



WE ARE A WORK OF ART

HEALTH + WELLBEING INITIATIVE

**PHYSICAL WELLBEING
TOOLKIT**



WE ARE A WORK OF ART

WELCOME

Cool Culture is a BIPOC-led social justice organization that uses arts and culture to strengthen family and community wellbeing. Each year we have historically partnered with over 50,000 families from across the five boroughs who reflect the diversity of our city and thousands of educators from 450+ schools and early education programs. We collaborate with hundreds of cultural workers from 90 museums, historical societies, botanical gardens and science centers. The Cool Culture team brings together people from all walks of life—families and children, educators and artists, museum staff and government officials—to build cross-cultural understanding and advocate for positive social change. Whether you are new to Cool Culture or a longtime member, we are honored to welcome you into a community of New Yorkers committed to creating a more just and equitable city through the arts.

We face today's evolving challenges and losses knowing that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately harms BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) families who frequently have inadequate access to quality schooling and healthcare, not to mention the arts. Yet our communities also have a long and rich history of cultural traditions designed to support one another during times of hardship. We bring the joy!

This is one of five Wellbeing Toolkits that are designed to support discussions about individual, family and community health and wellness, whether at home or in schools, museums or other community spaces. Each Toolkit is informed by conversations with the Cool Culture network of families, educators and our partners across New York City.

LET'S GET STARTED!

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WHY ART?

Art is a human right. It is a means of self-expression evoking joy, pain, empathy, hope, and freedom. Through art we pass on knowledge about our lives, values, and traditions; transcend boundaries between and across our cultures; and increase our capacity for dialogue and understanding. Art is practiced by everyone. It is everywhere: in our homes and cultural institutions, on gallery walls and on the sides of buildings, in theaters and at block parties. Art is healing. It amplifies our individual and collective power, helping us to make meaning in our present and create our futures.



WHY CULTURE?

Culture is fundamentally shared and continually changing. It comprises the arts, institutions, practices, languages, and ways of knowing that individuals, families, communities and societies value and choose to preserve for the future. Like the air we breathe it is often invisible, but guides our interactions, values and deepest held beliefs. It is strengthened when people from all backgrounds intentionally come together to define and act upon their collective ideals.



WHY FAMILIES?

Families embody culture, imparting language, enacting daily practices and following traditions their children receive in both formal and informal ways. They are their children's teachers and advocates having goals that straddle the past, present and future. Families draw on their wealth of knowledge, insights, skills, and experiences to build a foundation for their children and future generations.



MEET THE TEAM

The pandemic is teaching us many things about what is needed to thrive in our homes, community, city—indeed the world. Some of the lessons have been deeply personal, others are reminders that our wellbeing is interconnected. A question our team has been thinking about, and one we want to pose to the Cool Culture community of families, educators, museum partners, artists, and others is: *What has the pandemic awakened in us?*



CANDICE ANDERSON
Executive Director

Deep appreciation and gratitude for small moments: a favorite meal with family, a good read on the couch, a good laugh with neighbors, walks in the frigid New York City air while looking forward to spring.



STANLEY DELVA
Institutional Relations Manager

I'm more intentional with my health and more aware of how I treat and maintain my relationships with the people around me and the world we're inhabiting. I'm often reminded during this pandemic of how community work begins with self-care.



TRACEY GREENIDGE
Director of Development

As a wife and mom of two little ones, this pandemic has ignited a fighting spirit from deep within. I still find joy during life's most challenging moments, in dance-offs with my family, game nights, and stop motion movies produced by tiny fingers on my phone.



ANNIE LEE
Director of Communications

I'm learning to give myself space to process grief. I've become more intentional about making time for joyful things like cooking with loved ones and writing snail mail.



TRA NGUYEN
Program Manager

The desire to stretch and grow in ways I've only dreamed about, to uncover layers of myself, to surrender to healing, to slow it down, and to appreciate all of the little things that make up life.

