

Integrated Wellbeing Model (IWM) and Mindfulness

A practical framework for cultivating awareness, balance, purpose and whole-person wellbeing

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Wellbeing is often spoken about as if it belongs to one part of life: the body, the mind, emotions, relationships, or purpose. In reality, these aspects are deeply interconnected. A difficult environment can affect the nervous system. Physical exhaustion can shape mood and thinking. Emotional overwhelm can narrow attention. A lack of meaning can reduce motivation, vitality and resilience.

The Integrated Wellbeing Model (IWM) offers a structured yet flexible way to understand wellbeing as a whole-person process. It invites us to attend to five interrelated dimensions of the self: the Spatial Self, Physical Self, Emotional Self, Intellectual Self and Eudaimonic Self. When combined with mindfulness, the IWM becomes more than a conceptual model; it becomes a practical pathway for noticing what is happening, understanding what is needed, and responding with greater wisdom and care.

The Five Selves at a Glance

Dimension	Focus	Guiding Reflection
Spatial Self	Environment, body-space, surroundings and sense of place	Does my environment support calm, connection and growth?
Physical Self	Energy, movement, nutrition, rest and physiological regulation	What does my body need in order to feel more supported?
Emotional Self	Emotional awareness, regulation, relationships and support	What am I feeling, and how can I meet it wisely?
Intellectual Self	Learning, strengths, competence, values and life direction	What skills, choices or perspectives will help me move forward?
Eudaimonic Self	Meaning, purpose, contribution and fulfilment	What gives my life depth, direction and significance?

The Role of Mindfulness

Mindfulness strengthens the IWM by helping us recognise what is happening within and around us before we react automatically. It invites a shift from living on autopilot to living with intention, attention, awareness and acceptance.

Intention: What Are We Orienting Towards?

Intentions quietly shape the way attention is directed. When our intention is to learn, connect or approach a situation with curiosity, we are more likely to notice possibility, support and new information. When our intention is shaped by fear, self-protection or worry, attention may narrow towards criticism, failure or threat.

For example, an employee entering a meeting with the intention to collaborate may notice helpful ideas and supportive colleagues. The same employee, entering with doubt or defensiveness, may focus mainly on disagreement or perceived criticism. Mindfulness helps us pause and ask: “What intention am I bringing into this moment?”

Attention: Where Is the Mind Going?

Attention is not neutral. It is often pulled by habit, stress, emotion and past experience. Mindfulness trains the capacity to notice where the mind has gone and gently return it to what matters. This does not mean forcing positive thinking. Rather, it means developing enough steadiness to see the full picture.

Awareness: Seeing Patterns More Clearly

A key contribution of mindfulness is the ability to recognise patterns as they arise. We may notice repeated worries, bodily tension, emotional triggers, relational assumptions, or an inner critical voice. With awareness, these patterns become workable. Without awareness, they often drive behaviour from the background.

Acceptance: Meeting Experience Without Immediate Struggle

Acceptance does not mean passive resignation. It means acknowledging what is present with honesty and kindness, so that our response can be clearer and more skillful. For instance, recognising “I am anxious” creates more freedom than being completely fused with anxiety. From that place, one can breathe, regulate, seek support, reframe, or take constructive action.

Balancing the Negativity Bias

The human brain naturally gives more weight to threat and negative information. This negativity bias once helped human beings survive, but in modern life it can lead us to overlook what is steady, supportive or meaningful. A student who scores 95% may focus only on the 5% lost. A professional receiving mostly positive feedback may remember only one critical remark.

Mindfulness helps individuals notice this automatic pull. Practices such as gratitude reflection, savouring small moments, and deliberately recognising what is working can help restore balance. The aim is not to deny difficulty, but to hold difficulty within a wider and more truthful field of awareness.

Applying the Integrated Wellbeing Model

The IWM can be used for personal reflection, therapeutic exploration, coaching, education and organisational wellbeing. Each dimension offers a different entry point. Often, change begins where there is enough safety, readiness and motivation.

1. Spatial Self

The Spatial Self refers to the environments we inhabit and the way these environments influence our body, mind and relationships. This includes the home, workplace, learning spaces, therapeutic spaces, community spaces and the natural world.

