min**
Your call: three scenarios · Test one: 15 questions, 12 to pass	**20 min**
Break	**5 min**
Video part two: occupational, environmental, intellectual, spiritual	**9 min**
Your call: three scenarios · Test two: 15 questions, 12 to pass	**20 min**
Course evaluation	**3 min**
Your certificate, and putting it in My CEUs	**2 min**
Total designed time	**about 2 hours**

Designed time is the course read and done the way it's laid out. How fast you move through it is up to you. Both tests have to be passed for the two-hour certificate.

The reading · The Eight Dimensions, in Real Rooms

About 25 minutes. Where the model came from, what it says, and how a peer supporter might use it without turning it into a report card. Read it before part one; the tests ask about it.

Where the eight dimensions came from

In 2006, Margaret "Peggy" Swarbrick, an occupational therapist who had spent years in psychiatric rehabilitation in New Jersey, published a short paper in the *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* called "A Wellness Approach." Her idea was simple and, at the time, not the usual way of thinking in mental health and addiction services: people are not their diagnosis, and recovery isn't only the absence of symptoms. Wellness, she wrote, is "a conscious, deliberate process that requires a person to become aware of and make choices for a more satisfying lifestyle." She broke that lifestyle into eight connected dimensions, each one a place where a person can be doing well or struggling, mostly on its own.

The idea traveled. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) built its national Wellness Initiative on the eight dimensions and launched the first National Wellness Week in 2011. What drove it was a 2006 report from the state mental health directors (NASMHPD) showing that people with serious mental illness were dying years earlier than everyone else, about 25 years on average, mostly from physical conditions that weren't getting treated because everyone was focused on the diagnosis. SAMHSA's guide, *Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-by-Step Guide to Wellness*, put the model in plain language and in thousands of agencies. The wheel of eight colored wedges on the wall of your group room is Swarbrick's model, by way of SAMHSA.

Two things about the model matter for peer supporters. First, it was built by someone who worked beside people, not above them, and it was adopted because the old way (treat the diagnosis, overlook the life) was costing people years. Second, Swarbrick was clear that wellness is a personal process. The dimensions tell you where to look. They don't tell you what you're supposed to see.

The eight, in SAMHSA's words and in real life

SAMHSA's one-line definitions, with the version you'll probably use in a room, and an opener for each.

Emotional. SAMHSA: coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships. Real life: can you feel something hard without it running the whole

day? **Opener: where does a bad day go?**

Physical. SAMHSA: recognizing the need for physical activity, healthy foods and sleep. Real life: is your body getting enough of what it needs to carry everything else? **What would you change first?**

Social. SAMHSA: developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system. Real life: who do you call, and who calls you? **Who calls you?**

Financial. SAMHSA: satisfaction with current and future financial situations. Real life: does the money cover your life, and is anything about it keeping you up at night? **Does it cover your life?**

Occupational. SAMHSA: personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work. Note the word is work, not job. Real life: where do you feel valued or connected? **Where do you feel valued?**

Environmental. SAMHSA: good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being. Real life: do the places you live and spend time make the day easier or harder? **What part can you change?**

Intellectual. SAMHSA: recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills. Real life: is anything in your week making your brain light up? **When did your brain last light up?**

Spiritual. SAMHSA: expanding a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Notice what the definition doesn't say: church, God, steps. Real life: when did the day last mean something? **When did the day mean something?**

How a peer supporter might use them

The model is a map, not a report card. Nobody has all eight going at once, including the people who made this course. Here's what the H.E.L.P. crew has found works, in three moves, and none of them is grading.

Notice where something seems to be missing. You hear it in what people say and don't say: the woman who's "fine" and cried in her car before group (emotional); the man whose whole social life was a night shift that's gone (social); the twenty-four-year-old dozing off at the bus stop (physical). The dimensions give you words for what you noticed, so you can ask about it instead of just worrying about it.

Ask what it means to them. An open question per dimension; the openers above are examples, not a script. Then say back what you heard, point at what's already strong, and let them name the next thing. Denise names her sister, not a journal. Jade names "staying warm between shifts," not "quit a job." Hector names a nine-dollar circuit kit, not night school. If they'd named the other thing, the other thing would be worth following.

Keep your own picture in your pocket. Most of us carry a mental picture of what "well" looks like, and it's usually a picture of our own life: job, apartment, meetings, church on Sunday. The moment that picture gets laid over somebody else's life, we're checking boxes on them. Walt's financial dimension might be a check on the third that covers his life. Hector's spiritual dimension might be a heron at six in the morning. If it covers their life and they're at peace with it, that may be exactly what that dimension looks like for them.

Whose worry is it?

