

Pursuing Happiness

Objective

To identify characteristics of happy people, assess your own happiness, and expand your experiences of happiness.

What to Know

You might think happiness is something that just happens. In fact, happiness is something you learn, create, and cultivate throughout your life. Researchers agree that achieving happiness requires a long-term commitment to growth, serious engagement in the process, meaningful relationships with others, and vitality. Learning, being curious, trying out new things, making mistakes along the way, and engaging in prosocial activities are at the core of the pursuit of happiness.

Dr. Neil Eddington wrote about the characteristics of happy people. According to him, happy people achieve the following traits.

- Personal Integration
- Autonomy
- Accurate Perceptions
- Environmental Mastery
- Self-Acceptance
- Self-Actualization

If you are motivated to achieve happiness, you:

- believe in the power of learning.
- engage in proactive behavior.
- are aware of your cultural context.
- have achieved well-being and are ready for growth.
- surround yourself with people you can share your experiences with.
- are aware of your model of happiness – some people want moderation while others desire ecstasy.
- feel motivated and want to make the effort.
- grow deep and trusting relationships.
- look for meaning in life.
- have a purpose.
- stand by your core values.

This worksheet will help you assess your own happiness and expand your experiences of what it means to be happy.

What to Do

Imagine that an alien from outer space lands in front of you, steps out of the spaceship, approaches you in a friendly way, and asks you to define happiness. What would you say? Make your answer short, simple, and to the point.

The alien asks you if you are happy. What is your honest response?

Depending on your answer, is there anything missing in your life for you to be happy? If yes, what is it?

Focus on what you think you are missing to be truly happy. Is that really what will make you happy? How can you achieve that?

Researchers have identified five factors that affect well-being.

1. Connecting with people and having high-quality connections (empathy is essential for achieving this).

Do you have strong connections with others? Why or why not?

2. Being active and relaxed.

Do you take time for physical activity and relaxation? Explain.

3. Being aware of when you are happy.

Do you notice body sensations, thoughts, and feelings? If not, what is blocking you?

4. Love of learning.

Are you a lifelong learner? If not, why not?

5. Prosocial behavior, acts of kindness, and giving have many benefits.

Do you intentionally engage in acts of kindness and generosity? If not, why not?

Here are a few characteristics that most happy people share. Check off the ones you have.

- hopeful optimistic kind positive feelings
 zest for life express gratitude curious self-confidence
 authenticity resilience adaptable
 tangible values compassionate able to love and receive love
 cooperative present and planning for the future

Can you think of other characteristics? Write them down.

Describe yourself using the positive characteristics you have.

Write about the characteristics you don't have but would like to have. Why would you like to have them?

How will you learn how to develop those characteristics? What do you need to learn?

Here are some things you can do to increase happiness in your life.

- spend more time socializing
- open yourself to spirituality
- cultivate curiosity
- strengthen your closest relationships
- develop a prosocial personality (kindness, generosity, compassion, empathy)
- be vulnerable by allowing others to see you as you are
- spend time with animals
- dance
- question your expectations and aspirations
- enjoy the small things in life
- develop positive, optimistic thinking
- become involved in meaningful work
- get organized and plan
- present yourself well to the world
- stop worrying
- identify your strengths and weaknesses
- meditate
- spend time in nature
- find calm and grounded friends
- listen to music or play an instrument
- visualize your best possible self
- write letters of gratitude
- practice self-compassion

What can you do to improve the quality of your relationships?

What can you do to improve your work, hobbies, and interests?

What can you do to find purpose and enhance your perspective of yourself?

What can you do to achieve your goals?

Write about how you can care for others.

Being vital will energize your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. What can you do to enhance your vitality?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