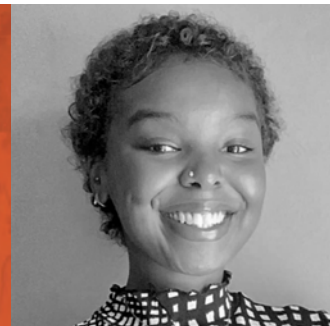
FATIMA SHABBI
Director of CityWide Initiatives

The pandemic has shown me the power of communal care and rest. It has affirmed that we must reimagine, co-create and invest in equitable futures for all.



ALEXANDRA SHONEYIN
Program Coordinator

The pandemic has made me realize that we need to invest more in our local communities and preserve our resiliency, stories, and creativity.



KANIKA SRINIVASAN
Senior Director of Operations & Strategy

The importance of connection to loved ones, the meaningfulness of nurturing these relationships, and appreciation of the time we can spend together.



SUSAN WILCOX
Director of Programs

The pandemic has awakened in me the reminder that, for better or worse, we are one organism susceptible to the ways we abuse or nourish the earth - our sole home. The impact may be unequal, but not one of us is untouchable.



WE ARE A WORK OF ART

HEALTH + WELLBEING INITIATIVE

The Health + Wellbeing Initiative will bring us together to connect, create, imagine and act to invest in our individual and collective wellbeing, so that our community members come away with:

- **Deeper awareness of the current state of our wellbeing:** mind, body, spirit + civic engagement (and that of our family and communities).
- **Knowledge of the ancestral and indigenous wellness practices in our communities,** and our family traditions and practices as well as Western medical practices.
- **Awareness of the social dimensions of health** and the interdependent nature of our health + wellbeing.
- **Knowledge that health is a social justice issue** and how to access both indigenous and western health + wellbeing and civic engagement resources.
- **A vision of wellbeing for ourselves** (our family, our communities and our city) + an actionable first step to move towards this vision of the future.

PHYSICAL WELLBEING

ALL BODIES DESERVE LOVE

AUTHORS: BROOKE HARRIS GARAD AND LEIGH PATEL

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Brooke Harris Garad is a “scholarmama” who enjoys teaching, reading, and eating spicy vegetarian food. She dreams of writing children’s literature with her daughters one day.



Leigh Patel is a writer, cultural worker, and eldercare provider. She dreams of a world where simple things like healthcare and potable water are not reserved for only some.

What has the pandemic awakened in you?

“The pandemic has shown me that humanity is resilient, but people shouldn’t have to endure so much suffering. We need to do more to care for the people, especially the most vulnerable among us.”

— Brooke

“The pandemic has made it crystal clear to me what brings me joy as well as our collective need to allow grief the space it deserves.”

— Leigh

A note for caregivers:

This toolkit uses storytelling as a way to inspire physical wellbeing with children and family members. Taking a moment to read stories together, perhaps in a cozy space with a favorite toy or comfortable blanket, is also an act of care for our bodies. This is a story about a little girl named Yani. Across one afternoon and evening, Yani thinks and says a lot about her body, family members’ bodies, bodies of animals, water, and even stars. Yani has a lot of resources in her world that help her to be with her body and process her feelings. And she even practices needing to “talk it out.”

This story opens up chances to talk with young ones about how we take care of bodies and how we can do that for many forms of life. It might be helpful to read this story in parts so that you and your loved ones may pause to talk about different bodies of life and how you may take care of their wellbeing. This story is a toolkit for igniting imagination and encouraging conversations with young children about a range of physical wellbeing practices.



ALL KINDS OF BODIES

Every day after school, I walk by the pond in the park on my way home. It's a little off the fastest way home, but I can see buildings and trees in the water. I know there are animals there too! I pause to look at my reflection in the water and talk to my animal friends about my day at school. Sometimes I share my questions about the world.

"Hey Mr. Fish, did you know there are all kinds of bodies?" I say.

"My teacher, Ms. Tazi says all bodies are different and kind of the same.

There are human bodies and sooo many kinds of bodies of water.

You have a body!

I have a body."

