

Lights On! New Productions

A wellbeing toolkit to support and promote health, safety and wellbeing in the pre-production process

Brought to you by Wellbeing in Entertainment and Creative Arts (WECA)

Our Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision

WECA envisions an entertainment industry guided by trauma-informed principles, by which the health, safety, and wellbeing of artists and entertainment workers are prioritized throughout the entire creative process, from pre to post-production.

Mission

WECA strives to be the premiere hub of wellbeing in entertainment in the United States, ensuring that creative spaces are well-equipped to promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of cast and crew members. WECA is committed to decreasing mental health stigma, increasing access to support, and establishing industry standards for wellbeing.

These goals are achieved by developing resources and training, partnering with productions to provide risk assessment and consultation, and supporting and uplifting ongoing mental health research.

Values

WECA is guided by values of social justice, intersectionality, and trauma-informed knowledge. We believe that the creative arts are an essential component of human wellbeing where individual and community healing can occur. We believe that those who work in entertainment have the right to work in healthy and safe environments guided by principles of prevention and harm reduction.



WECA

WELLBEING IN ENTERTAINMENT
AND CREATIVE ARTS

WECA

Pillars of Wellbeing

Wellbeing in Creative Arts and Entertainment (WECA) is a non-profit, 501 (c) 3, and the premiere hub of wellbeing in entertainment in the United States, **ensuring that creative spaces are well-equipped to promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of cast and crew members**. In addition, WECA is committed to decreasing mental health stigma, increasing access to support, and establishing **industry standards** for wellbeing.

In reviewing the literature regarding wellbeing and psychological safety and various sociological and psychological theories, WECA developed the **Pillars of Wellbeing**. These pillars will be a guide throughout this toolkit. The bottom portion, **safety and autonomy**, represents the foundation on which everything else is built. The top of the pyramid encompasses **purpose and fulfillment**, where we often strive to be but struggle due to systemic issues and emotional struggles. **Consider the activities in this toolkit an introduction to some supports to help you reach the top of the pyramid to thrive while working in entertainment.**



Wellbeing: A Primer



Wellbeing is a sense of **health, prosperity, and vitality** that arises from our thoughts, emotions, actions, and experiences. It is the **ability to live life to our true potential** and as the best possible version of ourselves. It also constitutes **a sense of wholeness, a feeling of connectedness, and a recognition of purposes in our lives**. Wellbeing is often conflated with physical health, but it goes much deeper. Genuine wellbeing combines physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological dimensions. The COVID-19 pandemic brought about a new understanding of wellbeing as our worlds were turned completely upside down.

Research has found **eight** essential components that contribute to wellbeing.

Physical

This component essentially deals with anything relating to our physical body. Physical wellbeing refers to all aspects of physical health, including nutrition, exercise, weight management, pain management, drug and alcohol use, and medical conditions.

Emotional

This component deals with all things related to feelings and our emotional experience. Emotional wellbeing refers to an individual's emotional state, ability to manage or cope with difficult emotions, express emotions, and adapt to life stressors and change.

Social

The social component of wellbeing includes social community, relationships, and personal expression. In addition, social wellbeing includes one's feelings of belonging and acceptance. Humans are social creatures and we rely heavily on social interaction with others. We also require social support to reach our full potential.

Intellectual

Research has consistently pointed to a human desire for continued opportunities for growth and expansion. Intellectual wellbeing refers to aspects related to the brain, brain health, and brain stimulation. Humans thrive in environments where there are opportunities to learn.

Environmental

Environmental wellbeing refers to aspects of the external environment that can impact an individual's health and wellness. This can include exposure to toxins, smog, and access to clean water. It can also refer to the safety of the environment in which an individual lives.

Financial

Financial wellbeing includes access to resources, the ability to pay expenses, and engaging in financial planning. Access to consistent monetary resources directly affects our ability to meet our basic needs.

