

**Sustaining and Supporting Well-Being in Public Defense
Assessment and Tools and Strategies**

Individual Check In and Strategies to Support Well-Being (Sphere One): This is a tool to check in and observe, with a sense of curiosity. This is a tool to reflect and strategize, not a tool to add to your “to do” list and increase feelings of overwhelm or inadequacy. It can be one tool to engage in regular structured goal-setting for the purposes of building supportive self-care.¹

Check in	Potential Strategies	Notes, Reflections, Intentions or Goals. What will I do to build knowledge and skills, seek support, or communicate my needs in this area?
Physical Wellness		
Am I engaging in sufficient exercise to meet my needs to manage stress, have enjoyable recreation, and be physically able to complete the activities in my life?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Find a movement practice you enjoy—walking, yoga, running, anything. ○ Get outside. ○ Increase movement by scheduling recreation time. ○ Increase movement with walking meetings and physical activity during the work day. 	
Am I getting nutrition that I need?		
Am I getting enough sleep?		
Am I managing use of alcohol or other substances, and seeking help if needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be informed and mindful of the high rates of alcohol substance use impacts in public defense. ○ Be attentive to your own patterns and changes in substance use. ○ Consider seeking support and/or treatment through American Bar Association Lawyer Assistance Programs, The Other Bar, or other organizations. 	
Am I tending to my needs of medical appointments and care?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintain preventative health care appointments and care. 	
Intellectual Wellness		

¹ This chart is inspired by and uses ideas from the National Wellness Institute (NWI) Focus Survey Tool, the NWI Wellness Inventory for Workplace, the U.S. Surgeon General’s Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being, 2022, Focus Group and Findings: A Trauma Informed Care Audit Report to the Capital Defense Community and Advocacy Movement, Sage Wellness Group, LLC, 2023.

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Am I able to continually learn and grow and develop (including learning from my own errors)?		
Do I have stimulating and creative tasks that are enjoyable?		
Can I stay informed and updated, and feel capable?		
Am I getting sufficient rest and rejuvenation to feel intellectually strong?		
Emotional Wellness		
Do I feel compassion and acceptance for myself?		
Am I engaging in activities to manage stress?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learn about the physiology of stress response. ○ Be attentive about your own stress response patterns, and develop stress management strategies. ○ Learn about long term health impacts of chronic stress. 	
Am I engaging and activities to metabolize trauma and heal from traumatic impacts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Learn about primary and secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout and moral injury. ○ Prepare for traumatic events (review of alleged child pornography, emotional victim impact statements at sentencing): use teams and tools to divide the task, debrief the process, and decompress and transition into other activities. ○ Develop strategies and tools to process impactful material (physical activity, therapy, debriefing). ○ Engage in journaling, writing or movement practices useful to you. ○ Access therapy and professional support. 	
Do I have resilience to manage my emotional responses to challenging situations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage in mindfulness practices. ○ Engage in gratitude practices. 	