I like the way the water feels warm between my fingers. I watch the fish swim in circles and I tell him more about what I know.

"The stars are bodies too! But I can't remember how to call them," I tell my fish friend.

I try to say the word my teacher said..."Suhlesssschaaalll..." something like that. I like the way the sssss sounds curl in my mouth, so I say it aloud a lot, just practicing.

"I remember it means something about stars," I tell the fish. "My teacher said to look up to the sky at night. The stars are bodies too! Mr. Fish, all bodies move and change. I wonder if they talk and think like me? What do YOU think?" I say, skimming my finger across the water.

"Ms. Tazi says there's nothing wrong with any kind of body because bodies are part of nature. Some are big, like the sea and some are small, like me," I think.

"Mr. Fish, sometimes I think my body is weird. I mean, it



makes noises and sometimes it even smells funny ...and...hmm, I guess that's true about water too," I say.

Last year someone told my best friend Grace that her body was too round and her eyes were too small. She was sad for a long time about it. They told me my skin was too dark, too, but Mama says I'm beautiful. Plus, no one has ever said an ocean is too blue or a pond is too round.

"I just don't know about people sometimes," I say, "But, you know what I do know about? I know that we have to take care of all kinds of bodies. That's why I drink lots of water and get lots of sleep."

Does water sleep?

Uh oh, that's Amma calling me. "I have to eat dinner with my family now, Mr. Goldfish."

"Oops, I forgot to ask if you are a 'he' or a 'they'? My neighbor Mrs. Jones says you can only be a boy or a girl but kids know who we are. Sometimes the grown ups mess things up. I bet no one tells the water to be a boy or a girl."

Yani waves goodbye to her animal friends and heads home.



What kinds of living bodies exist in your home, in your school, or in your neighborhood?

BODIES ARE ALWAYS CHANGING

I eat dinner almost every night with my grandmother, Amma; my mother Mama; my father Baba; and my grandfather Abu. Pizza is my favorite dinner but we only have it sometimes.

"What's for dinner tonight?" I say, skipping through the door and leaving my shoes on the mat.

"Little one, we are having coconut rice and lamb," says Abu. "I made it for you just like my mamà made for me when I was growing up. Eat! This way you'll be big and strong too."

I move the lamb around on my dish as Amma says, "C'mon, take a bite. One more bite." I'm too busy to eat with all the thoughts in my head. Mama says I'm daydreaming, but really I just want to know where rice comes from.

"Does rice come from a tall tree? What about the coconuts?" I ask.

"No, not trees, little one," Abu says, laughing. "Coconuts come from trees and rice grows on water."

"Rice grows on water?!" I must have said that a little too loud because everyone started laughing.

I watch as my family laughs with their voices and their bodies. Amma laughs until tears roll down her cheeks. Abu laughs with his mouth big and open. He's so loud sometimes I jump a little in my seat. His laugh is sooooo big it almost shakes my body.

"Laughing is something else weird about bodies!" I think to myself. "I wonder if water laughs." When Baba laughs his belly shakes. And when I laugh I breathe so hard, I can barely breathe again.

After everyone stops laughing, I can see that Amma is actually crying now. She seems more sad than happy. When this happens, I know I should walk away so the grownups can talk. I pick up my plate quietly and walk on my tippy toes to the kitchen. I stop and listen by the door.

"Manish fell again today." Amma says about Abu. My Abu uses a cane to walk. Mama says his mind is as sharp as a tack, but his body hurts. She says his body takes longer than his mind once he's made up his mind to do something!

My belly starts hurting when I think about Abu falling. And I know it isn't because of the food. I take a deep breath and look at the feelings chart Baba put on the fridge.

Angry? No, my tummy isn't mad.

Sad? Maybe...

Worry! That's it, my tummy is worried.

Knowing how I feel makes me feel better, but still bad.

Sometimes I feel two things at the same time.

"I'm worried that the cane isn't enough to keep Abu safe," I say aloud to myself.

I slip outside to find an animal friend. I have to talk this out.

