**HOW TO BE HAPPY**

**The Science of Happiness**

**Neil Frude – 9th May 2023**

##

## What do you most want from life? For yourself? For your friends? For your family members?

## *Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence*

##  Aristotle

# *The purpose of our lives is to be happy* The Dalai Lama

## Some major questions … Why are some people happier than others?

##  Why are we happier on some days than on others?

##  What are the benefits of being happy?

##  Can happiness be strategically increased? (… and, if so, how?)

## Since 2000, a good deal of psychological research has focused on happiness, wellbeing and flourishing. We now know a lot more about happiness – thanks to the development of the field of POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

# The US psychologist Sonya Lyobomirsky defined happiness as *“… the experience of joy, contentment or positive wellbeing, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful and worthwhile”*

# Happiness, wellbeing, satisfaction with life, etc. can all be measured

Example – The Diener Scale which measures general satisfaction with life.

## Of course, the experiences of happiness and wellbeing are “good in themselves” - but they are also associated with a broad spectrum of **Added Benefits**

# Research has shown that, compared to unhappy people, happy people are

##  more confident more energetic more productive more creative

## more friendly more helpful more loving more forgiving

## more popular kinder to others (and also kinder to themselves)

## Happy people also…

## ⇨ look forward to things more ⇨ are physically healthier

## ⇨ are psychologically healthier ⇨ are more resilient to stress

##  ... And they live longer …

## Lots of studies have shown a relationship between happiness, positivity and longevity.

Children who are smiling in their school photograph live, on average, seven years longer than those who are not smiling. Abel, E. and Kruger, M. (2010) *Smile Intensity in Photographs Predicts Longevity.* ***Psychological Science, 20***, 1–3. And there’s also “The Nun Study”

## Not only is Happiness GOOD FOR YOU –BUT, in addition, YOUR happiness is good for your friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, etc. **Happiness is CONTAGIOUS!!**

Studies on emotional contagion by Nicholas Christakis and his team at Harvard University have shown that happiness is contagious to 3 degrees:

## This, increasing YOUR OWN happiness will increase …

##  **At 1 degree** the friends you meet

##  **At 2 degrees** the family members of the friends you meet

##  **At 3 degrees** the neighbours of the family members of the friends you meet

## Most people have 1000 people within 3 degrees of them – so if we succeed in making ourselves happy this can then increase the happiness of 1000 other people – happiness spreads!

## So – even if you are not bothered about being happy for your own sake – work on increasing YOUR happiness for the sake of OTHERS!

## And if you are a parent or grandparent – YOUR happiness is a great gift to YOUR CHILDREN Or YOUR GRANDCHILDREN

## It is clear that some people are happier than others. Why? Research has shown that differences between people in levels of happiness can be explained in terms of three factors in the following ratio: 50 : 40 : 10

# 50% of the variation between people is due to Genetics

# 10% of the variation between people is due to Life Circumstances

# 40% of the variation between people is due to Outlook and Behaviour

Changing our thoughts and actions can **ENHANCE** and **SUSTAIN** our level of happiness

***AND WE CAN LEARN HOW TO DO THIS – So we can learn how to be happier!***

## The understanding and skilful management of our emotions are key aspects of our

## EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EQ) And we can use our EQ to do things that will effectively increase and sustain our happiness

**ENHANCING HAPPINESS AND WELLBEING**

So what can we do to make ourselves (and the people around us) happier?

Positive psychologists and others have provided a range of … ***“Recipes for Happiness”***

New Economics Foundation (NEF) “Five Ways to Wellbeing”

 Be Active Give and Volunteer Keep Learning

 Take Notice and Live in the Present Connect with Others

Simple Happiness Recipe The essentials of Happiness are:

 *Something to do Something to love Something to look forward to*

# **TWO WAYS OF INCREASING HAPPINESS**

# A) Develop a (realistic) positive outlook (see the glass as half full)

## AND B) Enhance your quality of life (put more in the glass)

# **A: DEVELOPING A (REALISTIC) POSITIVE OUTLOOK**

## We can change our mental set so that we’ll generally see the glass as half full

# **“WHAT WENT WELL” = WWW** (OR “Three Good Things” or “The Gratitude Diary”)

## At the end of each day, recall three good things that happened – things that went well

## These may be very simple – seeing a friend, having a nice meal, going for a walk. Even small events are worth recalling and noting – so note them in a diary or booklet. Repeat this exercise each day for at least two weeks. This exercise will sensitize you to positive events, changing your ‘mental set’ so that you are much more aware of positive events as they happen.