Vocational/Occupational

Vocational/occupational wellbeing encompasses an individual's ability to engage in work that is meaningful for them. For creative types and people interested in entertainment, many describe their occupational interests as a "calling." Many feel compelled to aid in telling human stories to help others heal and thrive. For some, this calling is often directly related to social justice and activism by exposing impactful stories to the larger community.

Spiritual

Spiritual wellbeing encompasses an individual's faith system and how they search for meaning and purpose in their lives. This area can refer to an individual's belief in a religion or a higher power, but it doesn't necessarily. Spirituality is an individual experience and is often directly related to our sense of purpose and ability to create meaning through our experiences.

The Big Picture of Wellbeing in Entertainment

As it stands, research on wellbeing in entertainment is scant. The research that has been conducted, however, has consistently pointed to **threats to wellbeing** consisting of toxic stress and anxiety, communication and boundary challenges, bullying and harrassment, stigma and bias, uncertainty, and fatigue as **risk factors that make entertainment workers highly vulnerable** to mental health and substance abuse challenges. Research has also pointed to experiences of **loss and trauma** as factors that exacerbate these challenges. Loss and trauma are authentic human experiences that are unavoidable. As the graphic below depicts, loss and trauma are constantly buzzing in the background of our day-to-day experiences. As you navigate this toolkit, we will explore your experience with these factors and identify strategies to build ongoing **resilience**.



New Productions

A Reflection and Journaling Activity

What comes to mind as you think about this new artistic endeavor? What fears, worries, anxieties, hopes, and excitements are presenting? Set a timer for 5 minutes, and either on this page or in your own journal, write freely what comes to mind. Allow your thoughts to flow onto the page, and try your best to avoid judging what comes up.



A large purple rounded rectangle containing 18 horizontal lines for journaling, each preceded by a white circular dot.

