

LET'S TALK

Strategies to handle life's stressors
and overcome challenges.

A Toolkit for City of New York Employees



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Introduction: About WorkWell NYC

LET'S TALK

WorkWell NYC is New York City's workplace wellness program. We offer programs and resources to support City employees at every stage of their wellness journey.

Our free offerings fall into five areas:



Move More: Physical Wellness



Be Well: Mental Wellness



Eat Well: Nutrition

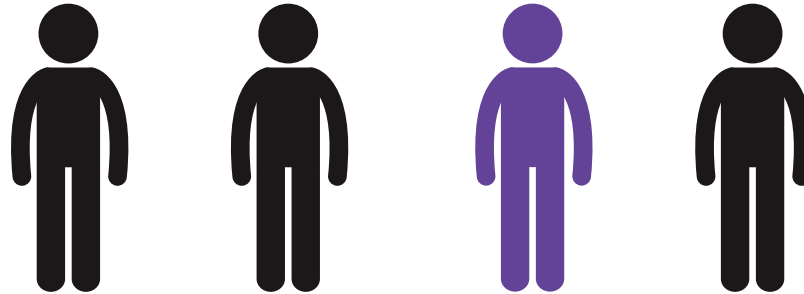


Take Action: Disease Prevention and Management



Project B.U.I.L.D.: Health Equity and Justice

Approximately 1 in 4 New Yorkers experience a mental health diagnosis each year.



The State of Mental Health of New Yorkers (NYC Health Department, 2024)

The updated Let's Talk Toolkit aims to:

- **Support** City employees to prioritize their mental health in and out of work
- **Encourage** a culture of health, support, and resilience in the workplace

Mental health is a “state of well-being that enables us to cope with the stresses of life, realize our abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to our community” ([CDC](#)). Mental health relates to emotions, psychology, and social well-being.

City employees face unique challenges and responsibilities. According to [WorkWell NYC's 2024 Pulse Survey](#), **6 out of 10 City employees report feeling burned out**. If you're one of them, know that you're not alone.

Prioritizing mental health makes it easier to cope with daily stressors, process information, perform quality work, and maintain healthy relationships.

LET'S **TALK**

How to Use the Toolkit



Mental wellness takes more than reading or a one-off activity. We recommend you **Reflect**, **Commit**, and **Explore** to get the most out of this toolkit.



Reflect

Think about your mental health needs and ask yourself:

- How am I feeling right now?
- What do I need most to feel balanced and fulfilled?
- What areas in my life need extra support?



Commit

Prioritize your mental well-being as an investment in your future.



Explore

Explore the strategies in the toolkit that best meet your needs. For each strategy, you'll find benefits, tips, practices, an activity, and resources.

- **Be Grateful** - Improve happiness, health, and interpersonal relationships
- **Be Mindful** - Develop awareness, empathy, kindness, and manage stress
- **Build Resilience** - Overcome difficulties and challenges
- **Reframe Negative Thoughts** - Reduce unhelpful thoughts and increase positivity
- **Navigate Uncertain Times** - Maintain your health and stay resilient
- **Support Colleagues** - Increase social support and reduce stigma

When you find a practice you like, use the [Wellness Plan Worksheet](#) on page 8 to create a plan. There are examples of how to use the worksheet in many of the strategy sections.

Important Reminders

Be Consistent and Patient

Finding what works can take longer than we expect. Patience and consistency are key to make change happen.

Be kind to yourself if progress is slower than you expect. Dedicate time for daily mental wellness and results will follow.

Tailor the Toolkit to Your Needs

There's no "right" way to use this toolkit. Your mental wellness is personal, so treat the **Reflect**, **Commit**, and **Explore** instructions as a guide, not a requirement.

Seek Support When Needed

The toolkit is not a substitute for a mental health or healthcare provider.

- The **NYC Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** offers free and confidential services. Email eap@olr.nyc.gov or call 212-306-7660 to schedule an appointment.
- In the [City & Additional Resources](#) section on page 30, learn more about EAP and how to use your health insurance for mental health services.

Wellness Plan Worksheet



When you find a practice from the toolkit that you like, use this worksheet to create a plan for success.

