

1. Building a habit of checking in with self or journaling/documenting regularly

One of the counselors we interviewed emphasized the importance of routine and awareness in maintaining mental health. Before our diary study prompt, none of our participants had been maintaining daily written checks for themselves, although they did report that they thought about their mental wellness often to always. We asked all of our participants to complete diary entries at four specific times of the day, and we noted that we would text them reminders to complete the entries if we hadn't received their entries by a certain time. We found that initially we did have to send some reminders, but that most of the time the participants completed entries on time and on their own. One participant even set his own alarms and found that he didn't need the alarm reminder to complete the entries. From this we found that our participants built a (short-term) habit of checking in on themselves, which was impressive for only doing this study for 3 days. One participant said that he would continue this habit of regularly performing self-checks throughout the day, if not also completing full written entries. Another participant said that after the study, he definitely felt more aware of how he recognizes his feelings. Building this habit is a task that our application will enable.

2. Determining what is important for checking on self/journaling

Both of the counselors we interviewed emphasized the importance of awareness when recognizing your feelings and thoughts in order to inform better decisions and recognize patterns. Simply by being more aware of your thoughts can lead to a better understanding of the factors that influence your wellness. In our survey, we asked participants to tell us their definition of mental wellness. We received varying responses centered around different aspects of life, from school to work to family. When we began our diary studies with four different participants, we allowed each participant some space to do open journaling for themselves. We found that each participant would track different things from their day, in addition to tracking them in different forms. One participant decided to track his mental wellness on a scale of 1-10, with open journaling focused on internal thoughts and worries. He said the mathematical system was helpful for him, comparing it to a scale of pain at a hospital. Another participant focused more on tangible activities in her life, while another focused mainly on sensory observations and being excited about new things in his life. Each person had a different emphasis and indicator of wellness that they determined individually. Therefore, one task our application will support is determining and/or setting what you want to journal.

3. Completing a check in with yourself

Each participant chose to check in with themselves in different ways; a few chose to type and email them to us while another chose to hand write the entries and send us pictures. Additionally, this task was completed in a variety of locations including home,

school, and while commuting. The motivation was to track the things that each individual found important to their wellness, in order to potentially inform about patterns, habits, and associations in their daily lives that were affecting their wellness. We found that it also increased awareness in some of our participants, which was emphasized by one of the counselors we interviewed. One of our participants noted that he began thinking about his wellness more frequently. Our participants generally liked the “structured” idea for providing specific insight as well. Therefore, one important task is somehow recording your state and feelings to “check in” on yourself, which is an existing task.

4. Checking in on friends and their wellness

A common theme found during our research was reaching out to friends and the varying motivations behind this. Some mentioned that they benefitted from reaching out to friends and felt good about it when they did. Another mentioned that how much she interacted with friends was a good indicator of how “well” she was. Most of these instances were initiated by a friend of a participant - they reached out and then our participants were able to respond. This allowed for significant interactions that benefitted our participants. One participant noted that she reached out to friends and family after the protests at UW on the evening of the inauguration to make sure that everyone was okay. She mentioned that it was good, but also sad because of the circumstances. Checking in on friends is important and beneficial for the friend, but also appears to be beneficial for the initiator as well. This is an existing task, but would be a helpful task people can complete on our application when they aren’t sure how to initiate conversation.

5. Sharing feelings with a support system

Sharing feelings with people within a support system can be very different than checking in on friends or reaching out for help. This was often seen in our participants’ entries. One participant mentioned “being with friends always helps.” Another mentioned that he appreciates when friends simply notice that he is in need of support, and sharing feelings can allow friends to notice when someone is down. Sometimes this task can be more passive and present in everyday life, rather than a deliberate ask for help. A support system provides an outlet for expression. One task people should be able to do on our application is to communicate feelings with a support system.

6. Reaching out for help

During our interviews with the counselors and diary study participants, we heard that having a support system and relationships are very important. One counselor said that social support and networks are very important, especially in helping to handle a lot of wellness problems. One participant described how being at a friend’s house during an emotional event was good because she had someone to lean on. Being able to reach out to close friends and family for help in hard times is a critical part of supporting mental wellness, so although this is an existing task, our application should support this task in a way that is safe and accessible to people who are afraid to ask for help.