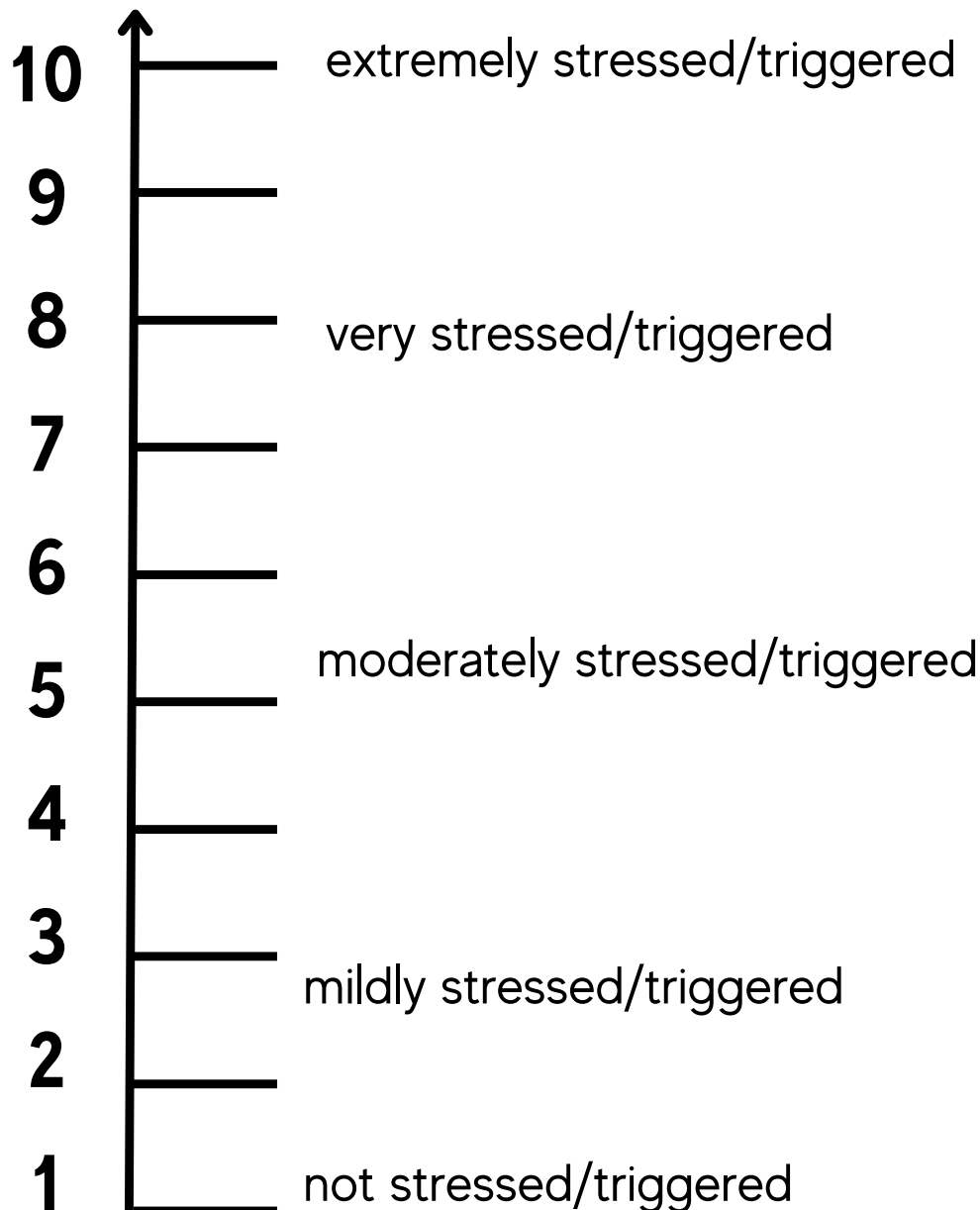
Body Awareness

Take a moment to think about the last few times you were overwhelmed. **Where did you feel it in your body?** Our body will send us warning signals about our emotional experience before we can even register that we are overwhelmed. Mark an **x** on the places in your body where you experience difficult emotions and feel free to take notes on the sides. This will be helpful for helping to regulate your nervous system.