What practice do I want to explore?	When and how often do I want to do it?	What could make this hard for me?	How can I address this?

- If a plan works, celebrate your success!
- If a plan doesn't work, learn from it and try a different approach.
- Once the practice becomes a habit, try a new one.



LET'S **TALK**

Mental Wellness Strategies



What is Gratitude?

Gratitude can be described in different ways:

- Thankfulness; to appreciate and return kindness.
- To acknowledge the goodness in your life.
- To connect to something larger than yourself – whether to other people, nature, or a higher power.

When you focus on the positives in your life, gratitude naturally follows.



What are the Benefits of Gratitude?

Quality of Life

- Increases happiness and life satisfaction
- Improves self-esteem
- Increases resiliency
- Increases patience
- Improves relationships

Physical and Mental Health

- Supports heart health
- Improves sleep quality
- Promotes mindful eating
- Reduces stress, and anxiety
- Increases optimism and positive emotions

Ways to Start a Gratitude Practice

- **Keep a gratitude journal.** Write down things you're grateful for as a daily or weekly practice.
- **Meditate.** Reflect on something you're grateful for or wish to have more of in your life. Then, bring that something to mind while you take slow, deep breaths and focus on the feeling of gratitude.
- **Thank others.** Give sincere thanks to a colleague, friend, family member or someone else you interact with.
- **Service.** Do a small acts of service. For example, volunteering for a cause or help someone in need.
- **Affirmations** are positive statements about something in your life. They help you practice gratitude daily, no matter where you are. Start your affirmation with, "I am grateful for," then complete the sentence with things you appreciate or wish to have more of in your life.



Need Some Inspiration? Try One of These Prompts

- What's a good thing that happened today?
- What do I take for granted that I can be thankful for?
- Who in my life am I grateful for?
- What is the last book, movie, or social media clip I saw that made me feel grateful, and why?
- What am I looking forward to in the coming weeks or months, and why?
- What is the kindest thing someone said or did for me lately?



Tips for Success

- Acknowledge the good in your life each day
- Appreciate the presence of those in your life who love you, care for you or help you
- Look for positive aspects of difficult situations
- Use reminders to help your gratitude practice, such as a meaningful item, an inspirational quote, or a list of prompts.

Activity

Write a gratitude affirmation that you can recite daily.

I am grateful for...

Mental Wellness Strategy: Be Grateful



Wellness Plan

Want to add a gratitude practice from this section into your routine? Add it to your [Wellness Plan Worksheet](#) on page 8.

Here's an example:

What practice do I want to explore?	When and how often do I want to do it?	What could make this hard for me?	How can I address this?
<i>Gratitude journaling</i>	<i>With my morning coffee on Saturdays</i>	<i>Might be hard for me to remember</i>	<i>Set a reminder on my phone</i>

Resources

- **Watch:**
 - [An Attitude of Gratitude](#)
- **References and Further Reading:**
 - [How gratitude changes your brain](#)
 - [Giving thanks can make you happier](#)
 - [35 Scientific Benefits of Gratitude: Mental Health Research Findings](#)
 - [Gratitude Health Benefits](#)

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about being fully present in the current moment. You can practice mindfulness by giving your full attention to the present moment, and observing your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings while avoiding judgement.

As you practice, it is normal for distractions to come up. Noticing them and coming back to your present focus is mindfulness.



What are the Benefits of Mindfulness?

- Reduces impact of stress on physical and mental health
- Builds resilience and emotional stability
- Helps you feel less reactive and more open-minded
- Increases kindness

Ways to Start A Mindfulness Practice

- **Take some deep breaths.** Breathe in through your nose to a count of 4, hold for a count of 1 and then exhale through the mouth to a count of 5. Repeat as needed.
- **Go for a walk.** Pay attention to your breathing and the sights and sounds around you. If other thoughts enter your mind, acknowledge them and then return to the present moment.
- **Eat with awareness.** Be aware of taste, textures, and flavors in each bite. Listen to your body when it needs nourishment and when it's full. Think about how each part of your body is feeling.

