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Cultivating Happiness:

Simple Ways to Enhance Joy

Presentation by:
MHN Training & Development

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Participant Handbook

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Learning Objectives

- Explore factors that determine our happiness levels
- Review the five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness
- Discuss strategies for increasing happiness levels

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Happiness Defined

What does happiness mean to you?

More than a positive mood...

Happiness is a state of well-being that encompasses living a good life—that is, with a sense of meaning and deep satisfaction.

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What Determines Our Levels of Happiness?

Research indicates that when it comes to our happiness levels:

- Up to about 50% is preset by genetics
 - we have a happiness 'set point'
- 10% is tied to life circumstances
 - the job we have, how much money we have, etc.
- 40% is influenced by everyday habits and choices
 - the people you see, the activities you do and how you see the world

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Can Money Buy Happiness?

- Money is important to happiness, to a point
 - Once we can meet our basic needs and support the life style we are accustomed to, more money doesn't mean more happiness
- What about material possessions?
 - "Hedonic adaptation". Whatever level of wealth or material goods we have, we will always adapt and want more
- Experiences with others make us happy
- Giving away money makes us happy

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Seligman's PERMA Model

Five core elements of psychological well-being and happiness:

- P – Positive emotion
- E – Engagement
- R – Relationships
- M – Meaning
- A – Accomplishments

See **Handout A: The 5 Elements of Well-Being and Happiness**

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How to Apply the PERMA Model to Your Life

- Adopt a positive perspective as often as you can
- Engage in the things that you enjoy
- Focus on your positive and healthy relationships with family and friends
- Savor your accomplishments
- Strive to further achievements
- Search for meaning and lead a life of purpose

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Additional Ways to Increase Happiness

- Appreciate what you have
- Have compassion
- Commit acts of kindness
- Change your thoughts
- Be curious; vary your routine
- Get moving!
- What else?

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Appreciate What You Have

Make an effort to notice and be grateful for the good things in your life.

Suggestions:

- Keep a gratitude journal
- Write notes of appreciation
- Express appreciation verbally

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Have Compassion, Commit Acts of Kindness

- The altruism that arises from compassion is a key component of happiness.
- A variety of studies have shown that helping others can induce a calmer mind and a feeling of happiness.
- In a survey of people who were regularly involved in volunteer activities, over 90% of the volunteers reported:
 - A kind of “high” associated with the activity, characterized by a feeling of warmth, more energy, and a kind of euphoria.
 - After participating in the volunteer activity, they had a distinct feeling of calmness and enhanced self-worth.

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Change Your Thoughts

1. Develop thought awareness
 - notice negative thoughts as they arise
2. Use rational thinking
 - evaluate and challenge your thoughts (fact vs fiction)
 - keep in mind, beliefs aren't real
3. Develop positive thoughts and affirmations
 - identify opportunities

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Be Curious, Vary Your Routine

- Happy people are curious
 - Ask questions, learn new things, stretch beyond your comfort zone
- Vary your routine
 - Consciously vary what you do (where, when, how)
 - Perhaps it's small variations (eating at a different restaurant or walking on a different path)
 - Perhaps it's larger variations (going on a weekend adventure)

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Get Moving

- Exercise does influence happiness!
- When you start exercising your brain recognizes this as a moment of stress
 - As a natural "protective" response, the body releases chemicals to fight stress, BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor) and endorphins
 - Causes us to feel good and at ease after exercising

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Summary

- Cultivating happiness is simple, easy and often costs nothing (or next to nothing)
- What are your take-a-ways?

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Resources

Books

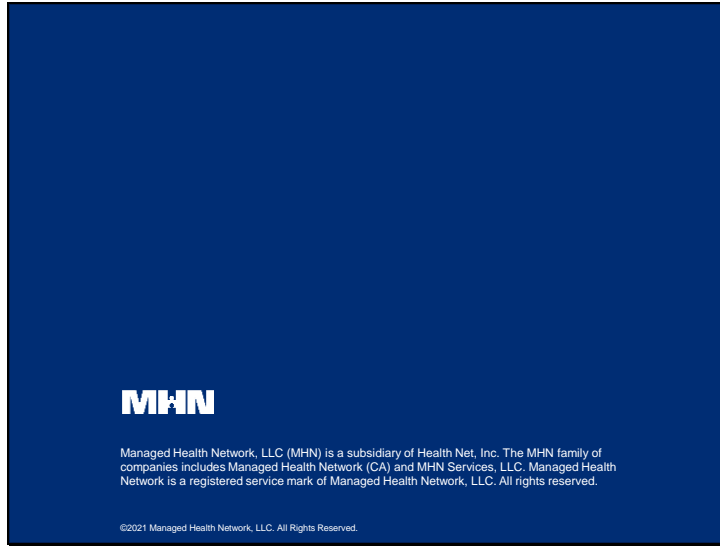
- Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment, by Martin Seligman
- Gratitude, by Oliver Sacks
- Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier, by Robert Emmons

