



## EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: CONTRIBUTORS AND CONSEQUENCES

### Brief No. 2 in a Series

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This four-part series of briefs about emotional well-being was created by [CSCH](#) and the [M3EWB Network](#) at the University of Connecticut. The [first brief](#) describes challenges in defining emotional well-being, and shares a working definition of emotional well-being generated by a diverse network of researchers striving to advance the science of emotional well-being.<sup>1</sup> **This second brief** reviews the components to emotional well-being along with exploration of contributing factors and consequences. The [third brief](#) discusses options for measuring emotional well-being, and the [fourth brief](#) considers next steps in advancing the science of emotional well-being.

Throughout this series, we use the following definition of emotional well-being. This definition was recently developed by a diverse network of researchers working to advance the science of emotional well-being. To learn more about the development of this definition, see the [first brief](#) in this series.

**Emotional well-being** is a multi-dimensional composite that encompasses how positive an individual feels generally and about life overall.

It includes:

- **Experiential features:** emotional quality of everyday experiences
- **Reflective features:** judgements about life satisfaction, sense of meaning and purpose, and ability to pursue goals that can include and extend beyond the self.

These features occur in the context of culture, life circumstances, resources, and life course.

In our first brief, we discussed the need to separate the terms associated with emotional well-being to offer a guiding definition as to what it is and what it is not. In this brief, we explore this topic further, diving into the importance of clarifying the components (i.e., the defining parts) as separate from the contributors, correlates, or consequences.

Exploring the concepts that **contribute to, or result from, emotional well-being** but are not emotional well-being itself helps us further distinguish what emotional well-being is from the many related concepts.

## What can Contribute to Emotional Well-Being?

To begin, we explore factors that can contribute to emotional well-being. As shown in the figure below, things like caregiver warmth, mindfulness, and acts of kindness are thought to contribute to emotional well-being. For example, those with stronger social connections are likely to have higher levels of emotional well-being. In this case, it is not necessarily the number of friendships that is important, but instead the quality of those friendships. As one example, research has found that the transition to college can offer an opportunity to build quality relationships that can contribute to emotional well-being.<sup>2</sup> Emotion regulation skills are also thought to contribute to emotional well-being.<sup>3</sup> Emotion regulation strategies include calming oneself after a stressor (sometimes called self-soothing) or reappraising the severity of a stressor or one's ability to handle it.<sup>4</sup> Some evidence suggests being able to flexibly implement self-regulation strategies leads to greater positive affect and life satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Social connections and emotion regulation can be important contributors, but are not emotional well-being itself.

Emotional Well-Being		
Contributors	Components	Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acts of kindness</li> <li>• caregiver warmth</li> <li>• emotion regulation</li> <li>• mindfulness</li> <li>• social connectedness</li> <li>• spirituality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positive affect</li> <li>• sense of meaning and purpose</li> <li>• life satisfaction</li> <li>• goal pursuit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improved academic achievement</li> <li>• increased productivity</li> <li>• higher self-esteem</li> <li>• improved heart health</li> <li>• healthy aging</li> <li>• improved overall well-being</li> </ul>

*Note.* These are only examples of contributors and consequences of emotional well-being. What would you add? Researchers are investigating a wide range of possible contributors and consequences of emotional well-being.

## What are the Consequences or Results of Having Emotional Well-Being?

In addition to contributors to emotional well-being, it can be useful to consider the consequences or results of having emotional well-being. Things like productivity and self-esteem, for example, might result from *having* emotional well-being. For example, employees with higher levels of psychological well-being have been found to have stronger job performance.<sup>6</sup> Why might this be? We might consider that their positive affect helps them to engage with their responsibilities and colleagues, or their sense of meaning and purpose provides motivation to be successful at work. The consequences of emotional well-being may also extend beyond psychological and behavioral outcomes to physical health outcomes. For example, evidence suggests that those with high levels of emotional well-being might live longer and healthier lives.<sup>7,8</sup>

## Can Something Both Contribute to and Result from Emotional Well-Being?

Keep in mind that these relationships might not always be one directional. Is it possible that something can contribute to and result from emotional well-being? The short answer is yes. Take acts of kindness as an example. Engaging in acts of kindness is likely to bring about positive affect and a sense of meaning and purpose, which would contribute to increased emotional well-being in both experiential and reflective components. But having high levels of emotional well-being can also encourage someone to engage in acts of kindness. Those with higher levels of positive affect or a stronger sense of meaning and purpose, for example, might be more inclined to look outwards towards others' needs and engage in acts of kindness.

## Next Steps in Researching the Contributors to and Consequences of Emotional Well-Being

Using a common definition of the components to emotional well-being makes it easier to be more precise in research. Additional research that explores the factors that *contribute to* and *result from* emotional well-being will help us to create more effective interventions for *improving* emotional well-being. For example, if we confirm that journaling or expressing gratitude increases emotional well-being, then interventions to support these actions might be recommended.

Of course, to evaluate if something improves emotional well-being, we need to be able to *measure* emotional well-being. We explore how researchers measure emotional well-being in our [third brief](#). Building from this discussion, the [fourth brief](#) considers next steps in research to advance the science of emotional well-being.

Finally, we invite you to explore factors that contribute to and result from emotional well-being in your own life. What contributes to your emotional well-being? Why might this be? Reflect on your answer to help you identify actions to promote emotional well-being—both for yourself and for those around you.

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<sup>2</sup> Barzeva, S. A., Richards, J. S., Veenstra, R., Meeus, W. H. J., & Oldehinkel, A. J. (2022). Quality over quantity: A transactional model of social withdrawal and friendship development in late adolescence. *Social development (Oxford, England)*, 31(1), 126–146. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12530>

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