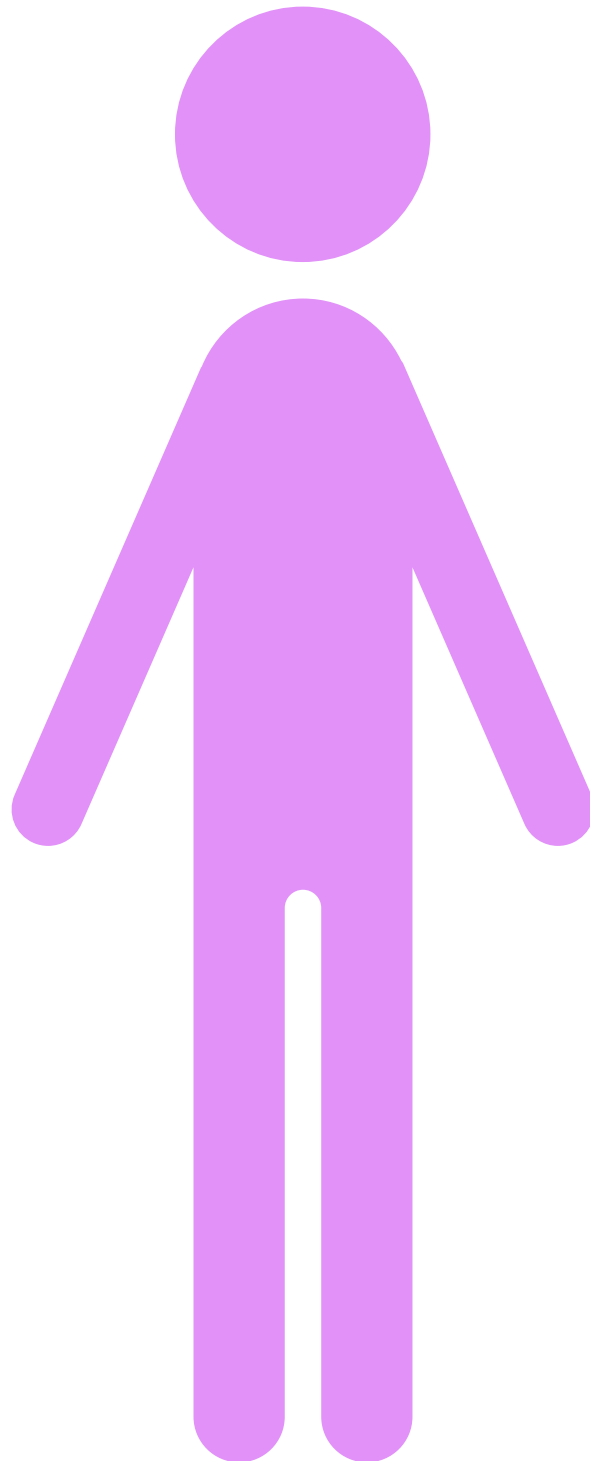
Scale of Stress

We can use a scale to understand our experience and different levels better. A 1 on this scale means you are not experiencing stress and are not triggered. A 10 on the scale tells you you are the most stressed or triggered possible. Please know that **your emotional experience can shift throughout the day**. For example, you may wake up and be 1 on the scale, and an hour later, you may spill coffee on your shirt. This may make you rise to a 4 or 5 on the scale. You may engage in breathing that brings you back to a 2. In the coming days, get curious about your experience. **Checking in with yourself throughout the day and identifying your number can help increase self-awareness.** We will continue to practice with the next activity.



Body Awareness Expanded

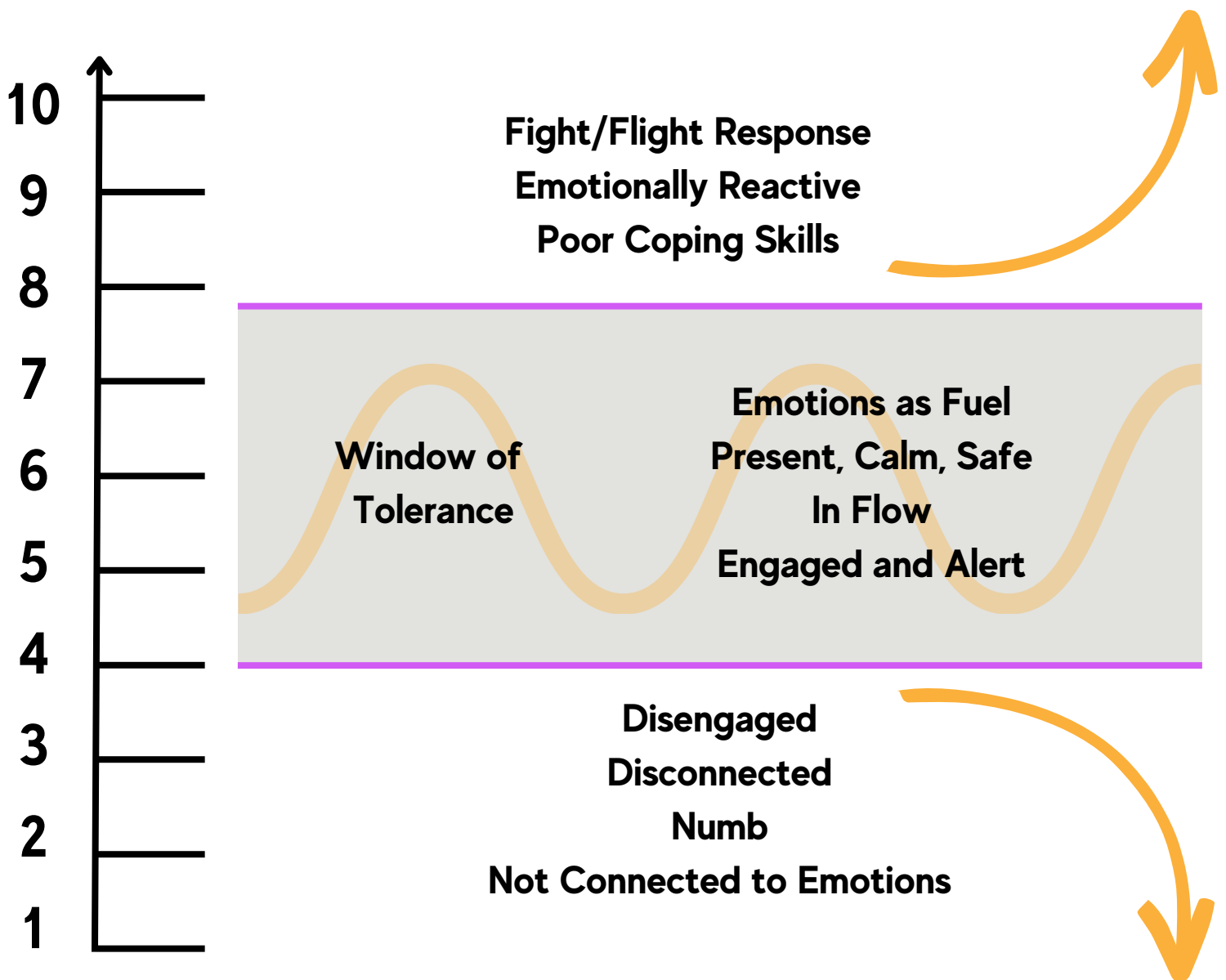
Take a moment to revisit the body awareness activity, keeping the scale of distress in mind. Go through each of the numbers on the scale and notice if your awareness of how your body feels shifts. For example, how does that make sense if you are at one on the scale? What if you are a 5 or a 10? Mark an **x** on various parts of the body diagram with notes. Engaging in this reflection will help you to be **more aware of your body cues** as your level of distress shifts.