BODIES CAN HAVE MANY FEELINGS

As I walk to the park, I listen to leaves and branches cracking under my feet. I take a deep breath and let the fresh air fill my lungs.

"Hello, Nice Fish. I'm baaaack!" I call out.

"Something hard happened at dinner. Can I tell you about it?"

"I'm worried about my Abu, Nice Fish. What if one day his cane can't help enough?

What if he falls and nobody is there to help him, hug him and give him a band-aid like Amma does for me? The feeling in my body isn't the same as when I hurt myself falling. That's more like being scared. I just feel heavy, like I'm carrying a big, heavy backpack that no one can see."

"Have you ever felt that way?"

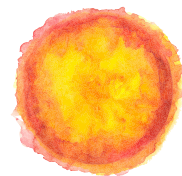
"Sometimes when my body feels heavy, I pretend I'm a tree. I stand super still. I take deep breaths, and I raise my hands to the sky."

"Do you want to try?"

Ms. Tazi says the strongest part of the tree is the part we cannot see: the roots. Do you think that's true for me? No one can see how strong my body is on the inside, but I know it's true."



What does your body do when you are laughing? How does your body react when you feel sad or happy?



“Ms. Tazi says if we talk nicely to plants, they grow. So, I say nice things to myself. I look in the mirror and say: ‘You are beautiful. I love you. You are kind and really smart too.’”

I can’t hear you so I’m going to keep watching you.
“Nice Goldfish, am I taking care of you ok?”

“I won’t ask you why you look different than I do, but if you start looking different for YOU, I might ask you if you feel tired or feel sick or just feel like not talking? Is that OK?”

I wonder what would happen in the world if we took care of ALL the bodies. What if we ALL asked each other how we’re feeling?”

“Well, I have to get ready for bed now. Amma is calling again. If you see the bodies in the stars tonight tell them I said hi. Ms. Tazi said the word again and I copied it on my hand. C-E-L-E-S-T-I-A-L.”



If you have to talk out loud about something that makes you feel worried or scared, who can you talk to?

CARING FOR OUR BODIES

“Yani! It’s almost storytime! Get in your pajamas!”
Amma calls to me.

Yay! I love love love storytime. I like my pjs better than anything else, even my shiny black shoes that I only wear on special days when more people come to the house.

When it’s storytime, I curl up in my Amma’s arms. I feel safe and warm here. She holds me and the book open at the same time. I can feel her body. My head goes up and down just a little bit on her chest because she’s breathing. Don’t tell her, but sometimes I ask her to start over just because I like how my head goes up and down with her body. I can hear the words from her mouth and in her chest.

I fall asleep thinking about the water, the stars, and the feelings in my belly. I’ll have so much to share with my fish friend tomorrow.



ART-MAKING ACTIVITY:

STAND TALL & TOGETHER TREES ACTIVITY



**Paper
Pens, crayons or
colored pencils**



**Take a piece of
paper and fold
it half lengthwise,
like a hotdog shape.
Then fold the bottom
third of the paper up,
and unfold the paper.**



**Now the paper is
divided into four boxes.**

**On each side, draw a
tree, and below the
fold, draw the tree's
roots.**

**Draw anything you think
could help both trees to
grow, such as:**

- Water
- Soil
- Fallen leaves
- The sun
- Roots connected to each other underground

**Share your drawings
with each other and ask:**

- What do you think one tree says to the other tree through their roots?
- What might they ask each other about?
- What can they give each other through their roots under the ground?



RESOURCES TO INSPIRE WELLBEING

Throughout We Are a Work of Art, Cool Culture will share resources identified by our network of families, educators, artists, museum partners and other community leaders. These resources were chosen to direct you to support, information and opportunities for healing as needed.

CHILDCARE & CAREGIVER SUPPORT

- **Baby Cafe**

A support group for breastfeeding mothers, hosted by NYCDOHMH Neighborhood Health Action Centers in Brownsville, East Harlem, and Tremont. www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/neighborhood-health/neighborhood-health-action-centers.page.

