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Creating a Positive Attitude

Presentation by  
MHN Training

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## *Participant Handbook*

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### Learning Objectives

- Discuss the importance of optimism and a positive attitude
- Identify different aspects of a positive outlook
- Examine the role of self-talk and negativity
- Present techniques for increasing your optimism
- Introduce a new theory of well-being

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### Descriptions for “A Positive Attitude”

What are some words that you use to describe yourself or someone else who holds a “positive attitude”?

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## Why is a Positive Attitude Important?

A “Positive Attitude” correlates with:

- Superior Health
- Greater Achievement
- Persistence
- Enhanced Emotional Health
- Positive Personal Relationships
- Increased Longevity
- Less Stress

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## What Makes Us Happy? The “Fact List”

<p><b><u>NO:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beauty</li><li>• Money</li><li>• Youth</li><li>• Intelligence</li><li>• Education</li></ul>	<p><b><u>YES:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Religion/Spirituality</li><li>• Self-Esteem</li><li>• Sense of Humor</li><li>• Free Time</li><li>• Social Skills</li><li>• Volunteering</li></ul>
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## Developing a Positive Attitude

### Cognitive Reframing

- Refrain from “Awfulizing”
- Challenge the “Shoulds”
- Avoid “All or Nothing” thinking
- Watch out for “Overgeneralizations”
- “Mind Reading” is impossible
- “Emotional Reasoning” is not reality

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## Learning How to be an “Optimist”

Three dimensions of habits of thinking:

- Permanence (about time)
  - Permanent versus Temporary
- Pervasiveness (about space)
  - Universal versus Specific
- Personalization (about the self)
  - Internal versus External

From M. Seligman, *Learned Optimism*. (1990).

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### Learning How to be an “Optimist” (cont)

Did something negative happen? Keep a positive view by thinking that the cause was:

**Temporary, External and Specific**

Example: “I missed a deadline at work today because of an unexpected crisis with another client. I will finish the deadline first thing tomorrow.”

Compared with: “I missed my deadline today because I am always so unorganized.”

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### What Optimism is NOT:

- Denial of Negative Emotions
- “Whitewashing” negative situations or events
- Constant cheerful demeanor
- Unrealistically positive view of situations, events or people

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## Authentic Happiness

Three Aspects of “Authentic Happiness”

- The Pleasant Life
  - Positive emotion and pleasure
- The Good Life (“Eudaimonia”)
  - Engagement using personal strengths
- The Meaningful Life
  - Meaning or dedication to a cause greater than oneself

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## Happiness Activities that Work!

- The Gratitude Visit
  - Write and deliver a letter in person to someone who deserves thanks
- The Signature Strengths Activity
  - Using your “signature strengths” in a new way
- The Three Good Things in Life Activity
  - Write down three things that went well each day and their causes

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## Beyond “Authentic Happiness”

A new theory of *Well-Being*: PERMA

- Positive Emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishment

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## Real Optimism

...is aware of problems but recognizes the solutions,  
...knows about difficulties but believes they can be overcome,  
...sees the negatives but accentuates the positives,  
...is exposed to the worst but expects the best, has reason to complain but chooses to smile.

by *William Arthur Ward*  
American Writer (1921-1994)


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## Resources

- Internet
  - MHN Online [www.MHN.com](http://www.MHN.com)
  - University of Pennsylvania, Positive Psychology Center [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org)
- Books/Articles
  - Csikszentmihalyi, M. *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper & Row.
  - Foster, R., & Hicks, G. *How we choose to be happy*. Perigee Books.
  - Seligman, M.E.P. *Authentic happiness*. Free Press.
  - Seligman, M.E.P. *Flourish*. Simon and Schuster.

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## Handout A. Cognitive Reframing & Self-Talk

**Purpose:** To identify some alternative ways to talk to yourself.

List three (3) things you tell yourself (using negative self-talk) and some new reframing phrases you can use to change the message.

1.

.....  
.....

New Phrase:.....

.....  
.....

2.

.....  
.....

New Phrase:.....

.....  
.....

3.

.....  
.....

New Phrase:.....

.....

## **Handout B. Mood Boosters**

**GET FRIENDLY:** Talk to people; smile and say thank you; greet your co-workers with a few cheerful words.

**TALK ABOUT THE POSITIVES:** Think of 2-3 things that you did well today, write them down for yourself or share them with someone.

**TALK TO YOURSELF GENTLY:** When something bad happens, try to find an explanation that has nothing to do with who you are inside as a person; when you make a mistake, try to forgive yourself the way a good friend would.

