



VICTORY WELLNESS CHECKS: A QUICK GUIDE FOR MILITARY & FAMILY LIFE COUNSELORS

With Evaluation Study Results & Recommendations

Victory Wellness Checks are a key component of Operation Victory Wellness. Each Soldier is expected to complete a 30-45 minute interview with a Military and Family Life Counselor (MFLC) on an annual basis. These interviews should be person-centered and individualized.

This Quick Guide is designed to ensure consistency across MFLCs, address potential questions from MFLCs, and support excellence in tailoring Victory Wellness Checks for each 1st Infantry Division/Fort Riley Soldiers. It is not designed to be a script or set of rules; instead, these suggestions are reminders and offer a framework for MFLCs to use when conducting Victory Wellness Checks.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

How are MFLCs being prepared?	Make sure that you know what the goals of Wellness Checks are—reading this whole Quick Guide might help.
How are Soldiers being prepared before the session begins?	Using the Soldier Quick Guide, Soldiers should already be introduced to: (1) The goals of the session (2) The limits to confidentiality This information will then need to be briefly repeated at the start of the session.

INTRODUCING THE SESSION

Cover the MFLC confidentiality statement.	Review the guidance around confidentiality with the Soldier: (1) What they say is confidential (and non-attributable) (2) Limits to confidentiality include intent to break the law and a threat to self or others
Review expectations for the session.	Make sure you address the concept that this session is: (1) For every Soldier in the 1ID/Fort Riley community (2) To support resilience and adaptability (3) To introduce Soldiers to counseling

Below is potential starter language. Please make this your own and use your own words and phrasing.

“You’ve probably heard lots of different things about these sessions—I want you to know that the goal here is to help support your personal resilience and to introduce you to what counseling is like. How you use this time is up to you. You are in the driver’s seat. My job as a counselor is to help and offer guidance that might be useful.”

LAUNCHING THE DISCUSSION

Start with an open-ended question.	Begin with an inviting question like, “How would you like to use this time?”
Follow-up as needed.	<p>Some people will jump right in with topics. Some will have specific issues and some will figure it out as they start talking. Others may hesitate—if they hesitate, you can prompt them in various ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think about your life right now—socially, personally—what would you like it to be like and how does that compare with how it is?• If there is a gap—what is getting in your way of achieving that gap?
Keep additional prompts handy in your back-pocket.	<p>If these initial questions don't help launch the conversation, here are some back-pocket prompts to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some Soldiers have talked about [describe a topic such as: personal goals, loneliness, sleep problems, drinking, problematic anger, finding meaning in what they do, building closeness with others]. I'm wondering if that's a topic that might resonate with you.• What do you think of as your strengths (as a person)? How can you use your strengths in other areas of your life?• How would others in your life describe you? What would they say is your biggest strength? What would they say you should work on in this session?• Not everyone is comfortable with self-reflection. In what ways might self-reflection be useful to you in terms of building toward your personal goals?
Follow the Soldier's lead.	<p>Take your cue from the Soldier—what are they interested in discussing? If they have a lot of topics they want to bring up, of course you won't have time to discuss them all. Consider asking, “What's the most important?” and ask them to prioritize. Remember, this Wellness Check isn't the same as an intake.</p>
Remember the fundamentals.	<p>The basics of counseling—listening and reflecting—will go a long way in establishing an authentic connection. You won't know at what point the Soldier is in their lives, so meet them where they are and focus on building that connection.</p>