Window of Tolerance

Artistic creation requires us to be able to tap into challenging emotions without losing courses in the process. Thinking about your window of tolerance can help you identify and establish stronger boundaries in your work and help you find a “sweet spot” where you are emotionally activated with the creative material you are working with but are not so triggered that you are flooding your nervous system.

Review the previous activity, body awareness. Notice the areas in which you indicated you feel stress or tension. Take a moment to check in with your body using the ten-point scale below.



Self-Regulation

It is important to remember that **you already possess a great power to regulate your feelings and bodily responses within you.** Our breath is our greatest untapped resource. Self-regulating emotions can lead to an enhanced sense of safety and autonomy when we realize that we have the power to change how we react to stress. The **STOP** tool can be helpful to remember if you find yourself outside your window of tolerance. **TIP:** Add this tool to your list on page 14, if you find it helpful.

When feeling overwhelmed, follow these simple steps:

S - Stop!

Pause for a brief moment.

T - Take a breath.

Inhale, exhale.

O - Observe what's happening.

How are you feeling? How are you reacting?
What is getting activated? Is there something
you need to talk about?

P - Proceed.

Creating a Container

Containment is often used in trauma therapy but can be adapted for all scenarios. It is a simple exercise you can engage in at the end of rehearsal, a shoot, a problematic scene, etc. You may need various containers, and that is ok! This containment exercise is designed to assist in creating, opening, and closing boundaries or artistic work so that you can "come home" to yourself.

