

openup

A practical guide to

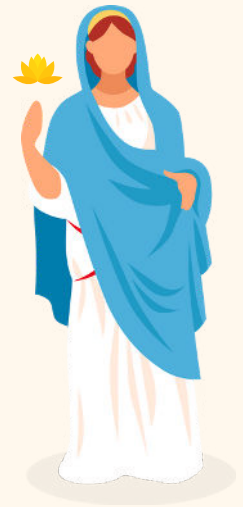
Positive Psychology



LEARN TO ENHANCE YOUR
OWN SENSE OF HAPPINESS

How to be **truly happy** is undoubtedly among the greatest pursuits of all time.

The psychological and philosophical pursuit of happiness began in China, India and Greece nearly 2,500 years ago with Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and Aristotle.



Up until the late 1800s, the field of psychology was focused on pathology: worst-case scenarios and the causes of unhappiness. Positive psychology arose, in part, as a reaction against this focus on “problems.” Instead of trying to fix what is “wrong” with people, positive psychology asked how we can **cultivate human strengths** and build positive aspects in our lives such as resilience, joy, purpose, and meaning.

In response to a growing interest in positive psychology in the 20th century, scientists started to research the **question:**

“What makes happy people happy?”

Thanks to scientific research and psychological developments in the field, we now know more than ever about the fundamentals of human happiness.

What is **positive psychology**?

Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life **most worth living.**

- Peterson, 2008

Positive psychology is the **science** of life's positive qualities: well-being, happiness, satisfaction, and fulfilment. The approach explores human thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, **focusing on strengths instead of weaknesses**.

The term, originally coined by the psychologist Abraham Maslow, was popularised by Martin Seligman in 2002 through his influential work "Authentic Happiness". He proposed a new subfield of psychology with a focus on what is **life-giving** rather than life-depleting and highlighted **three essential aims** of psychology to the overall study of happiness:

"The first is that psychology should be just as concerned with human **strength as it is with weakness. It should be interested in the **best** things in life. And it should be just as concerned with making the lives of normal people **fulfilling**, and with genius, with nurturing high talent."**

- Martin Seligman, TED Talk

Many researchers have adopted Seligman's approach globally, providing a foundation for the application of positive psychology principles.

IN A NUTSHELL

The **aim** of positive psychology is to make life more fulfilling, by asking the question “**What is right with you?**”.

It focuses on positive elements such as **happiness, optimism, compassion, gratitude**, and **joy**.

Nevertheless, positive psychology offers much more than just a focus on pleasant emotions.



Positive psychology can change our perception. In life, **good things happen, and bad things happen.** We have little to no control over what happens in the world, but we can control our perception and reactions. Let's apply this to a **practical example:**

Hands on:

You are on your way to Disneyland with your family. You suddenly blow a tire, and have to wait for help. After 1.5 hours, you get back on the road and finally arrive at your destination.

Problem-focused response:

- "Why did this happen to us? Now we missed 1.5 hours at Disneyland!"
- "Stupid me, I should've checked the car before travelling..."

Positivity-focused response:

- "Luckily someone could come and help us out! We still got a lot of time at Disneyland!"
- "Thankfully something worse didn't happen to the car."
- Fill in your positive thoughts...



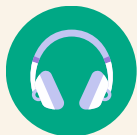
Let's go through some **theory**

As a field, positive psychology touches upon **many fundamental facets of life**, such as character strengths, self-esteem, relationships, well-being and how each of these can be applied to reach deeper meaning and purpose.

The ultimate goal is to increase **happiness** and **well-being** by enabling individuals and communities to **flourish**. To achieve this, a number of elements should be considered. Dr Seligman expanded his vision of human well-being based on five pillars, known by the acronym **PERMA**. Let's explore each of them:



Positive Emotions: Experiencing positive emotions is crucial and can be cultivated (e.g. through gratitude).



Engagement: To enhance our well-being, it is important to engage in **“flow”** inducing activities.