BUILDING THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE AND RAPPORT

Remember to re-charge.	Be sure to give yourself a break to re-charge and re-center before meeting each new person.
Remember to be psychologically present.	Avoid the check-the-block phrases or resorting to a list of resources as a way to fill the time.
Remember the context.	As you know, the Soldiers aren't coming in for treatment and might need encouragement to self-reflect.
Addressing previous experience with counseling.	Some Soldiers will have had previous experience with counseling that they regard as negative or disappointing. Remember to acknowledge their experience. You can also let them know that this Wellness Check is a chance to start fresh and make the counseling experience something that is useful to them.
Provide perspective.	If the Soldier is reluctant to engage, you can try encouraging them by mentioning that even if they don't need this experience themselves, it might be useful for them to know what it's like in case one of their buddies needs help in the future.
Remember there will be a range of experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For some Soldiers, this experience may be unsettling because they will be uncertain about what you are going to do and what will happen in the session. The session may feel intimidating because it is out of their control. Set them at ease the best you can.• Soldiers may be confused by the term "counseling" because it's a military term for leaders to guide their Soldiers in professional development and often described as an opportunity for correcting Soldiers. You may need to clarify terminology.• Soldiers may have questions about why Soldiers go to counseling or therapy. You can consider explaining it by noting that sometimes when people get stuck, and their normal ways of coping aren't working for them, they need new ideas of how to move forward. Or sometimes Soldiers want to unload a concern that they have that they aren't comfortable sharing with anyone else. Providing clear and direct explanations like this can help demystify the process.

CONSIDERING META-GOALS OF THE SESSION

Establish a counseling orientation.	Encourage psychological mindedness and a growth mindset.
Provide perspective.	Normalize that everyone struggles at some point in their life.
Create a welcoming environment.	Have them experience the relief that can come with sharing concerns, and that sharing their thoughts can be helpful—whether with family, friends or a counselor. This session may be their only exposure to counseling, and your role is to demystify it.
Give them a gift.	Can you provide one good tip, idea, or strategy (a kind of gift) that they can take with them—something to remember and to work on? See if you can give them something (e.g., grounding techniques, deep breathing, rapid reframing, asking themselves: “will this matter to me a year from now?”). Ideas for specific skills are included in the Evaluation Study Results on the next few pages of this Quick Guide.

CLOSING THE SESSION

Be sure to save time for a wrap-up.	As you prepare to wrap up the session, consider asking questions to prompt reflection. You can ask questions such as, “How was this session for you? What worked for you? Was it what you expected?”
Offer resources as needed.	Think about whether there is a need for some kind of follow-up and ask if there is anything the Soldier would like to follow-up with in terms of other resources. Provide targeted suggestions without overwhelming them with a long list.
Ask for their way ahead.	As you close out the session, prompt the Soldier to identify a point or topic that they might remember or take with them to think more about. And remember to offer your thanks for their participation.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

Thank you for being part of this ground-breaking effort in proactively supporting Soldier wellness and providing Soldiers with an introduction to the counseling process. Your role is unique, and you are serving an important part in this cultural shift in the Army.

WRAIR

Walter Reed Army
Institute of Research
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EVALUATION PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background.	When 1ID/Ft Riley launched Wellness Checks, the leadership asked the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research to evaluate the program.
Study.	1ID/Ft Riley Soldiers completed 6 quarterly anonymous surveys (2021-2022).
Method.	Each survey was completed by an average of 8,349 Soldiers.
Perspective.	There were a variety of benefits associated with completing a Wellness Check; there were also negative comments worth noting. Take a moment to think about how you might sustain, strengthen or adjust your approach to create an even more impactful opportunity for Soldiers.

RESULTS

Positive attitudes.	<p>Most Soldiers found Wellness Checks useful*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 79% reported they felt listened to • 66% reported it helped them see the value of mental health counseling • 60% reported it was good to get things off their chest • 57% reported it helped them in their professional life • 56% reported it helped them in their personal life • 52% reported they are using skills they learned during the Wellness Check <p>*Ratings reported here included “moderately,” “quite a bit” or “a lot”</p>
Associated outcomes.	<p>Compared to Soldiers who had not had a Wellness Check, Soldiers who had a Wellness Check reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Greater likelihood they would seek counseling if they needed it ✓ Less stigma around help seeking ✓ More resilience ✓ More flourishing (such as sense of purpose) ✓ Better coping skills ✓ More mental readiness for combat <p>These differences were significant even after adjusting for rank, age, negative affect, length of time in unit, and Company-level effects.</p>

RESULTS CONTINUED

Optimizing strategies.

Soldiers found the Wellness Check more useful when:

- They were ready with a topic to discuss
- They used the Wellness Check experience to reflect on their lives
- Their leaders were supportive of Wellness Checks (talked about importance of Wellness Checks, encouraged them to be prepared with a topic to discuss, and encouraged self-reflection)

SOLDIERS WERE ASKED...