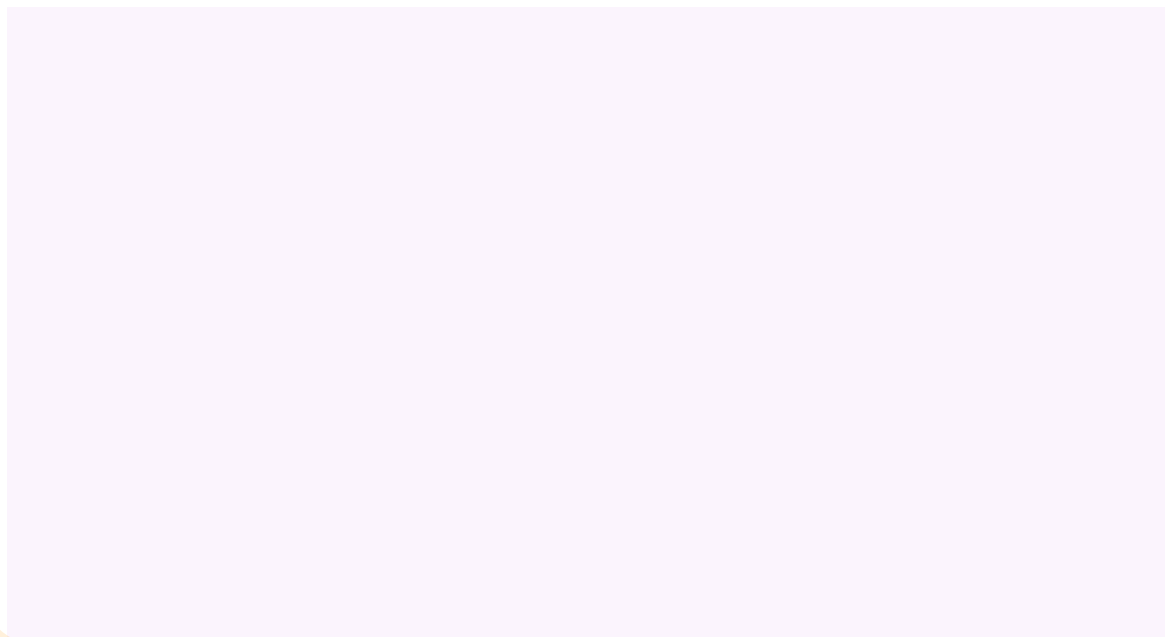
Take a deep breath. Connect with your body for a moment and consider the following:

What would it look like if you had to create a container where you could pack up your work when you leave for the day? What shape would it be?

What type of material would it be made out of? Would it be heavy? Light? How big would it be? What kind of lock would it have? Finally, where does it live when you are not working?

Once you have a strong image of what your container looks like, can you imagine everything you will put in it at the end of the day? What items do you want to leave on set/stage? What things do you not want to bring home at the end of the day?

Use this space to jot notes on what your container looks like. Use as many details as you can.



Like many activities, practice will help you better integrate these tools. For example, try practicing putting things in your container and closing it at the end of each work day.

Cope Ahead

Coping ahead means to be thinking about how to prepare for **copng with stresss before the stress occurs**. A simple way to engage in this type of preparation is to make a list of your current coping skills,, tools, and self care practices. List them here and refer back to this page often. **TIP:** Print this page off and place this list in a visual place like your refrigerator, on your desk, bathroom mirror, etc. Often when our nervous system is activated we have trouble thinking clearly. Having a quick visual reminder can be helpful to remind you of all the skills you already have.

A large yellow notepad with rounded corners and a hole punch on the left side. It contains 18 horizontal lines for writing, intended for listing coping skills, tools, and self-care practices.

Healthy Communication and Healthy Boundaries

Healthy communication is essential for psychological safety and for projects to run smoothly. Even in the most stressful times, we can use communication tools to ensure that we are respectful and effective while speaking our truth and establishing our boundaries. Conflict is a normal part of life. What makes the difference is **how** we manage the conflict. Here are some tips and tools to remember regarding communication and boundaries.

EXPLAIN YOUR MOTIVES UPFRONT

Explain your motives in a real, honest, and genuine way can prevent any potential misunderstandings. This is especially important when you may be implementing a new change or addressing a difficult topic.

LISTEN ACTIVELY

Active listening is one of the most important things we can do when nurturing relationships. When we are engaged in active listening, we listen to the person's story without distractions and without simply waiting for our next turn to speak. Paraphrasing can ensure that a person is heard and provide an opportunity for clarification. It can be helpful to focus on trying to talk only 30% of the time and allow 70% of the time to be spent on listening. You may only sometimes reach this goal, but having it in mind will help you be a better listener.