Online

- authentichappiness.org
- gratefulness.org
- greatergood.berkeley.edu
- MHN.com

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Handout A: The 5 Elements of Well-Being and Happiness

The acronym PERMA stands for:

P – Positive emotion

Feeling good, positive emotions, optimism, pleasure and enjoyment.

E – Engagement

Fulfilling work, interesting hobbies, “flow.”

R – Relationships

Social connections, love, intimacy, emotional and physical interaction.

M – Meaning

Having a purpose, finding meaning in life.

A – Accomplishments

Ambition, realistic goals, important achievements, pride in yourself.

P – Positive Emotion

- Being able to focus on positive emotions.
- Being optimistic and viewing the past, present, and future in a positive way.
 - This positive view of life can help you in relationships, work, and inspire you to be more creative and take more chances.
 - Enjoyment and satisfaction could come from a variety of things, such as intellectual stimulation and creativity derived from completing a project that required concentration and perseverance.

E – Engagement

- Finding activities that we enjoy and that absorb us fully in the present moment.
 - Engaging in a hobby we enjoy or work we find interesting
 - Creating a ‘flow’ of blissful immersion into the task or activity
 - Being ‘in the zone’ - flow, we forget problems and worries
 - Research shows that people who experience flow on a regular basis are happier than those who don’t.

R – Relationships

- Having strong relationships and social connections.
 - As humans, we are social animals that thrive on connection, love and intimacy
 - Building positive relationships with family members, peers, and friends can spread love and joy and provide support in difficult times.

M – Meaning

- Having a sense of purpose and meaning in life (rather than simply pursuing pleasure and material wealth).
 - gives people a reason for living and making the most of their lives.
- Understanding the greater impact of your work and why you chose to pursue it, can help you enjoy the tasks more and become happier and more satisfied.

A – Accomplishments

- Having goals and ambitions in life can help us to pursue and achieve things; providing a sense of accomplishment.
 - Setting realistic goals that can be met, and actively pursuing those goals, can provide a sense of satisfaction. When you achieve those goals, a deep sense of pride and fulfillment can be experienced.
- Having accomplishments in life is important to push ourselves to thrive and flourish.

In applying these elements to your life:

- Try to adopt a positive perspective as often as you can.
- Find the activities, projects and pursuits that you enjoy and that fully engage you.
- Focus on your relationships with your family and friends.
 - Be proactive about connecting with people who bring out the best in you. Limit time spent with people who drain your energy or encourage your bad habits.
 - Find positive role models and mentors who inspire you.
 - The happier people are in their social engagements, the happier they are in general.
- Savor your accomplishments.
 - Savoring our accomplishments allows us to soak in the pleasant feelings that come from the experience.
 - Celebrate, especially the items that feel truly meaningful to you. Do something to acknowledge yourself.
 - Research shows that reminiscing about positive events not only increases feelings of happiness, but it can also help us solve problems, gain perspective and know ourselves better.
- Strive to further achievements
 - Pleasure comes from making progress toward goals.
 - Progress triggers the release of dopamine in the brain, sending feelings of well-being and pleasure into the body.
 - You become more of the person you were meant to be every time you push past your fears.
- Search for meaning and lead a life of purpose
 - Find meaning in your life and what gives you a sense of purpose, it's different for everyone.

Adapted from: “The PERMA Model: Your Scientific Theory of Happiness.” *Positive Psychology Program*. February 24, 2017. Accessed April 1st, 2018.

Handout B: Taking a Daily Vacation

Do you feel like you lack time to actively savor and appreciate the experiences in your life?

Research has shown that, rather than their intensity, the *frequency* of positive emotions and feelings is a stronger predictor of our overall level of happiness. Meaning that it's more effective to increase the number of positive experiences, than it is to intensify them.