“Thinking about your Wellness Check experience, how did it impact you? What skill did you take with you? What did you learn?”

SOLDIER COMMENTS ABOUT OVERALL WELLNESS CHECK EXPERIENCE

Emotional Expression	"I felt like I got something's off my chest & I learned I have someone to talk too"
Stigma Reduction/ Help Seeking	"It's nice to see the military taking stigma away from [behavioral health]. Resources for my soldiers"
Resources/ Referrals	"I learned about programs that could help people not only in situations that are based on people's mental health, but financial, marital etc."
Leader Engagement/ Orientation	"How my attitude and well-being impacts the organization and those under my stead."

"I've opened up about parts of my life that I never got to hash out personally because I didn't see them as detrimental to my own well being. I quickly learned how to ensure these experiences are being addressed properly and not taking full effect of my life."

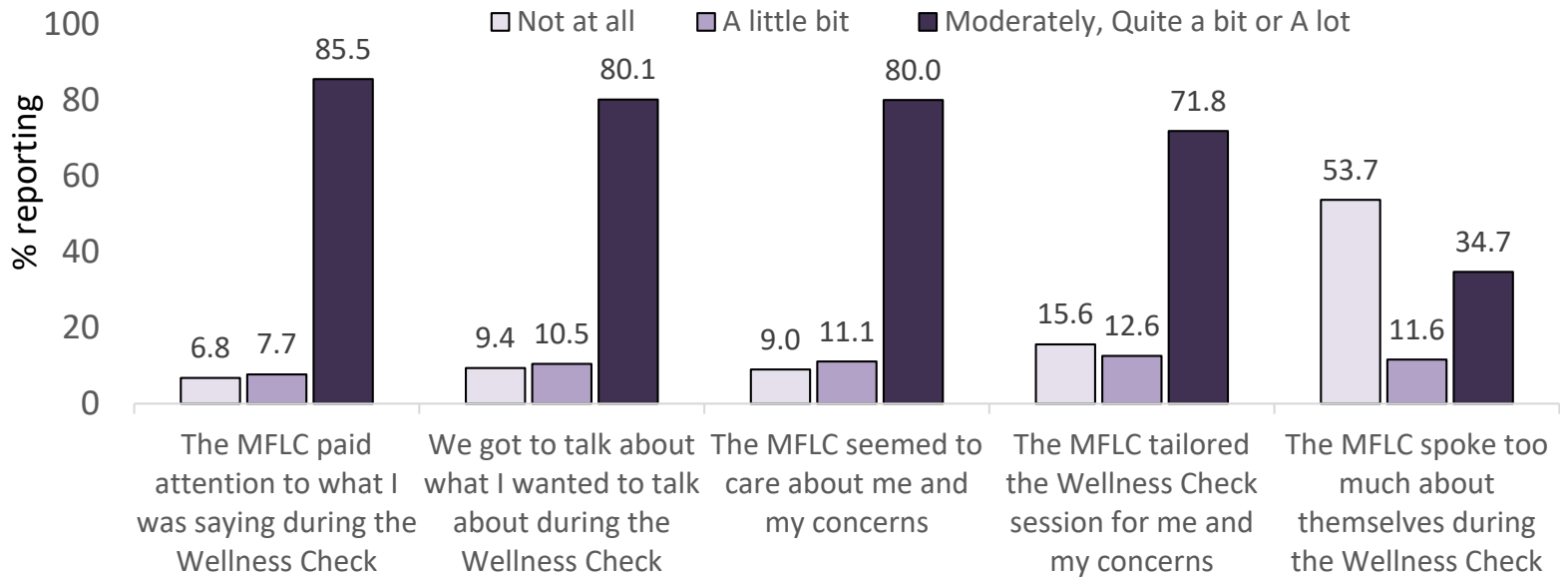
-NCO

"It was the first time I felt like the Army actually cared about my mental health. I am an advocate for counseling, even for those who do not believe they need it [...] I did feel more listened to than ever before and that was nice."

-Jr. Enlisted Soldier

SOLDIER PERCEPTIONS OF MFLCs

Soldiers who had a Wellness Check reported MFLCs paid attention and seemed to care but some thought the MFLCs may have spoken about themselves too much (see data below).