USE "I" STATEMENTS

Using statements that begin with "I" ensures that you are speaking about your own experience and your own feelings. Using I statements, especially during conversations that are tense, can help reduce defensiveness in the other person.

TAKE BREAKS

Breaks are an important tool for de-escalating highly charged moments.

Revisit the body awareness activity on page 8. Recall a time recently when you were angry, upset, or activated. Where did you feel it in your body? These cues can be helpful reminders for when it is time to take a break to avoid escalating a conflict further, or to even engage in self-care.

KNOW AND COMMUNICATE YOUR BOUNDARIES

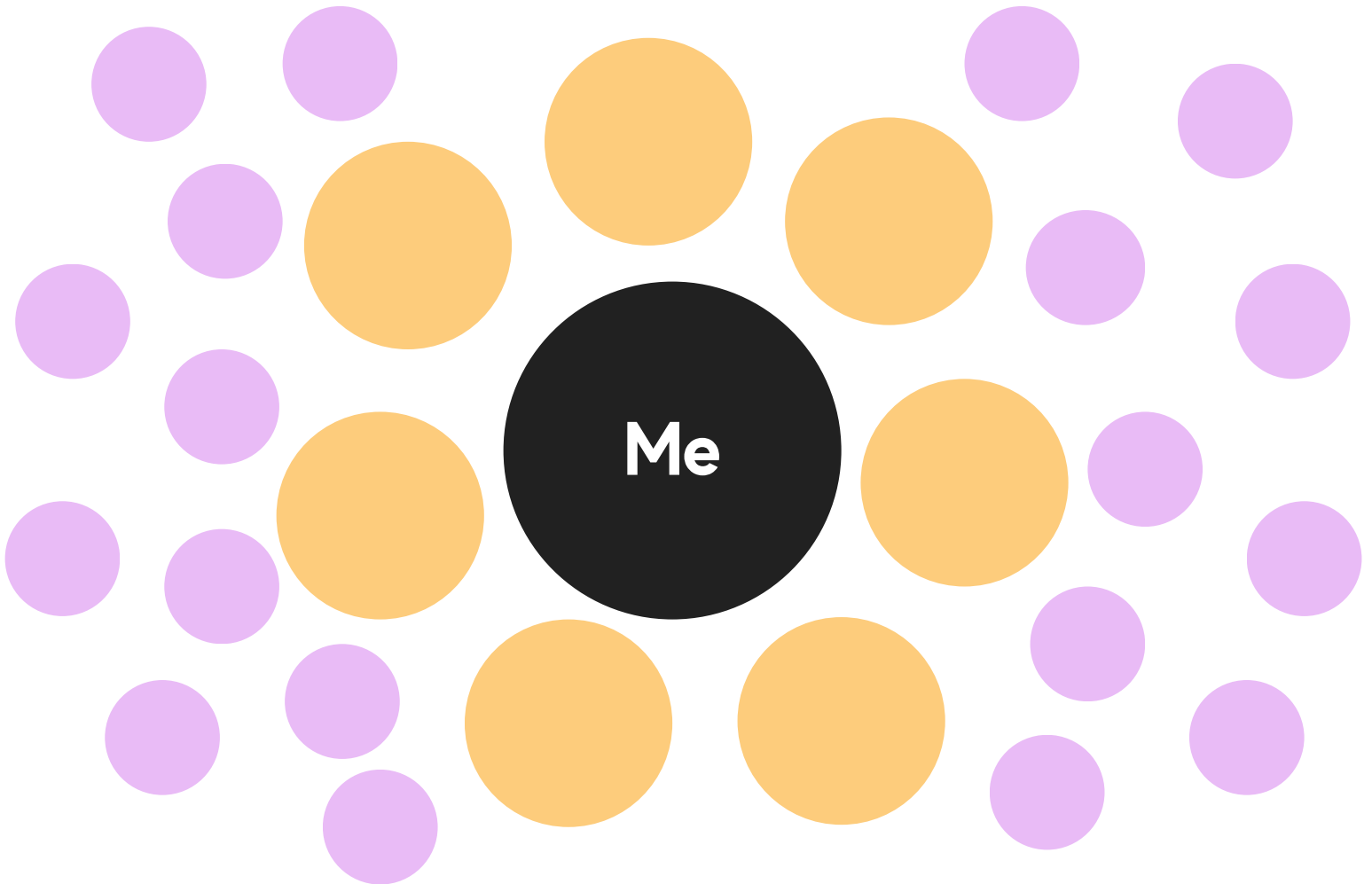
Revisit the body awareness activity on page 8. Reflect on how you feel in your body when a boundary has been crossed. It may be helpful to engage in this activity when you have a few moments of free time where you can reflect. Journaling about this can be a good way to get to know your boundaries further. Knowing your boundaries is important for healthy relationships and communication. Remember, you can communicate boundaries in a caring manner. Having boundaries does not mean you are not a kind person.

