



WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW

MON



STAY STRONG

Physical Well-Being

TUES



ALIGN

Spiritual Well-Being

WEDS



ENGAGE & GROW

Career & Intellectual Well-Being

THURS



CONNECT

Social Well-Being

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FEEL WELL

Emotional Well-Being

WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW CREATIVITY ACTIVITY GUIDE

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ENGAGE & GROW THROUGH CREATIVITY

Wednesday's theme of Well-Being Week encourages us to "Engage and Grow" through continuous learning and intellectual and creative challenges at work and home. This theme is as a good reminder to us left-brained-logic-loving lawyers who may overlook the rejuvenating force of creativity. Much research shows that everyday creativity can boost health and happiness.

Creativity Contributes to Full, Meaningful Lives

Creativity can contribute to a fuller, happier life. [A recent study](#) found that people who engage in every-day creativity (including coming up with original ideas, expressing ourselves in original and useful ways, and doing artistic activities like art, music, painting, writing, etc.) had more positive emotions and a greater sense of meaning, purpose, engagement, and social connection the next day. [Other research](#) has found that self-expression and fulfilling our potential are important parts of a meaningful life and [meaningful work](#). And [positive psychology research](#) has found that the experience of engagement (feeling absorbed) that often accompanies creative activities is a key pathway to happiness and life satisfaction.

Creativity Is A Health-Booster

Creativity also can support mental and physical health. Creativity is one way to help stressed-out lawyers relax, recover from stress, and rejuvenate. A host of studies has found, for example, that engaging in arts, crafts, and music can boost mood, reduce anxiety, improve immune system functioning, reduce cortisol levels, and improve heart-rate variability.

You Don't Need to Be Picasso To Benefit From Creativity

The positive effects of creativity aren't tied to specific activities or to any special talent. For example, [a recent study](#) found that people who identified themselves as "Makers" tended to be happier and more likely to have indicators of psychological health, such as less rumination and excessive self-focus. This study involved every-day creativity like domestic activities (e.g., baking, cooking, gardening, scrapbooking) and arts and crafts (photography, quilting, drawing, painting, sewing, jewelry-making, knitting, crochet, ceramics, computer graphics).

The benefits of creativity flow much more from the process of engagement than from our level of expertise, special talent, or aesthetic quality of our creations. Our end-products might seem frivolous, amateurish, or even weird. No matter! It's the creative process [that appears to be important to our well-being](#) and positive psychological development.

What Ingredients Are Most Beneficial?

Research in fields like occupational and public health, art therapy, and positive psychology point to certain ingredients that can help us squeeze the most benefits out of our creative activities:

1. Choose Activities Aligned With Who You Are. Choose activities that you want to do, that you enjoy and value, and that provide a sense of accomplishment. Keep in mind, though, that learning a new skill can be enriching while also making you feel frustrated and awkward. It might not be fun and absorbing right away. To grow, we'll want to persist through some discomfort until we learn basic rules and skills and can better evaluate whether the new activity is something we'll enjoy as our mastery grows.

2. Use Creativity to Relax. We benefit from relaxing activities that entail low physical and mental activation and minimal effort because they turn off the stress response and allow us to recover and recharge.

3. Use Creativity To Challenge Yourself. We also benefit from energizing activities in which we learn new things and experience optimal challenge--which may not be relaxing. Activities in which we become totally absorbed and feel challenged and stretched to the edge of our skills without feeling outmatched and anxious are especially beneficial. In this state, our minds are distracted from negative moods and self-absorbed thoughts. High investment of cognitive effort can be especially effective at crowding out negative thoughts and feelings that can cause bad moods to persist. Key features of rejuvenating experiences appear to be high cognitive investment, absorption/engagement, positive feelings, and decreased self-focus and negative self-talk.

4. Detach From Work. Aim for psychological [detachment](#) from work. Taking mental breaks from work demands turns off the stress response and helps us recover.

5. Connect With Others. Boost the positive effects of creativity by adding a social element—e.g., by inviting others to participate, creating a club, or making something for others.

What Kinds of Creative Activities To Try?

Everyone has creative potential to some degree, and everyday creativity encompasses a broad collection of possible activities. The above list of ingredients can help guide our choices of creative activities to try out. Below are some examples to consider that have been the focus of well-being research:

1. Optimistic Art-Making. Multiple art-making studies have found that drawing, painting, coloring shapes, clay-modeling, and collage-making have mood-boosting and anxiety-reducing effects. Research suggests that, although venting our feelings through art has some benefits, depicting something happy is a more powerful way to repair short-term mood.

► Practice Tip

In 2019 Reed Smith launched its first annual "[Arts for Wellness Month](#)" to promote the emotional and physical benefits of art as part of its comprehensive Wellness Works program. It included in-office art exhibits, art classes, pop-up art studios, and a virtual art gallery where lawyers and professional staff shared their artistic creations with their colleagues around the globe.

2. Textile Handcrafts. Craft-related studies often have focused on textile handcrafts like knitting, crocheting, beadwork, lace-making, needlework, paper making, bookcrafts, rug making, sewing, quilting, spinning, and weaving. All hold potential for boosting well-being and may be experiencing a surge for stress-relief [during the COVID pandemic](#). Knitting in particular has been the focus of [multiple studies](#) showing it helps people feel [less stressed](#), [less anxiety](#), and [calmer and happier](#). Repetitive activities like knitting may be best for relaxation. Activities like planning a new textile project or quilting typically require more engagement, [leading to a greater sense of rejuvenation](#).

Both kinds of experiences are beneficial and can contribute to well-being and recovery from stress.

► Practice Tip

[Harvard Law School](#) hosts a Virtual Knitting and Crochet Circle to share projects and craft together from afar. This is a great idea for other organizations to try out, by creating live or virtual events. Virtual courses and free patterns also are online.

3. Coloring. [Studies have](#) made the fascinating finding that coloring—especially “[mandalas](#)” and other circular shapes—improves mood significantly more than non-art activities and [even more](#) than coloring square shapes.

► Practice Tip

For Well-Being Week, the Benesch Friedlander firm has posed a coloring challenge. It hired an artist (via Etsy) to design a mandala-style coloring page that incorporates the firm logo. The contest winner will receive a gift card, and all submissions will be showcased on the firm’s intranet

You can find free mandala coloring pages on many [websites](#). Printable cards summarizing the benefits of coloring along with free coloring pages are included in the [Upward Spiral Activity Guide](#) posted on the Lawyer Well-Being Week website.

4. Photography. A [2018 study](#) found photography and movie-making were top mood-boosting creative activities.

► Practice Tip

[Udemy](#) and other online learning platforms offer a wide array of high-quality virtual courses, including photography and film-making and editing.

5. Domestic Arts: Cooking and baking also have been found to be top mood-boosting creative activities.

► Practice Tip

As part of its well-being initiative during the COVID crisis, Faegre Drinker has invited firm members to submit favorite recipes that have been placed on a searchable electronic platform. The recipes will be collected into a free cook book to be distributed internally.

6. Music: Listening to and making music (e.g., playing an instrument, composing music) [can alleviate stress](#) and boost well-being. Participating in [group singing](#) such as community choirs also has been found to have well-being benefits.

► Practice Tip

Researchers [have identified a collection](#) of songs that are especially effective at calming the stress response, including *Someone Like You* by Adele, *Strawberry Swing* by Coldplay, and *Watermark* by Enya. The top song for stress-busting was [Weightless](#) by Marconi Union. Listening to this song resulted in an amazing 65% reduction in participants’ overall anxiety and a 35% decrease in their usual physiological resting rates.

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