

OPTIMIZING WELLNESS CHECKS: A QUICK GUIDE FOR UNIT LEADERS

This Quick Guide highlights how leaders can optimize the utility of Wellness Checks for their Soldiers.

LET SOLDIERS KNOW ABOUT WELLNESS CHECKS

Ensure your Soldiers know what a Wellness Check is

- A 30-45 minute session
- An annual event (depending on the unit's requirements)
- Conducted by Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLCs)
- Confidential – No records are kept (they are outside of the medical system)
- An opportunity to promote personal resilience and personal development
- An introduction to what counseling is like and a chance to decrease stigma
- Time that Soldiers can use for their own benefit

PREPARE SOLDIERS FOR THEIR WELLNESS CHECK

In an anonymous survey of more than 3,000 Soldiers who had completed a Wellness Check, Soldiers were asked how they prepared for their Wellness Check and used their Wellness Check time.

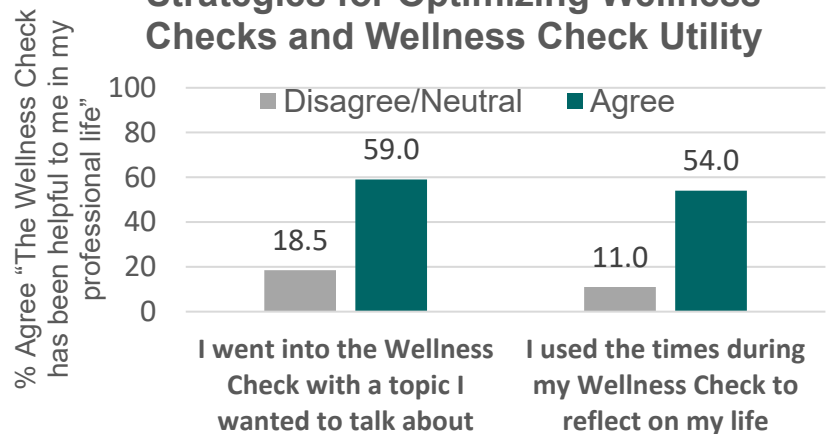
Ready with a Topic	Soldiers who go into their Wellness Check with a topic they want to talk about are 3 times as likely to report the Wellness Check is helpful to them in their professional and personal life.
Time to Reflect	Soldiers who use their Wellness Check time to reflect on their life are nearly 5 times as likely to report the Wellness Check is helpful to them in their professional and personal life.

Encourage your Soldiers to plan for their Wellness Check

Ask your Soldiers how they will use their Wellness Check time to reflect, grow, and build resilience. Have them consider topics that might be meaningful to them

- Emotional health (like anxiety/stress)
- Connections with friends and unit
- Family (Spouse, kids, parents)
- Work-related demands
- Leadership skills
- Performance at work
- Sense of meaning and purpose
- Personal and professional goals

Strategies for Optimizing Wellness Checks and Wellness Check Utility



Prompt Soldiers during their 1-on-1 military counseling to consider whether some goal or challenge might be a good topic for their Wellness Check.

INTEGRATE WELLNESS CHECKS

As a leader, you can use Wellness Checks to prompt discussion. Talking about your own experience with your Wellness Check can be a great way to get the conversation started. You can use the conversation to strengthen unit connection and support best practices for Wellness Checks.

Set the Tone

When you bring up the topic of Wellness Checks, make sure Soldiers know

- (1) What Wellness Checks are (some Soldiers may not be familiar with the concept);
- (2) Some Soldiers may have had a Wellness Check, and some may not have had one yet;
- (3) Everyone should get a Wellness Check, including you and leaders at all levels; and
- (4) Wellness Check details can remain confidential—no one has to talk about their experience if they don't want to.

Reflect on the Experience

Initiate a discussion in which you ask your Soldiers whether they want to share what they've learned from the Wellness Check, recognizing that Soldiers can talk about the experience without specifics and that Wellness Checks are confidential.

Try questions such as:

- Was it what you expected? Did anything surprise you?
- Was there anything you did that helped make the experience more meaningful?
- Did you gain any insights into things that have been bothering you?
- In what ways did it impact you over time after you had a chance to consider it?
- If you learned something, how can you hold onto and remember that insight?
- What would you advise Soldiers do to get the most out of a Wellness check?
- Some Soldiers report the most powerful part of a Wellness Check is feeling heard.
How can we—as a team or as individuals—do a better job listening to one another?

Remember to consider what part of your own Wellness Check experience you might share in order to lead by example and promote the deliberate use of Wellness Checks

Take into Account Soldier Response

In survey comments about Wellness Checks, many Soldiers wrote that they

- Liked having someone listen to them (“He actually listened to what I had to say”);
- Felt the experience lightened their load (“I got to get things off my chest”);
- Gained perspective (“Walked out with a better perspective of my emotional habits”).

Even Soldiers who felt they didn't need a Wellness Check commented it helped them as a leader (“Demystifying the experience of counseling and giving leaders first-hand experience”).

Remember Benefits of Wellness Checks

Those Soldiers who have completed a Wellness Check (compared to those who have not)

- Are more likely to rate the Wellness Check positively
- Are more willing to consider going to seek mental health care if they need it
- Have a greater sense of purpose

These differences were significant even after accounting for rank and other demographics

Think about Your Role as a Leader

- Junior leaders may want to follow this guide for 1-on-1 counseling whereas experienced squad and platoon leaders may find this guide useful for building group discussions.
- Company leaders may want to chain-teach their leaders to facilitate these discussions.
- How you respond as a leader can enhance the impact of Wellness Checks.