- **NYC Child Care Connect**

Learn about different types of free and low-cost child care that is regulated by the NYC Health Department and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services. www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/services/child-care.page.

- **Pre-K and 3-K Enrollment**

NYC Department of Education offers free universal pre-K for all children aged 4 years old, and a number of 3-K spots for children aged 3 years old. Get on admissions emails lists for more information here: www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade.

- **Real Dads Club**

A weekly group for fathers and father figures to support each other in their relationships and in raising their children. Facilitated by nonprofit Real Dads Network. www.realdadsnetwork.org.

NOURISHING THE BODY

- **A Space for Sound: Sound Healing with Rena Anakwe**

Rena Anakwe is an interdisciplinary artist, performer and healer working primarily with sound, visuals, and scent. Exploring intersections between traditional healing practices, spirituality and performance, she has created sensory-based, experiential activities at Cool Culture's Family Festivals. Listen to her sound healing work on SoundCloud: <https://soundcloud.com/djladylane/a-breath-in-two-parts-side-a>.

- **Black Food: Stories, Art, and Recipes from Across the African Diaspora by Bryant Terry**

With contributions from more than 100 Black cultural luminaires from around the globe, the book moves through chapters exploring parts of the Black experience, from Homeland to Migration, Spirituality to Black Future, offering delicious recipes, moving essays and poetry, and beautiful artwork.

- **Callen-Lorde Community Health Center**

The Center provides sensitive, quality health care and related services targeted to New York's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities—in all their diversity—regardless of ability to pay. To further this mission, Callen-Lorde promotes health education and wellness, and advocates for LGBTQ health issues. <https://callen-lorde.org>

- **GirlTrek**

GirlTrek is the largest public health nonprofit for Black women and girls in the United States. With 1 million members, GirlTrek encourages women to use walking as a practical first step to inspire healthy living, families, and communities. As women organize walking teams, they mobilize community members to support monthly advocacy efforts and lead a civil rights-inspired health movement.

www.girltrek.org

- **Healing Herbal Soups, a cookbook and blog by Rose Cheung and Genevieve Wong**

Using the concept of natural foods to build up one's health, with a dash of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), this cookbook and blog by a mother-daughter duo focuses on boosting immunity and weathering the seasons. An herbal encyclopedia and more than fifty recipes mix herbs with meat and vegetables to create healing broths. <https://healingherbalsoups.com>

- **Maya Feller Nutrition**

Maya Feller, MS, RD, CDN is a registered dietitian nutritionist who provides medical nutrition therapy for the management of and risk reduction of non-communicable diseases. Maya believes in providing nutrition education from an anti-bias patient-centered, culturally sensitive approach. For more information about nutrition counseling and healthy recipes, visit <https://mayafellernutrition.com>.

- **NYC Care**

NYC Care offers New Yorkers low- or no- cost health care through NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation. Call 646-NYC-CARE or visit www.nyccare.nyc.

- **NYC Well**

A free and confidential connection to mental health and substance abuse support, available 24/7 via talk, text, and chat. <https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>

- **Salud America!**

Salud America! is a national Latino-focused organization that creates culturally relevant and research-based stories and tools to inspire people to drive healthy changes to policies, systems, and environments for Latino children and families. <https://salud-america.org/>

- **Shape Up NYC**

Free group fitness programs across the five boroughs with indoor and outdoor locations along with family-friendly activities. Many are often adapted for both younger and older participants. www.nycgovparks.org/events/shape-up-nyc.

- **SOMOS Community Care**

A network of over 2,500 providers in NYC who have come together to ensure better health care for Medicaid members. They have a tool for finding health care practitioners by specialty, in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Call 833-766-6769 or visit <https://somoscommunitycare.org/info>.

RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN

- **Baby Loves the Five Senses by Ruth Spiro and Irene Chan**

This board book set explores the science of hearing, vision, taste, touch, and smell, with colorful illustrations and language for babies through children three years old.