A cluttered or tense environment may increase irritability and stress, while a calm and well-organised space may support emotional regulation. Simple changes, such as creating a quiet corner, adding natural light, introducing plants, or arranging furniture for connection, can influence wellbeing in subtle but meaningful ways. Nature walks, retreats and holidays can also restore the Spatial Self by offering perspective, spaciousness and renewal.

Reflective prompts:

- What spaces in my life feel nourishing, safe or expansive?
- Which environments drain me or keep me in a state of tension?
- What small change in my physical space could support my wellbeing this week?

2. Physical Self

The Physical Self focuses on the body as a foundation for wellbeing. It includes movement, sleep, nutrition, relaxation, breath, energy and physiological regulation.

A person who is emotionally overwhelmed may also be sleep-deprived, undernourished or physically inactive. A working professional may support the Physical Self through short walks, stretching, mindful breathing, strength training, balanced meals and a consistent sleep routine. Physical care is not separate from psychological wellbeing; it is one of its foundations.

Reflective prompts:

- How is my body communicating with me at the moment?
- What kind of movement, rest or nourishment would support me?
- What is one realistic body-based practice I can sustain?

3. Emotional Self

The Emotional Self concerns our capacity to recognise, name, regulate and express emotions. It also includes the quality of our relationships and support systems.

Emotions provide important information. Joy may point to connection and vitality. Anger may signal a boundary. Sadness may reveal loss. Anxiety may indicate uncertainty or perceived threat. Mindfulness allows us to meet emotions with curiosity rather than immediate avoidance, suppression or over-identification. Emotional wellbeing may be strengthened through breath awareness, journalling, therapy, supportive conversations, self-compassion practices and healthier relational boundaries.

Reflective prompts:

- What emotions visit me most often?
- Do I tend to avoid, suppress, judge or overanalyse my emotions?
- What would it mean to respond to this emotion with care rather than criticism?

4. Intellectual Self

The Intellectual Self relates to learning, reflection, skills, strengths, values and the capacity to make wise choices. It includes how we think, plan, problem-solve and grow.

This dimension is not limited to academic knowledge. It includes the ability to understand ourselves, develop competence, clarify goals and engage with life meaningfully. A young entrepreneur may strengthen the Intellectual Self by learning leadership skills. A therapist may deepen this dimension through supervision and reflective practice. A student may build confidence by identifying strengths and developing study strategies.

Reflective prompts:

- What knowledge or skill would help me move forward?
- What strengths can I draw upon?
- Which thoughts, beliefs or assumptions may need to be examined more carefully?

5. Eudaimonic Self

The Eudaimonic Self is concerned with purpose, meaning, values, contribution and fulfilment. It asks not only “How do I feel?” but also “What matters?”

Eudaimonic wellbeing often emerges when life is connected to values and contribution. A person passionate about animal welfare may volunteer at a shelter. A teacher may experience fulfilment by helping students

discover their strengths. A clinician may find meaning in supporting others through suffering and growth. This dimension reminds us that wellbeing is not only comfort or happiness; it is also depth, alignment and significance.

Reflective prompts:

- What gives my life meaning?
- Where do I experience a sense of contribution?
- How can I live more closely aligned with my values?

Using IWM and Mindfulness in Everyday Life

A simple way to work with the model is to pause and scan the five selves. Rather than asking only “What is wrong with me?”, the IWM invites a more compassionate and precise inquiry: “Which part of my wellbeing needs attention?”

Step	Practice
Pause	Take one or two mindful breaths and arrive in the present moment.
Notice	Observe what is happening in the body, emotions, thoughts, relationships and environment.
Name	Identify which dimension of the IWM is most activated or most neglected.
Nurture	Choose one small, realistic action that supports that dimension.
Reflect	Notice how the action affects the wider system of wellbeing.

Conclusion

The Integrated Wellbeing Model provides a practical roadmap for nurturing wellbeing across the interconnected dimensions of life. Mindfulness offers the awareness needed to use this roadmap wisely. Together, they help individuals move from automatic reaction to intentional living; from fragmented self-care to integrated wellbeing; and from the pursuit of temporary relief to the cultivation of a more grounded, purposeful and meaningful life.

When we learn to care for the spaces we inhabit, the bodies we live in, the emotions we carry, the minds we develop and the meanings we serve, wellbeing becomes less of a distant goal and more of a lived, daily practice.