



# Family Compassionate Conversations: Community Wellness

## Activities to Increase Community Wellness

*Start with your personal wellness.*

- Think holistically about wellness.
  - How is your body doing? Are you putting healthy foods into it? Are you getting enough sleep? Are you making time for movement?
  - How is your mind doing? Do you have a balance of challenging intellectual activities and restful, relaxing moments? Do you have the tools and skills to quiet a busy mind? Are you using them?
  - How is your heart doing? Are you overwhelmed, stressed, or depressed? Or are you feeling content, happy, or even fulfilled? What changes can you make to feel more joy each day?
- Wellness becomes a part of our daily lives when we form habits. We build habits by doing the same routines and rituals over time.
  - Is wellness a part of your routine?
  - How can you make time for it? Put it on your calendar!
- Our environment affects our wellness. Is there anything unsafe—physically or emotionally—that makes it difficult to practice wellness on a regular basis? Is this something you can change?

*You can change your environment and practices to optimize wellness for your family and community.*

- Start a group wellness program. This can include a group exercise opportunity, adding healthy snacks to high traffic areas, teaching about the [connection between diet and mental health](#), and offering a regular time for mindfulness practices.
- Make time to check in as a group. You can have formal, scheduled conversations, like our Compassionate Conversations, or schedule a wellness check-in when the need arises. You can offer tips and provide accountability or just ask how family or community members are doing, depending on the need.
- Have a relaxing space to come together.
  - Think about how the ambiance can affect family and community members' moods. Consider the lighting and add some low light lamps instead of overhead fluorescents. After checking that there are no allergies, bring in some relaxing lavender scented infused oil sticks or an oil diffuser. Bring in a couch and comfy chairs, which can be donated by a community member or purchased at low cost at thrift stores. Add some calming artwork or motivational posters. Celebrate others' accomplishments. Think about what a relaxing space would look, feel, sound, and smell like and create a space that delivers that.
  - If there is no place for a devoted gathering room, you could carry some of these items that make a space inviting in a suitcase to create a welcoming space wherever you are.



- Create opportunities for team building. A group that grows together is better able to support one another.
  - Schedule [team-building exercises](#) and social events when you begin to gather as a community.
  - Consider including [team-building exercises](#) as an ice breaker at each group meeting.
  - Plan some social events throughout the year to come together to regularly celebrate and get to know each other better.
- Ask school leaders to have grade level, schoolwide, or district wide wellness events around specific topics, including healthy eating, exercise and movement, mental well-being, sleep hygiene, mindfulness, stress-coping skills, and other wellness topics.

*Work with your school to provide assistance to all families in need.*

- Assess the community's needs around clothing, shelter, and other necessities and work towards meeting those needs in conjunction with community organizations and local or state government agencies. Wellness factors like poverty, lack of shelter, and food insecurity can contribute to mental health challenges and make it difficult for children to learn. Work with organizations with expertise in these areas to understand where families in need can go for assistance and how to communicate about these resources to culturally diverse families.

*Ask what kind of wellness activities are being offered to students at school and propose some ideas to school leadership.*

- Propose movement/breathing/meditative breaks regularly in the school day.
- Encourage teachers to start a classroom gratitude practice. Keeping a gratitude practice makes finding positive things part of the daily routine so that students come to search out the good things that are happening all around them instead of focusing on the negative. At the end of the day, teachers can have them log three good things, big or small, that happened throughout the day in a gratitude journal. Students can volunteer to share with the class and/or make a classroom gratitude journal and keep a record of all of the good things that have happened throughout the year. Have teachers emphasize that all class wide gratitude is kept in good conscience and is not punitive or calling out anyone. These can be adapted for the home, too.
- Encourage teachers to start a kindness commitment in their classroom where the class is challenged to find at least one kind thing to do for someone in the classroom every day. Teachers can give the students some different ways that they can be kind: holding the door for someone on the way into school, saying something nice, complimenting a classmate, etc. Let them brainstorm a list of kind things to do.
- Giving back does good and feels good! Ask teachers to start a group community service project with their class. It can be a participatory process where students can learn about different community needs and brainstorm ideas and ways they can help in their community. For instance, if there is interest in animals, a guest from the local



animal shelter can come and visit your class and let the class learn about what the shelter needs. If they are in need of donations to feed the animals, the class can organize a school wide pet food drive. Classes can also do something on a smaller scale like having the children make cards for the residents of a local nursing home or children's hospital (checking with the facilities and their stipulations for such donations).