Mindfulness Examples

Walking to the Bus/Train Stop

- *Mindful:* Being aware of your surroundings as you walk, noticing the greenery, art, or something new
- *Not Mindful:* Looking at your phone while walking, almost bumping into others around you

Workplace Conversations

- *Mindful:* Listening thoughtfully without judgement, acknowledging helpful feedback from a colleague
- *Not Mindful:* Getting defensive and interrupting when a colleague is giving feedback

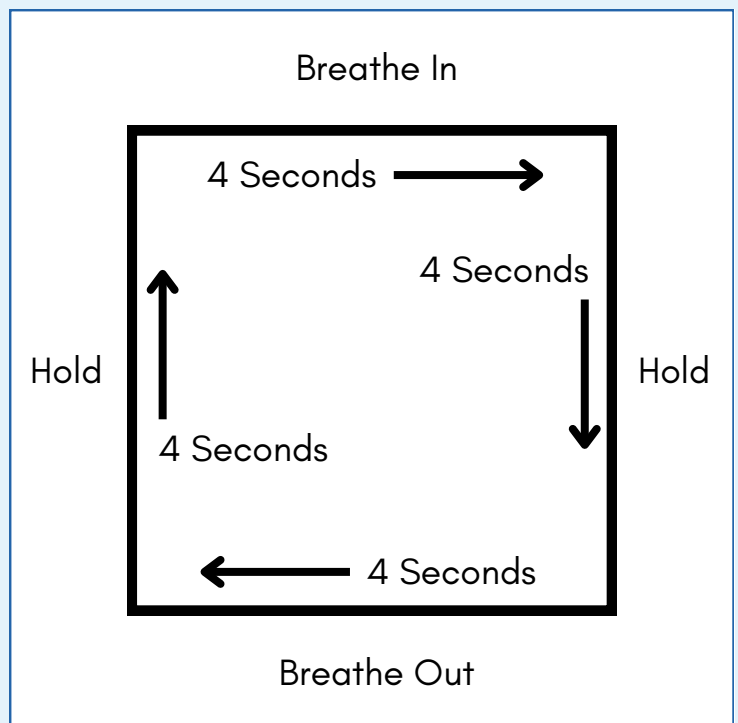
Activity

Try this **Square Breathing exercise** for relaxation and a mental reset.

1. Breathe in for 4 seconds
2. Hold your breath for 4 seconds
3. Breathe out for 4 seconds
4. Hold for 4 seconds

Repeat steps 1-4 as needed.

Can't do 4 seconds? Shorten the time to what's comfortable for you. The key is to have the same amount of time in each step.



Mental Wellness Strategy: Be Mindful



Wellness Plan

Want to add a mindfulness practice into your routine? Add it to your [Wellness Plan Worksheet](#) on page 8.

Here's an example:

What practice do I want to explore?	When and how often do I want to do it?	What could make this hard for me?	How can I address this?
<i>Go for a mindful walk</i>	<i>During lunch breaks, 2-3 times a week</i>	<i>I'm used to eating at my desk as part of my routine</i>	<i>Try a portable lunch option like a sandwich and stop at a bench to eat on my walk</i>

Resources

- **Watch:**

- [Mindful Journaling for Self-Love](#)
- [Mindful Breathing](#)

- **References and Further Reading:**

- [21 Mindfulness Exercises & Activities for Adults](#)
- [Mindfulness meditation changes our brain and biology](#)
- [Mindfulness exercises](#)

What is Resilience?

Resilience is the ability to draw on inner strength to rebound from stressful or traumatic events.

What are the Benefits of Resilience?

- Improves mood
- Increases ability to cope with changes
- Reduces impact of stress on physical and mental health



Ways to Practice Building Resilience

- **Develop healthy habits** like mindful eating, physical activity, and regular sleep.
- **Take time for yourself each day.** Notice the good moments. Do something you enjoy.
- **Look at problems from different angles.** Think of challenging situations as opportunities to learn. Try to see the positive side of things.
- **Practice gratitude.** Take time to note things you are thankful for each day.
- **Explore your beliefs** about the meaning and purpose of life. Align your actions with what truly matters to you.
- **Tap into social connections and community.** Surround yourself with positive, supportive people. Ask for help when you need it.

Mental Wellness Strategy: Build Resilience



Activity

Reflect on the prompts below and jot down your thoughts.