SOLDIER COMMENTS ABOUT MFLCs

Soldiers were asked, "Thinking about your Wellness Check experience, how did it impact you? What skill did you take with you? What did you learn?"

Available	"There are more options out there as far as people to talk to"
Attentive	"I appreciated the chance to talk with a person who isn't in my chain of command and who seemed genuinely interested in my well-being."
Approachable	"My counselor was wonderful and it was a very enjoyable conversation."
Lack of Rapport	"It seems like the counselors here are in a rush to get the checks done and I didn't feel like I was being taken seriously"
Inadequate	"To be honest, all they did was talk about themselves"

"I think the wellness checks are very beneficial and provide Soldiers with an opportunity to talk with someone that they otherwise might not go [seek] out and schedule [for] themselves. Additionally, it has provided me with information and resources to assist Soldiers, as well as provide myself with knowledge in case I did ever need to talk to someone."

-Officer

TAILORING WELLNESS CHECKS

Soldiers who rated the Wellness Check as tailored for them were 4.5 times more likely to report using skills they learned. This finding was significant even after accounting for gender, rank, trait affect, time in unit, and unit differences.

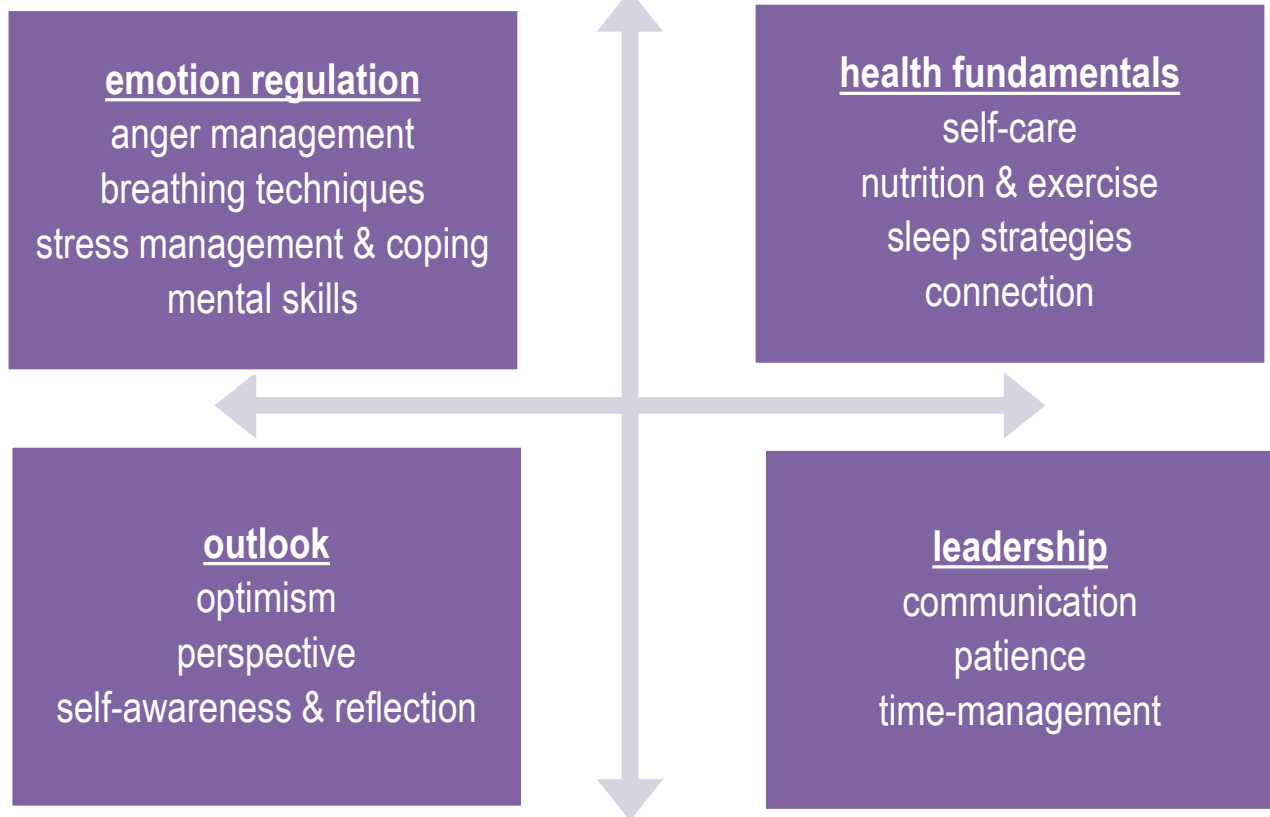
Of Soldiers who reported their Wellness Check was tailored, **75%** reported using the skills they learned during the Wellness Check