**LOOK FOR THE SILVER LINING:** Often times, something bad also brings something good with it...you just have to find it.

**BE A PROBLEM-SOLVER:** When things don't seem to be working as you'd hoped, look at what you're doing and make some changes to fit the situation.

**DISTRACT YOURSELF:** If something goes wrong, do something to take your mind off it for a while. When you think about problems when in a negative mood, you come up with fewer solutions. Doing something you enjoy breaks the negative drift and allows you to return to the problem refreshed and better able to problem solve.

**LAUGH:** One good, deep laugh is as beneficial as 10 minutes on an exercise bike, and a lot easier. It's good for your body and for your soul.

**SPEND TIME WITH CHILDREN:** Their wonder and joy at life is infectious. Helping a child conquer a difficult task like tying a shoelace or preparing for a test can help you believe that anything is possible for you, too.

**FAKE IT:** Practice looking at the bright side even when you don't feel like it. Each time you count on success and achieve it, you build your confidence and your positive attitude. Soon you won't be faking.

## Handout C. Approaches to Happiness Questionnaire

Below are 18 statements that many people would find desirable, but we want you to answer only in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life. Read each one and then write the number of your response using the scale below next to the statement. Please be honest and accurate!

1=Not at all like me; 2=A little like me; 3=Somewhat like me; 4=Mostly like me; 5=Very much like me

- 
- \_\_\_ 1. Regardless of what I am doing, time passes very quickly.
  - \_\_\_ 2. My life serves a higher purpose.
  - \_\_\_ 3. Life is too short to postpone the pleasures it can provide.
  - \_\_\_ 4. I seek out situations that challenge my skills and abilities.
  - \_\_\_ 5. In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether it will benefit other people.
  - \_\_\_ 6. Whether at work or play, I am usually "in a zone" and not conscious of myself.
  - \_\_\_ 7. I am always very absorbed in what I do.
  - \_\_\_ 8. I go out of my way to feel euphoric.
  - \_\_\_ 9. In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether I can lose myself in it.
  - \_\_\_ 10. I am rarely distracted by what is going on around me.
  - \_\_\_ 11. I have a responsibility to make the world a better place.
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- \_\_\_ 12. My life has a lasting meaning.
- \_\_\_ 13. In choosing what to do, I always take into account whether it will be pleasurable.
- \_\_\_ 14. What I do matters to society.
- \_\_\_ 15. I agree with this statement: "Life is short-eat dessert first."
- \_\_\_ 16. I love to do things that excite my senses.
- \_\_\_ 17. I have spent a lot of time thinking about what life means and how I fit into its big picture.
- \_\_\_ 18. For me, the good life is the pleasurable life.
- 

**Scoring:**

- For the *Pleasure in Life* subscore, add items 3, 8, 13, 15, 16, and 18. Divide the total score by 6.

Write your *Pleasure in Life* subscore here: \_\_\_\_\_

- For the *Good Life* subscore, add items 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10. Divide the total score by 6.

Write your *Good Life* subscore here: \_\_\_\_\_

- For the *Meaningful Life* subscore, add items 2, 5, 11, 12, 14, and 17. Divide the total score by 6.

Write your *Meaningful Life* subscore here: \_\_\_\_\_

**Interpretation:**

For each subscale score, your average total should range between 1 and 5. For each route to happiness (pleasure, the good life, and meaning) the score can range from 1 to 5. If the score is closer to a "5", then you feel a great deal of happiness in that area. If the score is around 3, then that is an average level of happiness; if the score is close to 1, then you may feel little or no happiness in that arena in your life.

## Handout D. Happiness Exercises (from Martin Seligman, 2005)

**1. The Gratitude Visit.** People were given 1 week to write and then deliver a letter of gratitude in person to someone who had been especially kind to them, but whom they had never thanked properly. The happiness boost from this experiment lasted about 1 month.

**2. Use your Signature Strengths in a New Way.** Researchers asked study participants about their top five strengths--generosity, for instance, or creativity--and then told them to use one of these strengths in a new and different way every day for 1 week. The result? The volunteers measurably increased their happiness for a full 6 months.

For those of you who would like to further explore your “Signature Strengths”, go to [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org) and take the VIA Signature Strengths Questionnaire. Again, it’s free of charge, but may be a bit time-consuming. The assessment is 240 questions long!

**3. Write down the Three Good Things.** Every day, a group of adults was asked to write down three things that had gone well and *why they happened*. And again, even though the experiment lasted only 1 week, participants reported feeling happier for 6 months afterward.