This exercise does just that. It's called "Taking a Daily Vacation":

1. You're going to choose a different vacation every day. For example, going for a walk, chatting with a friend, having a hot bath, watching the sunrise while sipping on a mug of tea. The only limit is your imagination. Just choose something you enjoy doing.
2. Before you start, remember, your daily vacation is a time to relax. So, set aside your worries and fears for a while.
3. During the daily vacation, try to be present and experience what is happening. Notice the sensations. How are you feeling? What positive emotions are you experiencing? Take a mental note of them.
4. After your daily vacation remember to plan for the next day; what will tomorrow's daily vacation be? Feel free to look forward to it.

Every day, before you go to bed, take at least five minutes to remember the positive emotions that you savored during the day, and on the weekend take 10 to 15 minutes to look at all the positive emotions of the past 7 days. How did you feel this week compared to other weeks? Are there any differences? How do you feel right now?

Adapted from: "Positive Psychology Exercises to do with Clients or Students." *Positive Psychology Program*. Accessed April 1st, 2018.

Handout C: Finding What's Meaningful to You

This exercise can help you assess what aspects of your life are the most meaningful to you. To begin this exercise, take out a notebook or a sheet of paper. Down the left side of the page, write these domains of your life:

Intimate relationships
Parenting
Family
Friendships/socializing
Education/personal growth
Career
Recreation
Spirituality/religion
Physical health
Helping others

- Next to each item write a number between 1 and 5 that corresponds with how important you personally find each area to be in your life, with 5 = extremely important and 1= not at all important.
- If you're not sure, just write a question mark. There are no right answers, and no one will ever have to see this list. Just write down what you feel is important to *you*, not what anyone else believes *should* be important to you.

Define What Would Bring You Meaning

- Pick the two domains that you rated as most important.
- If you rated every domain as exactly as important as any other, go back and think about whether there are one or two domains that stand out as more important than the others, even if it's only by a little bit.
- For the one or two domains that you picked out as most important, write one or two sentences about how **you** would like to behave in each domain. This is important—this is not about how you would like to feel or think (e.g., I would like to be confident and self-assured.) Instead, focus on your behavior or how you would like to **act** in that domain.
- Here's an example of the “intimate relationships” domain:

“I would like to be a kind and caring partner. I would like to say supportive things to my partner when they are feeling down, and I would like to do things for them that will help make their life a little easier. I would also like to act as if I am worthwhile in relationships by asking for the things I need.”

Putting It Together

- Now—in the one or two domains that you chose as most important to you—look at what you have written about how you would like to behave. Hopefully, you have written one or two sentences that describe behaviors or actions that you would like to take in those domains.
- These are the types of actions that can help you find meaning in your life, the ways that you would like to be in the areas of your life that are most important to you.
- Don't be surprised if reading the statements, you have written makes you sad. Perhaps you're not acting the way you would like in these areas of your life, or perhaps you feel nowhere near where you would like to be in these areas. For example, maybe you're not in an intimate relationship despite the fact that it's very important to you.

Take Your Time

- If you're struggling with this exercise and are having a hard time finishing it, put it down and come back to it another time.
- This can be a very difficult exercise, and sometimes it requires some time to think about everything, so let it sit for a while and try again when you're ready. You can also try talking it over with a friend or your therapist to get more input.

Living the Life You Want to Live

- If you've completed this exercise, you've taken a very important step toward living a more meaningful life. You've determined what areas of your life are most important to you, and you have specified a few actions you could take that would move you toward having more meaning in your life. The exercise doesn't take long to complete, but if you work toward achieving the actions you want to take in specific domains, it can have long-lasting effects in helping you to live the life you truly wish to live.

Source:

Salters-Pedneault, Kristalyn. "A Mental Exercise to Help You Find Meaning in Your Life." Verywellmind. Updated: December 31, 2017. Accessed: April 4th, 2018.

Handout D: 10 Tips for Keeping a Gratitude Journal

By writing down positive things that happen to you and actively acknowledging those who have helped you, you become better at recognizing the good in your life, which naturally helps you feel more grateful and thankful more often. There is no, “one right way” to keep a gratitude journal, but here are tips.

1. Choose your journal

Select a notebook or journal to use, solely for this practice.