- Have leadership offer more options for after or before school yoga/meditation/self-care/cooking classes and clubs.
- Ask the school to provide a space for students to utilize as a quiet space to meditate or take a moment alone during study hall, a lunch period, etc.
- Form a student group committed to representing, learning about, and enhancing the school community and give them the opportunity to connect and collaborate with other groups such as the PTA and school board and inform the school and community leadership.

*Students can learn about whole foods by starting a community garden.*

- Young students can learn about plant life cycles and seasons when schools start a community garden.
- Students can also learn about healthy meals and how to cook if teachers make time in their curriculum for these lessons. Students can also get to know the cafeteria staff in the schools in a deeper way, strengthening sense of community, if they are involved in these lessons.
- Lessons about compassion can be infused in community gardening when schools share the bounty from the garden with others in the community.
- Consider a Harvest Celebration where families and students are invited to share a meal made with food grown in the community garden.

*Consider service learning projects around community wellness needs.*

- Have young people do research about issues affecting the community's well-being, for example lead poisoning, air pollution, or water pollution, or issues that are common across the U.S. such as homelessness, poverty, domestic violence, and obesity.
- Have young people brainstorm multiple ways they can affect positive change directly in their own community and in the broader world.
- Give youth the tools they need to design a community project to address one of these issues.
- Help youth connect with community organizations and government agencies working to find solutions to these issues to help them execute their community projects.
- Consider a school, district, or community wide event to share youth's ideas, help them network, and/or share outcomes of community projects.
- Start a regular after or before school community service initiative.



## Reflection Activity

*What can you do to improve your wellness this week?*

*What can you do to improve wellness for your community this month?*

### Family Members' Community Wellness Ideas & Practices

*How These Families Plan to Attend to Their Personal Wellness:*

- Get outside
- Talk a walk
- Cook a meal from scratch
- Play some bocci ball with friends
- Play with their dog
- Use a mindfulness app to remember to breathe. Some popular apps include:
  - Insight timer
  - Calm
  - Headspace
  - MindBell

*Challenges Around Attending to Our Personal Wellness*

- It's difficult to consistently exercise.
  - Doing this with other people helps us keep accountable
- Sitting at the computer all day with deadlines looming is exhausting.
  - It's helpful to remember when we want to help everyone that while we can't help everyone, we are doing what we can.
  - We often need to compartmentalize our work life so we can have a life outside of work.
- One participant had construction going on outside their building, which disrupted sleep.
  - Someone found knowing how long the construction would last to be comforting.
  - Someone else suggested this sleep mask with [headphones](#) built in.
  - [Loop ear plugs](#) also filter out sudden and loud noises, which can be helpful in this instance.
- Many mentioned troubles with getting good sleep.
  - Keep your room dark and cool.
  - Put away electronic devices an hour before going to sleep.
  - Use your bed only for sleeping.

*How These Families Increase Community Wellness for Their Families and Communities:*

- It's important for leadership to allow time during the school or work day to practice the wellness activities that they promote.
- One participant is helping to create community gardens to promote food sovereignty to support Indigenous populations.
- Another participant helps educate their community about the benefits of universal healthcare and helped advocate for legislation in their town.



- One participant found community in peer support online groups.
- Another participant is implementing a wellness/mindfulness practice with staff during professional development.
- Someone else is going to go on a hike with their son.
- One person made a list of people they haven't spoken to in a while and plans to call them.

#### *Challenges Around Practicing Community Wellness*

- There has been a loss of community because of COVID, however, online community has increased.
- There is a need for time to reorient while considering which communities to be a part of with the limited time we have.
- One participant spoke about her school district's decision not to enforce a mask mandate at school and how stressful that was for her as a leader.
  - Someone mentioned that one school district made masks a part of the dress code.
  - Someone else told a story about two young girls being the only ones in their karate class with masks and getting teased by the other students, but bonding over being the only ones to have masks.
  - The school leader will make sure that her school keeps up other safety routines.