Healthy Thinking

Think about the ways you have overcome challenges in the past. Write down three skills you used then that you can use now.

1)

2)

3)

Connections

Write down three people you can reach out to for social or emotional support in the next 48 hours, should you need it.

1)

2)

3)

Wellness

Write down three self-care and healthy practices you will add into your life this week.

1)

2)

3)

Purpose

Write one thing that gives you a sense of purpose and two things you will commit to over the next two weeks that will help you fulfill your purpose.

1)

2)

3)

Mental Wellness Strategy: Build Resilience



Wellness Plan

Want to add a resiliency practice into your routine? Add it to your [Wellness Plan Worksheet](#) on page 8.

Here's an example:

What practice do I want to explore?	When and how often do I want to do it?	What could make this hard for me?	How can I address this?
<i>Develop healthy habits (get better sleep)</i>	<i>Every night at bedtime</i>	<i>I watch videos on my phone before bed to unwind and lose track of time</i>	<i>Keep phone in a different room and read a chapter of a book to unwind</i>

Resources

• Watch:

- [Self-Care For All](#)
- [Building Your Social Network](#)
- [Let's Get Creative! - The Benefits of Creativity](#)
- [Creating Work-Life Harmony](#)

• References and Further Reading:

- [Nurture Your Resilience: Bouncing Back from Difficult Times](#)
- [Building your resilience](#)
- [The Secret to Building Resilience](#)

What are Negative Thoughts?

Negative thoughts, or irrational thoughts, are thought patterns that are not based on sound reasoning or supported by evidence.

Everyone has negative thoughts sometimes, but having too many can be unhelpful and is closely linked to depression and anxiety.



What are the Benefits of Reframing Negative Thoughts?

- Increases productivity
- Improves mood and well-being
- Increases resilience

Ways to Practice Reframing Negative Thoughts

- **Fact or feeling?** When you have a negative thought, ask yourself, "Is this thought based on a fact or a feeling?"
- **Look for evidence.** Examine a negative thought by writing down the evidence for or against it.
- **Catch It, Check It, Change It.** Remember these three C's to reframe negative thoughts:
 1. Catch It - Notice the negative thought
 2. Check It - Ask yourself "Am I falling into negative thinking?"
 3. Change It - Ask yourself, "What is a more helpful way to think about this?"

Mental Wellness Strategy: Reframe Negative Thoughts



Activity

Write down a negative thought you're having, then think of evidence for and against that thought. After reviewing the evidence, reframe into a positive thought.

This may be challenging at first, but after some practice, you may find you're thinking more positively.

Negative Thought

Evidence For

Evidence Against

Positive Thought

I can't do this new job. It's too hard.

I'm having trouble doing some of the new tasks.

I'm still learning and I can ask for help.

This is a challenge and I'll do my best.

Negative Thought

Evidence For

Evidence Against

Positive Thought

Mental Wellness Strategy: Challenge Negative Thoughts



Wellness Plan

Want to add a practice to reframe negative thoughts into your routine? Add it to your [Wellness Plan Worksheet](#) on page 8.

Here's an example:

What practice do I want to explore?	When and how often do I want to do it?	What could make this hard for me?	How can I address this?
<i>Catch It, Check It, Change It</i>	<i>At work, when I'm nervous before a presentation</i>	<i>I might get distracted by another task before the presentation</i>	<i>Write the 3'C's on a sticky note and put it on my computer to remind me</i>

Resources

- **Watch:**
 - [The Power of Thoughts](#)
 - [Challenging Irrational Thoughts](#)
- **References and Further Reading:**
 - [Reframing unhelpful thoughts](#)
 - [Cognitive Restructuring Workbook](#)
 - [Catch It, Check it, Change It](#)

What are Uncertain Times?

Uncertain times are periods marked by unpredictability from current events, personal challenges like a health condition, or a serious issue affecting a loved one. Sometimes these periods are short and temporary, while some may be long-term or have no end date.

When we experience events that make us feel less safe about ourselves or the world around us, it can cause stress, anxiety and other negative emotions.



What are the Benefits of Navigating Uncertain Times?

- Improves mood
- Reduces negative physical and mental health impacts
- Builds resilience

No one can avoid uncertainty, but simple, actionable steps can make it easier to face unexpected events.