- **Eyes That Speak to the Stars by Joanna Ho**

When a friend at school creates a hurtful drawing, a young boy turns to his family for comfort. He realizes that his eyes rise to the skies and speak to the stars, shine like sunlit rays, and glimpse trails of light from those who came before.

- **Hair Love, a short film and book by Matthew A Cherry**

Hair Love, is an animated short film that centers around the relationship between a Black father, his daughter, and her hair. www.matthewacherry.com/hair-love

- **Hair Twins by Raakhee Mirchandani**

A Sikh father and daughter with a special hair bond proudly celebrate and share a family tradition.

- **I Am Perfectly Designed by Karamo Brown**

A boy and his father take a joyful walk through the city, discovering all the ways in which they are perfectly designed for each other.

- **Listening to My Body by Gabi Garcia**

A board book guide to help children understand the connection between their sensations and feelings so that they can get better at figuring out and expressing what they need.

Look out for other **Cool Culture Toolkits** around **Spirit, Mind, and Civic Wellbeing** with more in-depth resource lists and activities for families and educators.

As part of the **We Are A Work of Art Health + Wellbeing Initiative**, they will contain frameworks for assessing wellbeing while providing art-making activities that can inspire conversations around different states of wellbeing and healing.

FEATURED PARTNER

Which NYC cultural institutions are inspiring us to process our states of wellbeing and inspire action around mind, body, spirit or civic engagement right now?

With warmer weather and longer sunny days, your family might consider a visit to the Bronx's New York Botanical Garden for fresh air and physical movement. While there, explore their new food-themed exhibit launching in June 2022. You can go to this botanical garden and nearly 90 other museums, gardens, and zoos for free with your Cool Culture Family Pass. View updated visitation guidelines on our Cultural Partner Visitation Portal: <https://bit.ly/VisitCoolCulturePartners>.

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

2900 Southern Boulevard
Bronx, NY 10458-5126

Around the Table: Stories of Foods We Love

June 4, 2022 – September 11, 2022

www.nybg.org/event/around-the-table-stories-of-the-foods-we-love/



“Food is at the center of many of life’s most important events. When we gather together for a meal, the dishes we share often tell a story—and we share a bit of ourselves. Explore the rich cultural history of what we eat throughout this multifaceted, engaging exhibition that examines the art and science of foodways and food traditions. From global dietary staples such as rice, beans, squash, and corn to the regional spice and flavor provided by peppers, greens, and tomatoes... discover the diversity and beauty of plants that are grown for cuisine around the world.” –NYBG

Invite your child to reflect:

What kinds of physical spaces do you use for movement or releasing energy?

How did you feel walking through the botanical garden? What types of food and plants did you see that will nourish your body and give you energy?

STAY CONNECTED

JOIN US

Cool Culture partners with Title I elementary schools and early education centers to co-create programs and activities with families and educators that ignite our emotional, intellectual and political imaginations.

Through a partnership with Cool Culture, families sign up through their school or child care center to utilize the Family Pass. The pass offers a range of arts and cultural activities through free access to nearly 90 museums, gardens and zoos — places like the Brooklyn Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Central Park Zoo and much more!

Donate to support our work: www.coolculture.org/donate

THANK YOU

Cool Culture's programs are made possible by generous donors like you. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we rely on public and private donations to build capacity for over 50,000 families, educator partners, and museum staff to connect, create, and collectively evolve art and culture within and beyond institutions.

Cool Culture, Inc. is Supported By:

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Candice Anderson (Executive Director), Dixie Ching, Jared Cooper, Cathy Elkies, Samantha Gilbert, Dr. Christopher John Godfrey, Rob Krulak, Risa Meyer, Edwina Meyers, Lynne Toye, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, Ahmed Yearwood

Cool Culture envisions an equitable society that values, embraces and is enriched by all cultures. Our mission is to amplify the voices of families and to strengthen the power of historically marginalized communities through art and culture, both within cultural institutions and beyond.



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#WeAreAWorkofArt
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