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<p>Do I have the support and assistance that I need for my emotional needs and mental health, and the ability to ask for that help?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be mindful of the high rates of depression, stress, anxiety and suicide in our profession. ○ Consider professional support through therapy, counseling, and other mental health services. ○ Normalize conversation about mental health care and services, keeping resources available and destigmatized for yourself and others. ○ If you are in crisis, call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (available 24/7) at 988. 	
<p>Am I able to navigate communications with clients, colleagues, supervisors and others in the workplace? Can I adequately express positive and negative emotions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be clear and kind. ○ Choose direct communication when possible. ○ Apologize when you've done something wrong. ○ Communicate your preferred methods of communication and ask others for their preferences. ○ Offer and accept appreciation and positive feedback. ○ Offer and accept constructive suggestions that are clear, kind and direct. 	
Occupational Wellness		
<p>Does the work I feel meaningful and enjoyable?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage in reflection, assessment, conversation, training or other activities to remind you why you chose this work and why you continue doing this work. 	
<p>Am I able to show up as my whole self at work?</p>		
<p>Am I able to balance time working with non-work activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Set and Maintain Boundaries ○ Schedule regular time away from work each day, week and year. ○ Commit to off hours. Don't remain available 24/7. Don't check messages during your off hours. Create an emergency notification for true emergencies only. 	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use out of office auto-reply features to communicate when you are unavailable. ○ Set routines and rituals to end the work day. Clear your desk, update your prioritized task list and leave. ○ Continually assess and edit your projects and commitments; conclude and transition off of projects regularly. 	
Does my work connect with my personal values and a sense of mission and purpose?	○ Engage in regular self-assessment to assess work engagement, burnout, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and take action on the results.	
Do I feel I can successfully navigate the challenge of my work?	○ Recognize that structural obstacles and under resourcing of public defense are not personal failure, personal defect or shortcoming.	
Do I feel physically and psychologically safe at work?	○	
Social Wellness		
Do I feel connected to love and supportive relationships with friends and family?		
Do I have a sense of belonging and community?	○ Develop mentors and a supportive network that believes in you and your work, and that makes you feel supported and appreciated.	
Am I contributing to my loved ones and community in meaningful ways?		
Do I use my strengths in helpful ways?		
Am I able to build healthy relationship with clients, colleagues, supervisors and others in the workplace?		
Spiritual Wellness		
Do I feel meaning and direction in my life?		
Are my daily actions consistent with my values?		

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Organizational/Community Care Check In and Strategies to Support Well-Being (Sphere Two): This is a tool to check in and observe, with a sense of curiosity. This is a tool to reflect and strategize, not a tool to add to your “to do” list and increase feelings of overwhelm or inadequacy. It can be one tool to engage in regular structured goal-setting for the purposes of building supportive community care.

Check in	Potential Strategies	Notes, Reflections, Intentions or Goals in this Area
Unity of Purpose and Mission		
How is well-being included in the mission and value statement of the agency?	○	
How is it communicated that defenders who maintain their health and well-being, and who support each other, provide the highest level of care and representation to the people we defend?	○	
How are individuals within the organization regularly engaged and connected with the organizational mission?	○	
	○	
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging		
How are Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging and Accessibility Operationalized in norms, policies and programs?	○	
	○	
Social and Community Well-Being		
Are community building events organized, offered and attended?	○	
Are there events that de-center alcohol?	○	
Are family members included in well being initiatives?	○	
Are there opportunities for all staff to be involved in community service and collaboration with community members?	○	
	○	
Emotional and Mental Well-Being		

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How has the office created rituals, events and spaces for celebration, recognition, appreciation and gratitude?	<input type="radio"/>	
Are local, regional, state and national supportive mental health services posted and made available?	<input type="radio"/>	
Do the available health plans include coverage for mental health and substance use treatment, and are providers available?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is it regularly communicated that confidential support and assistance is available for mental health, substance use or other impairment?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is there an organizational approach to recognizing signs of trauma and burnout?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is time made clearly available (flex time, etc.) for wellness, personal or mental health days off work?	<input type="radio"/>	
How has the office created supportive spaces to talk about difficulty or loss?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is information made available to learn to manage stress?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is information made available to learn to mitigate traumatic impacts?	<input type="radio"/>	
Are staff engaging in trauma informed legal practice?	<input type="radio"/>	
Physical Well-Being		
Are resources made available to learn about nutrition?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is healthy food part of events and meetings?	<input type="radio"/>	
Are kitchen facilities available?	<input type="radio"/>	
Is physical activity supported, encouraged and occurring?	<input type="radio"/> Make showers and lockers available. <input type="radio"/> Provide bike storage. <input type="radio"/> Negotiate discounts at health facilities for staff. <input type="radio"/> Encourage fitness breaks. <input type="radio"/> Encourage walking meetings.	