Mental Wellness Strategy: Navigate Uncertain Times



Ways to Practice Navigating Uncertain Times

- **Prioritize basic needs:** Rest, stay hydrated, and eat healthy foods. Meeting these basic needs has a big impact on your mood and energy levels.
- **Practice mindful breaks:** Throughout the day, take a few moments to take a deep breath, relax with guided meditations or calming music, practice journaling, stretch, or go for a short walk.
- **Avoid information overload:** Track how much time you spend on watching news coverage or using social media or the internet. Set limits to prevent overwhelm.
- **Understand what's in your control:** Recognize what issues are beyond your control and where you can act. Save your energy to work on what's in your control.
- **Stay connected:** Reach out to family, friends, colleagues, or join a group that shares your concerns. Sharing experiences can help you feel less alone.
- **Get additional support:** Seek support from a mental health provider or a helpline. Visit the City and Additional Resources on page 30, including the NYC Employee Assistance Program.

Activity

Circle a basic need that could help you navigate uncertain times. Then, write down one thing you can do in the next week to make it a priority.

Healthy food

Hydration

Sleep

Movement

Personal hygiene / self-care

Time spent with others

I can make this a priority by...

Mental Wellness Strategy: Navigate Uncertain Times



Wellness Plan

Want to add a practice to navigate uncertain times into your routine? Add it to your [Wellness Plan Worksheet](#) on page 8.

Here's an example:

What practice do I want to explore?	When and how often do I want to do it?	What could make this hard for me?	How can I address this?
<i>Practice mindful breaks (guided meditations)</i>	<i>During my morning commute to work</i>	<i>It might take a while to find a meditation when I'm on the train</i>	<i>Look for a guided meditation the night before so I don't have to search in the morning</i>

Resources

• Watch:

- [Nightly Wellness - Sleep to Thrive](#)
- [Extinguish Burnout!](#)

• References and Further Reading:

- [10 tips for dealing with the stress of uncertainty](#)
- [6 Strategies for Leading Through Uncertainty](#)
- [Navigating Uncertainty: How We Can Thrive in Difficult Times](#)
- [Navigating Chaos in Uncertain Times](#)
- [The challenge and opportunity in uncertainty](#)

What Support do Colleagues Need?

According to [WorkWell NYC's 2024 Pulse Survey](#), **6 out of 10 City employees report feeling burned out.**

Talking with colleagues about mental health can help them feel supported. Conversations could relate to stress and feelings of anxiety, sadness, frustration, anger or burnout. It is a complement to, not a substitute for, professional mental health care.



In recent years, about **1 in 2 American adults** experience loneliness, according to a [2023 US Surgeon General advisory report](#). Loneliness is associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes, including diabetes, hypertension, stress, depression, and more.

What are the Benefits of Supporting Colleagues?

Support for colleagues fosters a culture of health in your team or agency – which exists when there is a shared value of health. It can make it easier for everyone to combat loneliness, prioritize mental health, cope with daily stressors, perform quality work, and maintain healthy relationships.

Ways to Practice Supporting Colleagues

Talking about mental health with coworkers might feel difficult or awkward initially, but it may help them feel supported and less alone. Here are some tips for having a helpful conversation.



Express Your Concern and Support

In a private area, express to your colleague your concerns. Ask them how they are doing/feeling. Let them know you are available for support.



Practice Active Listening Skills

Put your troubles aside momentarily and give your complete attention to the person who is talking. It's okay to share similar experiences, but be careful not to compare your experiences.



Provide Reassurance

Reassure your colleague that their feelings are valid.



Ask What You Can Do

Ask your colleague how you can help. Do not make assumptions. Respect if they do not have an answer right away or express they do not need help. Let your colleague know you are available for support.



Share Resources

Ask your colleague if they would like to know where to go for more support. Refer them to NYC Employee Assistance Program or to the [City & Additional Resources](#) section on page 30.

