

Choosing Joy – Positive Psychology

For much of the history of experimental psychology, research has focused on mental disorders. Positive psychology studies what helps people to be happy, find meaning, and function well.

People who have a tendency to pessimism are more prone to learned helplessness and to depression. When bad things happen, they tend to think:

- Those things will persist
- There isn't much they can do to change those things
- The bad things are indicators of some bad quality about themselves

The good news is, research has shown it is surprisingly easy to change a natural tendency towards pessimism to a more optimistic style.

Strategies to Increase Happiness

1. Express Gratitude:

- *Keep a gratitude Journal:* write down something you are grateful for each day.
- *Express gratitude:* Maybe there is someone in your life you have never properly thanked. Write a letter or visit that person and thank them.

2. Focus on your Personal Strengths: We all have things we are good at. Make a list of yours and appreciate the areas you are strong in.

3. Savor Life's Joys: Value every day experiences and notice things and people around you.

- *Live life like a tourist:* Focus attention on every experience and detail.
- *Focus on the good:* Write down 3 good things that happen to you everyday. Those good things are always there, but we stop paying attention to them.

4. Practice Acts of Kindness: Make the choice to do things for others.

- *Pay it forward:* Make it a goal to go out of your way to do one kind thing each day for someone else. Buy someone a coffee, or let someone go ahead of you in line. Little things can mean a lot to someone else and can boost self-happiness.

5. Actively Choose Joy: We are constantly put in situations that can have a negative impact on us and on our mood. Fight against the negatively by recognizing you can choose how you react to something. For example, someone cuts you off on the drive to work. It is a natural response to get frustrated and angry. Since you have a choice, maybe today you just take a deep breath and say to yourself, "They must be in a hurry." You are choosing joy.

6. Commit to your Goals: Be intentional about committing to something that is personally fulfilling and expressing your values.

7. Take Care of your Body: Feeling good physically translates into how we feel mentally. Exercise, eat right, and get enough sleep.

8. Practice Religion or Spirituality: Develop a spiritual practice, such as prayer, meditation, devotional reading, and doing good deeds.