2. Write in your journal and re-read your entries

Write down 3 to 5 things that you are grateful for before going to bed. Read your entries in the morning. You can do this daily, or even once or twice each week. *Note: the time of day is a suggestion. If evening doesn't work for you, pick a different time of day. Create a routine.*

3. Be as specific as you can

In the beginning, it may be hard to find things for which to be grateful, and you may be tempted to list things like “I’m grateful for my health.” While this is certainly something for which to be grateful, try to be more specific and focus on exactly why you are grateful. For example, instead of saying, “I’m grateful for my husband,” you could write:

“I’m happy to have such an affectionate husband who tells me that he loves me so often. This evening he told me that he loved me after I’d had a really difficult day at work. It felt good to hear.”

Or, instead of writing, “I’m grateful for my job,” you could write:

“I’m grateful to have a job that is flexible around my child care needs. Today I left early to take my daughter to the doctor. Having this flexibility makes it so much easier to manage things.”

4. Go for depth over breadth

Elaborating in detail about a particular thing for which you’re grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of *many* things.

5. Get personal

Focusing on *people* to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on *circumstances or material ‘things’* for which you are grateful.

6. Savor surprises

Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.

7. Turn negatives into positives

Help really transform your thoughts by finding the positive side of negative situations. Instead of dwelling on things that are not working out – maybe a failed relationship, or financial hardships, or health problems – find and write about a positive in those situations. For example:

“I’m upset that relationship didn’t work out, but now I have time to focus on myself and figuring out what I really want and need in a partner.”

“My husband is still unemployed, but I’m grateful that we were able to pay the rent this month.”

“I don’t feel well, and I’m worried about my health condition, but I’m grateful for the insight it has given me into how much I want to get out of life.”

8. Re-read your entries

9. Don’t just go through the motions

Research by psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky and others suggests that journaling is more effective if you first make the conscious decision to become happier and more grateful. “Motivation to become happier plays a role in the efficacy of journaling,” says Emmons.

10. See each item as a gift

Be aware of your feelings and how you “relish” and “savor” what you have listed as a “gift” in your imagination. Take the time to be especially aware of the depth of your gratitude.

Don’t hurry through this exercise as if it were just another item on your to-do list.

Happy journaling!

Content adapted from:

Shoreland, Lisa. “5 steps for creating a gratitude journal to cultivate positivity”. Positively Present. Accessed April 2nd, 2018.

Handout E: 10 Ways to Become More Grateful

1. Keep a Gratitude Journal. Establish a practice in which you remind yourself of the gifts, grace, benefits, and good things you enjoy. Setting aside time a couple of times a week to recall moments of gratitude associated with ordinary events, your personal attributes, or valued people in your life gives you the potential to interweave a sustainable life theme of gratefulness.

2. Remember the Bad. To be grateful in your current state, it is helpful to remember the hard times that you once experienced. When you remember how difficult life used to be and how far you have come, you set up an explicit contrast in your mind; fertile ground for gratefulness.

3. Ask Yourself Three Questions. Utilize the meditation technique known as Naikan, which involves reflecting on three questions: “What have I received from ___?”, “What have I given to ___?”, and “What troubles and difficulty have I caused?”

4. Learn Prayers of Gratitude. In many spiritual traditions, prayers of gratitude are considered to be the most powerful form of prayer, because through these prayers people recognize the ultimate source of all they are and all they will ever be.

5. Come to Your Senses. Through our senses—the ability to touch, see, smell, taste, and hear—we gain an appreciation of what it means to be human and of what an incredible miracle it is to be alive. Seen through the lens of gratitude, the human body is not only a miraculous construction, but also a gift.

6. Use Visual Reminders. Because the two primary obstacles to gratefulness are forgetfulness and a lack of mindful awareness, visual reminders can serve as cues to trigger thoughts of gratitude. Often times, the best visual reminders are other people.

7. Make a Vow to Practice Gratitude. Research shows that making an oath to perform a behavior increases the likelihood that the action will be executed. Therefore, write your own gratitude vow, which could be as simple as “I vow to count my blessings each day,” and post it somewhere where you will be reminded of it every day.

8. Watch your Language. Grateful people have a particular linguistic style that uses the language of gifts, givers, blessings, blessed, fortune, fortunate, and abundance. In gratitude, you should not focus on how inherently good you are, but rather on the inherently good things that others have done on your behalf.

9. Go Through the Motions. If you go through grateful motions, the emotion of gratitude should be triggered. Grateful motions include smiling, saying thank you, writing letters, etc.

