

Well-being: Positive Development Across the Life Course

This book, scheduled for publication by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates in early 2002, considers well-being holistically, integrating physical, cognitive, and social-emotional dimensions and takes a developmental perspective across the life course. The book also describes foundational strengths for well-being, that is, the capacities that can be actively developed, supported, or learned. These foundational strengths, such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, and physical safety, are the positive underpinnings of early child health and development and of ongoing well-being across the life course. Many variables, including genetics, biology, the environment, and individual experience, contribute to the development of well-being, but could not be included as a major focus of one volume on this subject.

In considering these elements, we asked experts to address these questions in considering each of the proposed strengths:

- Is the strength a capacity that all children might develop?
- Is there an evidence base that supports the strength?
- Does the strength promote child health and development and lessen the likelihood of problems developing later?
- Can the strength be cultivated?
- Can the strength be measured?

These questions were considered by the authors and representatives from an array of child-serving organizations at Center conferences in May and June of 2000. Their deliberations have shaped the book and given practical insights into practice and policy concerns.

The book's authors and editors have used the following definition of well-being: Well-being is a state of successful performance throughout the life course integrating physical, cognitive, and social-emotional function that results in productive activities deemed significant by one's cultural community, fulfilling social relationships, and the ability to transcend moderate psychosocial and environmental problems. Well-being also has a subjective dimension in the sense of satisfaction associated with fulfilling one's potential.

The book is divided into the following sections :

- An introductory section with chapters on the history of the study of well-being in children and adults and a chapter on foundational elements and the strengths-based approach.
- Social and emotional domain—with chapters on coping, emotional development, parent-child relationships, peer relations, emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, empathy, sympathy, positive development of the self, sibling relationships, trust, and autonomy.
- Physical domain—with chapters on nutrition, personal and community health care services, physical activity, physical safety and security, reproductive health and sexuality, and growing up drug-free.
- Cognitive domain—with chapters on information processing and memory, curiosity, exploration, novelty-seeking, mastery motivation, thinking and intelligence, problem-solving, language and literacy, educational achievement, moral development, and creativity and talent.
- The adulthood section will cover topics such as transition to adulthood, physical health in the aging, social and emotional engagement in adulthood, cognitive styles and well-being in adulthood and old age, and elements of mental health in adulthood.
- A concluding section will include chapters on the nature and structure of developmental well-being and implications for programs, policy, science, and practice.

Each section includes an overview that explains what the domain contributes to general well-being. The overview provides a highlight of the chapters that follow and identifies the relations among the strengths within the domain as well as the relations between the domain and other domains.

Generally, each chapter examines a specific strength. The author or authors define the strength, documenting how the strength is identified in a human being and exhibited over the life course. They review past research and current literature on the strength and cite studies that have measured its characteristics. Within the chapter the authors discuss how the strength contributes to well-being and document or propose actions, environments, or programs that may positively influence its development and enhancement.

This book is intended for a professional audience across many disciplines contributing to child well-being.