## The beneficial effects of this exercise can last for months. It’s great to do the WWW activity with someone else – a friend or – especially – a child. This can be a very powerful way of helping children to develop an optimistic outlook.

# **CHOOSING WHAT WE SEE**

# To a large extent, we can choose what to see. Thus we can choose to focus on what’s GOOD about or what’s BAD about … our health, our life, our house, our past, our body, our neighbours, etc. We can choose to see the glass as half full or half empty.

# **B: ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE**

## But as well has how we see things, we can also do things that will make our life richer, more interesting, more enjoyable and more fulfilling – in terms of the metaphor, this means that we can put more into our glass.

**MENTAL HEALTH AND GENERAL WELLBEING:** Based on a review of the evidence, the UK Government Foresight Report ***“Mental Capital and Wellbeing”*** (2008) concluded that:

## “*Achieving a small change in the average level of wellbeing across the population would produce a large decrease in the percentage with mental disorder*”

## This is not surprising, because happiness is associated with more social engagement, greater cognitive flexibility, increased energy, increased optimism, greater self-confidence and greater resilience to stress, all of which are likely to promote positive mental health.

# And there are many ways in which positive psychology can be used to help people who have a mental illness (and there is good evidence that this can be effective).

# Remember the “Happiness Recipe” … FOR HAPPINESS, YOU NEED . . .

## Something to do Something to love Something to look forward to

# People who are distressed and despairing often have . . .

## Nothing to do Nothing that they love Nothing to look forward to

# A therapist working with Positive Psychology can help the person to . . .

## Find interesting/fulfilling things to do Find their passion Find things to look forward to

# **POSITIVE EXPERIENCES BOOST HAPPINESS**

### Positive experiences are generally triggered by things that we do and things that happen to us –

### These experiences provide **UPLIFTS**. Even small uplifts can ***“really make your day”!***

# Many uplifts“just happen”

 *I found something I thought I had lost An old friend got in touch with me*

 *I heard a great joke The weather was lovely today*

# But you can also “make uplifts happen”

# *You can go for a walk in the park You can treat yourself to a short nap*

### *You can start to think about a holiday You can borrow a great library book*

### *You can give somebody a cwtch*

# Fantastic online resources allow people to access media content that they know will trigger positive emotions – YouTube Spotify Netflix

## A choir is clearly – for many people – a very rich source of uplifting experiences. And there are many other potentially rich sources of uplifts (allotments, reading groups, for example, and “sheds”).

## And everyone needs = Ikigai – a reason to get out of bed in the morning!

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**“ACTIVATE YOUR LIFE”**

If you (or your friends, family, etc.) are interested in understanding more about how your Mind works and how it affects your thoughts, feelings and actions – and especially if you are distressed by any thoughts that come into your head, or feelings that arise, or habits that you have developed – you might wish to consider using a free course that I created a few years ago.

This course is called “ACTivate Your Life” and has been delivered to over 20,000 people through the NHS and various charities in Wales as well as in Ireland and Hong Kong. It is based on the “Acceptance the Commitment Therapy” approach that is widely used by clinical psychologists and others.

The course is generally delivered to groups of people in community settings, but when Covid arrived I was asked by Public Health Wales to develop a version for online access. That version involves 4 videos each lasting around 45 minutes, along with some activity sheets, etc.

If you want to have a look at this (it’s free – and you don’t even have the sign up) the course can be accessed on the Public Health Wales website. That will allow you to access the videos and any of the extra materials that you might find useful. Or you can just watch the videos on YouTube – simply search for “ACTivate Your Life.” You can also find versions of the course in Welsh and in British Sign Language on both the Public Health Wales website and YouTube.

I hope that some of you might find this free course helpful – and do consider mentioning it to others who might find it interesting and helpful.