One of the most useful things anyone says in the course is Walt's "why are you worried?" A lot of the worry in the room turns out to belong to the peer supporter, dressed up as concern for the person. The honest answer is sometimes "because I would be," and that's a fact about the helper, not the person. Tyler's recovery from it is simple: "That's fair. I jumped ahead." Then he asks a better question.

When it's about safety

Their version counts for all eight dimensions. Safety is a different conversation. A place with no heat in January, a home where someone doesn't feel safe, a body that's shutting down: those are the moments to follow your agency's policy, bring in your supervisor, and let the person know you're doing it. In the course, Tyler asks Jade whether she feels safe in her building and offers to look at housing options with her. If she'd said she wasn't safe, that would have changed the conversation.

Judge not, even in your head

Retold from *Playing God in Sweatpants*, by the course author. He was in a meeting when a man started talking about aliens. Actual aliens. His first thought was, what is this guy even doing here, and he looked around to see if anybody else was making the face. Then the man said, soft and quiet, that sometimes he still thought he was too broken to be there, but he came anyway.

It isn't our job to sort the room, or to decide whose share is valid. Even unspoken, the little voice sharpening its opinion mid-share is judgment, and it tends to disconnect us from the person in front of us. Taco's version: "Judging isn't my job. Listening is." A dimension that looks empty to you may be full in a way you haven't asked about yet.

You only see a corner of the picture

Same book. The author looked at a man's first apartment and saw wreckage. The man saw the first door he'd ever had a key to. Same room, two different stories. What looks like the end of a story is usually a chapter, and not one we get to write. You plant seeds. Sometimes you never see the harvest.

Writing it down

Agencies have their own documentation rules, so follow yours. A couple of habits Val has found helpful: write what the person said and what you did, in plain facts. "Participant named staying warm between shifts as her first priority. Peer supporter reviewed warming center options with her." That's what happened. "Client needs to quit a job" is an opinion, and it isn't hers. If you notice yourself writing "needs" or "should," it might be worth asking whose idea that is.

Eight places to start. They fill in the rest.

Meet them where they are. Their version counts.

The course guide · Part one

Emotional · Denise

"I'm fine. I ran a floor of forty beds for nineteen years, I can handle a Tuesday." Tyler saw her wiping her eyes in her car before group. The first instinct, "it's okay not to be okay," is kind, but it's a statement, and she already said she's fine.

Tyler tries: "Back then, when you had a rough one, where did it go?" She goes there herself (a bottle at eleven) and names what might help now (her sister).

Openers: where does a bad day go for you? who can tell when you're having one? what's helped before, even a little? **Careful with:** deciding what she's going through or putting a label on it. If it looks like more than we can support, that's a conversation with her, and with our supervisor, about more help.

Physical · Jade

Two jobs, eight months in, naps in her car between shifts, dozed off standing at the bus stop. The reflex is "you need more sleep" or "cut back your hours." She says the thing she'd change first is the cold.

Openers: when does your body get a break? is anything hurting? what would you change first? **What Tyler does with it:** offers to look at a warming center or a safer spot to rest, if she wants that. Taco: "Jade knows her schedule better than I do. The question I can actually help with is how she stays warm and safe between shifts."

Social · Denise

"You don't need friends when you've got forty patients and a night shift. Now it's me, the TV, and a cat who doesn't like me." She has a Rhonda who calls on Sundays. She mostly lets it ring.

Openers: who calls you? who used to? what would it be like to pick up? Maybe her social piece this month is picking up one Sunday call. She sets the pace. A group, a sponsor, new friends might come up someday, if she's interested.

Financial · Walt

"Check comes on the third. Rent's six-forty. The rest is food, cable, and a little for my grandkid. I'm good." Tyler asks about part-time work for a cushion. Walt: "The check is the cushion. I'm not worried. Why are you worried?"

The worry walked in with Tyler. A disability check, a pension, a part-time job, a full-time job: any of those might feel like enough to the person living on it. If something does worry them, that's where we can offer help. Tyler: "That's fair. I jumped ahead. Is there anything about money that does worry you?"

Openers: does the money cover your life? is there a bill that keeps you up at night? is there something you want that it doesn't reach?

EMOTIONAL	PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	FINANCIAL
Where does a bad day go?	What would you change first?	Who calls you?	Does it cover your life?

The course guide · Part two

Occupational · Walt

Tuesdays and Thursdays at the food pantry, running the loading side because he's the only one who knows how to stack a pallet. No paycheck. "For thirty-one years I had a place I belonged. Then I was just a check in the mail. Now I'm the pallet guy. I'll take it." SAMHSA's definition says work, not job.

Tyler asks: "Is it enough? Or is there something else you'd want to be doing?" Walt: "It's enough. Maybe teach a couple of the young guys how to do it right." Tyler didn't decide for him whether it was enough. He asked, and Walt answered, and added a goal of his own.