75% vs 14%

Of Soldiers who reported their Wellness Check was **not** tailored, **14%** reported using the skills they learned during the Wellness Check

Tailored Topics:

examples of topics that Soldiers highlighted in describing what skills they “took with them” months after their Wellness Check



“It was [a] great dialogue of information sharing. I was really able to feel listened to and taken seriously. Overall great experience.”

-NCO

SOLDIER COMMENTS ABOUT SPECIFIC SKILLS

Soldiers were asked, "Thinking about your Wellness Check experience, how did it impact you? What skill did you take with you? What did you learn?"

emotion regulation

anger management	"How to be calm in frustrating situations"
breathing techniques	"Deep breathing [exercises]"
stress management & coping	"Worry about what I can control and don't stress so much about things out of my reach"
mental skills	"[MFLC] helped me deal with my self image and improve my confidence through positive self talk and seeing myself the way I want to be."

health fundamentals

self-care	"Take time to take care of me because at times we focus more on Soldiers, families, and the mission."
nutrition & exercise	"Eat better" "To stay active"
sleep strategies	"Skills to help fix sleep habits"
connection	"[The Check] helped me realize that I am able to open up to people and seek help if I need it."

outlook

optimism	"I learned to be happy with myself and look at the brighter side of the picture."
perspective	"I learned that the moment I'm in no matter how hard or how easy it is it's only for the moment"
self-awareness & reflection	"I spent more time self reflecting and thinking about my future as a soldier, as a husband, and as person"

leadership

communication	"Ask open ended questions for soldiers"
patience	"I learn to be more patient and hopeful for the future."
time management	"I learned to prioritize time management and build upon the balance with work and family"

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES FOR MFLCs

Stay present.	Taken together, evaluation results demonstrate the benefits of Wellness Checks and the positive impact that MFLCs can have on Soldiers. You are on the right track!
Beware of talking too much.	Although it's common to use deliberate self-disclosure to help set someone at ease, this approach may backfire and be misinterpreted.
Focus.	Listen, listen, listen.
Be ready with a toolkit of skills for tailoring.	There are a range of skills that Soldiers remembered even months after their Wellness Check. Keep a list of these skills at the ready so you prepared to tailor the experience for the Soldier.
Top of mind.	After reading this guide, consider finding ways to routinely remind yourself of the main messages. Encourage incoming MFLCs to familiarize themselves with this guide to ensure consistency in understanding and implementation.

“My experience during the wellness check was surprisingly very good. Speaking with people [in] my unit prior to the check, I wasn’t expecting the experience that I had. Speaking with the counselor was honestly relieving. I get that there was a lot of things that I was able to think/speak about that I either forgot or haven’t talked about in a long time. It was a good feeling to reflect on all the different things that happened throughout my life and how I handle it now. I learned better ways to handle the adversities that I have or will encounter.”

-Jr. Enlisted Soldier

“The Wellness Check impacted me by letting me understand that there are resources and people to talk to outside my immediate work for help. A skill that I learned was to journal my thoughts down in order to get a better understanding and a sort of track record on how I've felt. I learned about the available resources and how to better monitor my emotions, as well as recognize when I need to reach out.”

-Jr. Enlisted Soldier

“That there were opportunities to be heard and listened to. For soldiers, I didn’t believe there was a source for mental health, which I believe to be mostly dismissive. It was great to see so many sources and that if I had any issues, I had an option to speak to a professional. I was given good advice about sleep and other tips in regards to physical health.”

-Jr. Enlisted Soldier



Note: Quotes have been edited lightly for readability.