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Are work stations as flexible and comfortable and useful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide ergonomic assessment and adjustment. ○ Provide sit/stand options. 	
Is each person's work station ergonomically evaluated and fitted within the first month, and options for any specialized office equipment explained?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Training, Development and Engagement		
Does initial onboarding include: how to take time off for illness, vacation, emergency and other circumstances; education about impacts of stress and trauma; how to confidentially access support and assistance for mental health, substance use, or other impairment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Design and provide onboarding on how to take time off for illness, vacation, emergency and other circumstances. ○ Design and provide onboarding on education about impacts of stress and trauma. ○ Design and provide onboarding on how to confidentially access support and assistance for mental health, substance use, or other impairment. 	
Are there clearly defined and equitable career paths and opportunities to advance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Are all staff in all job categories provided tools, resources and training needed to do their jobs successfully?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Are the core competency skills for each position and assignment clearly defined?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Do all new staff receive education about trauma and stress management within the first six months, and at least one more time in the first two years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Due trauma informed care trainings include race-based trauma and culturally competent strategies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Is there ongoing education about trauma and stress management?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	
Is there training prior to entering a new assignment such that each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 	

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person feels informed and prepared?		
Is mentorship provided for those in the early years of practice?	○	
Culture, Policy and Environment		
How are all staff enabled to get adequate rest?	○	
Is sufficient coverage provided for planned and unplanned absences?	○	
Is there a clear vacation policy, including encouragement of taking vacation, ease of requesting vacation time, ease of securing case coverage, and discouragement of work-related communication during vacation?	○	
How are schedules made as flexible and predictable as possible?	○	
Have all work flexibility options been clearly explained so that people understand when they are expected to be physically in the office?	○	
Is there a wellness team, committee, initiative, or organized activities?	○	
Have communication expectations been clearly explained so that people understand when they are expected to be available by phone, text, email or other communication method?	○	
	○	
Leadership and Supervision		
Use surveys and assessments to understand the obstacles that are forcing ineffectiveness.	○	
Advocate to reduce systemic obstacles to providing high quality client-centered representation.	○	
Are leaders and supervisors openly supportive of well-being?	○	
Are leaders and manager performance reviewed based on support of well being of staff?	○	

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How is leadership continually advocating for sufficient resources for staff to complete work within the scheduled work day?	<input type="radio"/>	
Are leaders modeling boundaries by taking vacation, having off hours during each day, week and month?	<input type="radio"/>	
Do leaders model vulnerability by sharing difficult experiences and communicating how they can be supported?	<input type="radio"/>	
Are evaluators trained to give performance evaluations that are timely, fair and empathetic? Are efforts made to highlight positive accomplishments and skills gained?	<input type="radio"/>	
What steps are taken to promote autonomy of staff to manage their own schedules and workflow?	<input type="radio"/>	
How are staff members encouraged to take time off each day, week, month and year by having undisturbed rest times?	<input type="radio"/>	
How are non-emergency communications discouraged during non-work hours?	<input type="radio"/>	
How are people encouraged to share how they can best be supported?	<input type="radio"/>	
How are all staff included and engaged in workplace decisions?	<input type="radio"/>	
How is relevant, reciprocal feedback ensured?	<input type="radio"/> Establish regular check-ins, coaching and/or mentorship.	

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System Check In and Strategies to Support Well-Being (Sphere Three): This is a tool to check in and observe, with a sense of curiosity. This is a tool to reflect and strategize, not a tool to add to your “to do” list and increase feelings of overwhelm or inadequacy. It can be one tool to engage in regular structured goal-setting for the purposes of system transformation.

Check in	Potential Strategies	Notes, Reflections, Intentions or Goals in this Area
External Communications about Mission and Value of Public Defense		
Is your mission stated and regularly communicated to people outside the agency?	○	
Do you collect and share (with consent) data and stories about the value of indigent defense?	○	
Resource Advocacy		
Do you continually advocate for sufficient resources to address caseload and workload?	○	
Do you make well-being as competence part of the narrative in budget/resource advocacy?	○	
Unite with Community		
How do you collaborate with transformational community organizers?	○	
How do you center and amplify the voices of impacted community members?	○	
Creativity and Transformational Ideas		
Where do you look—outside of the legal system—for transformational ideas and information?	○	
	○	

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