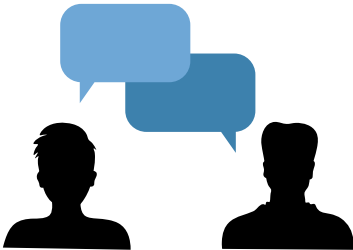
Mental Wellness Strategy: Support Colleagues

LET'S TALK

Conversation Guide

Starting a conversation about mental health with a colleague may feel uncomfortable at first, but it can be extremely helpful and comforting for your colleague.

Here are some conversation starters:



I have been (worried/concerned/_____) about you recently. Have you been getting the care and support you need?



For the past (day/week/____), it seems like you have been feeling (unlike yourself/distracted/stressed). I care about you and I'm here to listen if you would like to let me know how you are feeling.



You seem to be struggling with your (loss of a loved one/finances/job stress/_____).

Sometimes talking to someone who has experienced a similar issue can be helpful. Is there anyone you can think of who has overcome this problem? Are you able to reach out to them?

Mental Wellness Strategy: Support Colleagues

LET'S TALK

Activity

Add your own conversation starter:



Resources

- **Watch:**
 - [Building Connections and Combatting Loneliness](#)
 - [Ending Stigma](#)
- **References and Further Reading:**
 - [How to Talk About Mental Health - Friends and Family Members](#)

LET'S **TALK**

City & Additional Resources





NYC Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

EAP is here for you and your family members. They offer free and confidential services to address mental health, stress management, substance misuse, self-care, education, referrals and resources. Email eap@olr.nyc.gov or call **212-306-7660** to schedule an appointment. Visit nyc.gov/eap to learn more.

NYC Health Benefits Program

NYC Employees and their covered dependents are eligible for health insurance that includes mental health, behavioral health, and substance abuse services.



Learn about your coverage in your plan's [Summary of Benefits and Coverage](#) at nyc.gov/hbp.

For more guidance on finding a mental health provider, check out:

- [What is Therapy?](#) webinar by WorkWell NYC and EAP answers FAQs on using mental health therapy or counseling services
- [Finding Therapy](#) webpage by Mental Health America helps you find a mental health provider



Just Five

Just Five is an interactive online program that delivers the most important addiction facts in just five minutes per lesson. Learn who's at risk, how to know if a person has a substance use disorder, and more.

Helplines

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** If you need to talk, the 988 Lifeline is here. Life's challenges can be difficult. Whether you face mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns, or just need someone to talk to, our caring counselors are here for you. You are not alone. For more information and to contact via call, text or chat, visit website.
- **NAMI Helpline:** A free, nationwide peer support service that provides information, resource referrals, and support to people living with a mental health condition, their family members and caregivers, mental health providers, and the public. Call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264), weekdays from 10 AM - 10 PM EST.
- **MHA Screening:** Online screening is one of the ways to understand if you're experiencing a mental health condition. MHA screens are free, confidential, and scientifically validated. Note: Please check with your doctor, medical provider, or mental health provider if you have any questions or concerns on the results.
- **Warmlines:** Warmlines is a directory of phone lines staffed by trained peers who have been through their own mental health struggles and know what it's like to need someone to talk to.
- **Caregiver Help Desk:** Contact Caregiver Action Network's Care Support Team by calling 855-227-3640. Staffed by caregiving experts, the Help Desk helps you find the right information to navigate your complex caregiving challenges. Caregiving experts are available 8 AM - 7 PM EST.



WorkWell NYC

WorkWell NYC offers free health and wellness programs, on-demand digital content, and resources for City of New York agencies, like mental wellness, physical activity, healthy eating, and more.

We offer workshops made for the unique needs of the City workforce. Work with your agency Ambassador or Wellness Committee to bring wellness workshops to your worksite.

Build healthy habits with the Let's Talk Toolkit and other WorkWell NYC resources.

A habit is a behavior that is repeated regularly and often occurs automatically, without much thought.

Understand the science of habits to support your mental wellness with these resources:

- Watch Create Healthy Habits Webinar on Vimeo or YouTube
- Read our blog on developing healthy habits
- Use the SMART Goal worksheet

Visit [**on.nyc.gov/letstalktoolkit**](https://on.nyc.gov/letstalktoolkit) to check out the Let's Talk Toolkit.

For more mental wellness resources from WorkWell NYC, visit [**nyc.gov/bewell**](https://nyc.gov/bewell).