RESPECT THE BOUNDARIES OF OTHERS

Treat other's boundaries as you would want them to treat yours. Respect if someone tells you a boundary has been crossed or give them space if needed.

Support Mapping

It is normal for us to feel all alone in our experience. Sitting down to think about our support system can be helpful. Take the time here to **map out your support**. The bigger circles are the support that feels closest to you. The smaller circles are support that feels removed, or you haven't engaged recently. Support can be people, places, or things that feel supportive to you, for example, nature, books, guitar, spiritual community, etc.



Reflection:

What areas of support are outliers that you feel would be helpful to engage with? What is your plan for engaging with these people, places, or things?

Reconnect with Your Why

On page 5 we discussed vocational wellbeing. **Vocational wellbeing is important because it directly connects with our sense of financial security, but also our sense of purpose and fulfillment.** Sometimes, especially when we are activated, we forget why we got into this type of work in the first place. Use the space here to reconnect with your why. Why did you choose this career path in the first place? What are you passionate about? What was the most recent experience you had where you felt deeply connected to your why.



A large purple rounded rectangle containing 15 horizontal lines for writing, each preceded by a white circular bullet point.

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What's Next?

WECA is
here to help!

Ongoing Support Offerings

Trainings

Wellbeing 101

This training is designed to give professionals in the entertainment industry a basic understanding of wellbeing, how wellbeing can be threatened in creative spaces, and some tools you can use right away to make your sets and stages a safer place.

Trauma 101

This training is designed to give professionals in the entertainment industry a basic understanding of trauma, symptoms, triggers, how it develops, and how it shows up on sets and stages. Participants will leave with simple tools that can be used immediately to make the workplace safer for all cast and crew.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Certification

Mental Health First Aid is a training course that gives you the skills to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis and help connect them to the appropriate care.

Trauma-Informed Consultation

Risk Assessments

A comprehensive assessment of current wellbeing risks present in script and production. Careful attention is paid to scenes that may cause the cast and crew difficulty. Areas that may be hazardous for trauma and mental health are also identified, and recommendations are provided.

Process Groups

Sets and stages can be complex and high-stress environments to work in. Conflict arises, and crises happen. Process groups are a powerful way for people to come together and debrief in a way that facilitates connection and growth.

Therapeutic Support

Therapists are slowly making their way onto sets and stages to support the cast and crew, particularly when the story's content may be triggering. For example, directors like Barry Jenkins and Ava Duverney have utilized the help of therapists when troubling stories of racial trauma are being told. Areas in particular where therapists can be helpful is when the story content is related to grief or trauma, as these are universal human experiences and can be an emotional safety hazard for cast and crew.

Workshops

- Trauma-Informed Artistic Creation: Boundaries, Self-Care, and Returning Home to Self
- Hollywood and Mental Health: Let's Talk About It
- How to Recognize and Manage Character Bleed
- Disenfranchised Grief for Creatives: What Does it Mean to Mourn our Work?
- Teambuilding
- Grief at Work: Navigating Loss & Spurring Resilience in Creative Workplaces