Openers: where do you feel valued or connected? what do you know how to do that others need? is there anything else you'd want to be doing?

Environmental · Jade

The hallway: people in and out all night, a smell you'd recognize. "But it's cheap, and it's mine." The reflex is "you need to move." We don't know her lease, her money, or what she's tried, and jumping straight to advice could miss all of that.

Tyler tries: "How do you get through it?" Then: "Do you feel safe there?" Then: "Would it help if we looked at some housing options together sometime? No pressure." Then: "Inside your door, what would make your place feel more like yours?" Curtains. Something she can do this week, and her pick. It doesn't fix the building, and nobody's pretending it does.

Openers: what's the hardest part of your day, place-wise? do you feel safe there? what part can you change? If she says she isn't safe, that changes the conversation, and the supervisor comes in.

Intellectual · Hector

"I could read a panel like a newspaper. Now I sit. I feel like a bag of wet sand." His brain last lit up showing a nephew's kid how current moves through a snap-together circuit kit. "Felt like me for twenty minutes."

Openers: when did your brain last light up? what were you good at? what would it take to do a little of that again? Night school and getting the license back might come up someday, if Hector wants them. A cheap circuit kit and a kid who thinks he's a magician is real right now.

Spiritual · Hector

"I'm not doing the God thing. I did the God thing. So don't." Tyler, a meetings-and-higher-power person, says "I hear you" and asks a different question: when did the day last mean something? A heron at six in the morning, at the lake. If it counts to him, it counts.

Asking before sharing. Tyler has something that might help with Hector's "not enough" feeling, so he asks: "Would it be okay if I shared something? You can tell me no." Hector says yes, as long as it's not church. Tyler keeps it small and says it might not fit him. If Hector had said no, that's okay too. Sponsor, pastor, coach, a heron, a lake: whatever helps somebody on their path, it's theirs.

Openers: when did the day last mean something? where do you go to feel like yourself?

OCCUPATIONAL	ENVIRONMENTAL	INTELLECTUAL	SPIRITUAL
Where do you feel valued?	What part can you change?	When did your brain light up?	When did the day mean something?

Writing it down · Val

Plain facts: "Participant named staying warm between shifts as her first priority. Peer supporter reviewed warming center options with her."

An opinion: "Client needs to quit a job." It isn't hers. If you notice yourself writing "needs" or "should," it might be worth asking whose idea that is. Your agency's documentation rules come first.

What we try not to do, across all eight: decide what "well" looks like for somebody else. Measure their life against ours. Jump to fixing the part we'd fix. Mistake our worry for their problem. Sometimes we do it anyway. That's okay. Then we ask a better question.

The whole course on one line

Eight places to start. They fill in the rest. · Notice where something seems missing, ask what it means to them, keep your own picture in your pocket. · Safety goes to your agency's process. Everything else is their version.

Where this comes from

1. Swarbrick, M. (2006). A wellness approach. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 29(4), 311–314. The original eight dimensions.
2. SAMHSA (2016). *Creating a Healthier Life: A Step-by-Step Guide to Wellness* (SMA16-4958), and *Promoting Wellness: A Guide to Community Action* (SMA16-4957): the eight dimensions as adopted for the national Wellness Initiative, the one-line definitions used in this handout, and the first National Wellness Week (2011). library.samhsa.gov
3. Parks, J., Svendsen, D., Singer, P., & Foti, M. E. (2006). *Morbidity and Mortality in People with Serious Mental Illness.* NASMHPD Medical Directors Council. The report behind the Wellness Initiative.
4. Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15.1, Certified peer supporter, (N)(4)(a) the strengths-based model, (b) dignity, (g) cultural competence. codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-5122-29-15.1
5. Ohio Administrative Code 5122-29-15, Peer support services, (B) and (D): individualized, person-driven services and informed choice. codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-5122-29-15
6. SAMHSA, TIP 64: Incorporating Peer Support Into Substance Use Disorder Treatment Services (2023), Chapter 3: wellness, whole-person recovery and the peer role. ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK596270
7. *Playing God in Sweatpants* (2025), by the course author. Two sections of the reading are retold from it; the professional standards above are what the teaching stands on. The book's 12-step language is the author's own path, and this course respects every pathway to recovery.

The scenes in the course are fictional teaching examples at H.E.L.P., a fictional peer support agency. They are not quotations from these sources and not a validated technique. The openers are examples of how the H.E.L.P. crew might start a conversation, not a script. Your own agency's policies and supervision always come first. References checked October 22, 2026. Course version: OPS 006 v2.0, 2 hours of continuing education, topic: Wellness. Provider: Ohio Peer Supporter, made by Thunkbox LLC, Alliance, Ohio, for Ohio certified peer recovery supporters.