10. Think Outside the Box. If you want to make the most out of opportunities to flex your gratitude muscles, you must creatively look for new situations and circumstances in which to feel grateful.

Source: Emmons, Robert. “10 Ways to Become More Grateful.” *Greater Good Magazine*. November 17, 2010. Accessed April 4th, 2018

Handout F: Change Your Thoughts – 3 Step Process

1. Develop thought awareness

Develop thought awareness and notice negative thoughts as they arise. For many of us however, negative thinking is a habit – and we aren't aware of it.

Consider this example of not having thought awareness:

When I walked by Mary (the receptionist) in the morning, she doesn't greet me. I think, "Mary must be upset with me". Or, "she doesn't like me", or "yep, she's such a *rude* person". Lol. I keep walking, unaware of the fact that my interpretation was negative.

Do you have these experiences like that where you *automatically* assign a negative meaning to a situation? The goal is to catch yourself; being aware of the fact that your interpretation is negative.

Same example, this time having thought awareness:

When I walked by Mary in the morning, she didn't greet me. I assume she's upset with me. I keep walking, realizing that my interpretation was negative. "Oh wow, I automatically *assumed* she was upset with me".

Developing thought awareness helps you identify negative thinking, unpleasant memories, and misinterpretation of situations that may interfere with your performance and damage your self-confidence.

Step 1

Write down in a sentence or two, a recent negative thought. Perhaps it was about you, or a situation, or about someone else.

2. Use rational thinking

Rational thinking helps you to evaluate and challenge the negative thoughts, and either learn from them or refute them as incorrect.

You can do this by asking yourself questions, such as:

- Is the thought true? Meaning, is it factual?
- Do I know for a fact that it's true? Is there substance to it (some truth)?
- Are there other possible perspectives or interpretations that I have not considered?

By asking these questions, you are challenging the negative thought and separating fact from fiction.

Previous example of not having thought awareness:

When I walked by Mary in the morning, she didn't greet me. I think, "Mary must be upset with me".

Using rational thought questions, I might ask myself:

"Do I *know* she is upset with me? Could she have been busy or distracted when I walked by? Did I say hello to her? Maybe she wasn't feeling well, or she was in a negative mood herself".

NOTES:

- Watch for "always", "never", "worst".
 - You can bet that the statements which include those terms are for the most part, not true.
 - When it feels like something *always* or *never* happens, this is just your brain's natural threat tendency, inflating the perceived frequency or severity of an event.
- Thoughts aren't *real*. **Beliefs are not real**. They are mental maps, abstractions of reality, that help us predict and function in a complex world. A child may believe that Santa Claus is real. I may believe that the receptionist is upset with me. These are beliefs, not facts.

"Beliefs have the power to create and the power to destroy. Human beings have the awesome ability to take any experience of their lives and create a meaning that disempowers them or one that can literally save their lives." ~ Anthony Robbins

Step 2

Take a moment now to review the negative thought statement you wrote down. Ask yourself:

Is the thought true? Do I know for a fact that it's true? Is there substance to it (some truth)? Are there other possible perspectives or interpretations that I have not considered?

Write down one or two of your questions, and your responses.

3. Develop positive thoughts and affirmations

The final step is to use your rational assessment of the facts and re-state the thought in a positive and affirmative manner. Aim for a statement that is clear, rational and balanced.

NOTE: They will be strongest if they are specific, are expressed in the present tense, and have strong emotional content.

Previous examples (“she’s upset with me”).

Re-written as a positive statement:

“Mary didn’t say hello. Typically, she does. Perhaps she was distracted or just very busy”.

And here’s a new example:

Negative thought: “My presentation is going to be bad. I can never do a good enough job.”

Let’s assume that when you asked yourself rational thought questions, what was true was that you had not been given much time to prepare, weren’t, what you would call “well-prepared”, AND that you had done as well as you could have with the time you had. Additionally, you were able to come up with instances when you’ve done a really good job. Your statement might look like this.

Positive statement: “I am as prepared as I could be, with the time I had. The presentation is fairly solid, and I am committed to doing the best job I can”.

These affirmations can neutralize negative thoughts and build your self-confidence. Ok, now it’s your turn.

Step 3

Re-write your original statement, using positive, affirmative language.

Adapted from:

“Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking, and Positive Thinking”. *MindTools*. April 5th, 2018.