Relationships: As social creatures, **meaningful connections** are vital to our well-being.



Meaning: Meaning is the highest form of happiness and is achieved by serving something greater than ourselves.



Accomplishment: We all flourish when we are succeeding, reaching our objectives, and improving ourselves.

The **PERMA model** provides a thorough framework for understanding and enhancing our mental well-being.

To feel well, consider **each element** equally crucial. Happiness cannot only be built on amplifying positive emotions or living a life of engagement. Naturally, they play an important role, but will not be enough to develop a **comprehensive sense of well-being** which also includes meaning, success, and positive relationships.

A LITTLE RECAP

- ✓ Try to focus more on **positive emotions**: engage in more activities that make you happy and add enjoyment to your everyday routine;
- ✓ Strive to increase your **engagement**: strengthen your talents, engage in hobbies you are interested in, and seek experiences that align with your passions;
- ✓ Enhance the quality of your **interpersonal relationships**: strive to create stronger and closer bonds with your friends, family, and loved ones.
- ✓ Look for **meaning** in your life: activities such as volunteering, helping others, and developing personal interests can guide you towards finding your purpose.
- ✓ Never give up working toward your **achievements**: keep striving for your higher aspirations! But always remember to give yourself a break. Striking a healthy balance is key!

How to **apply positive psychology** in everyday life

Many of the techniques to apply positive psychology in your everyday life can be put into practice immediately, for example, random acts of kindness and gratitude. The best part? These skills may boost your mood pretty quickly too!

Below, we list five principles and exercises of positive psychology that you can apply and benefit from in your every day life:

1. Gratitude

Gratitude is one of the most well-known positive psychology approaches and it's no wonder: **it feels good to be grateful!** According to research, gratitude also has multiple emotional and physical benefits (e.g., better sleep, less stress and improved emotional awareness). Clearly, the simple act of **giving thanks** can have a significant positive effect on mental well-being.

There are plenty of ways to benefit from the power of gratitude. **Try one of the exercises below:**

- *Keeping a gratitude journal*
- *Writing a letter to a loved one to express gratitude*
- *Committing to a complaint-free day each week*
- *Taking a gratitude walk, mental noting what you are grateful for*
- *Conversing about the best part of your day around the dinner table*
- *Practising gratitude affirmations during your meditation*



2. Self-compassion

Us humans can be incredibly hard on ourselves. We often are our own **harshest judges**, criticising and over-analysing every minor flaw. This attitude, however, not only harms our self-esteem and self-confidence, but also drives us to focus on the negatives, affecting our mood and interfering with our ability to enjoy the good aspects of our lives. Guess what? **Self-compassion is the best cure.**

When we treat ourselves with kindness and patience, we are acknowledging our imperfections and **showing ourselves love**, no matter what.

How can I practise **self-compassion**?

- *Treat yourself as you would treat a **friend**: ask yourself what you would say to a loved one in a similar situation. Now, say it to yourself.*
- *Practice **positive talk** and give yourself encouragement;*
- *Try **self-compassion mindfulness** - scan the QR code for a quick exercise;*
- *Cultivate kindness: work on doing one kind act every week;*



3. Strength spotting

The happiest people are those that have found their unique **strengths** and **qualities** and make use of them in every possible scenario. Perhaps you are kind, perseverant, innovative, or creative. How often do you see yourself in this light?

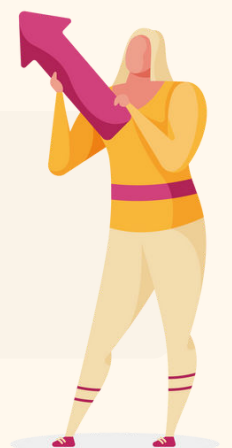
Finding and using our strengths, not only enriches our personal life but also serves as a reminder of how valuable we are.

4. Flow activation

Flow can be experienced through activities that we love doing, such as practising sports, painting, and playing music. The key is to feel in control and receive immediate feedback while having the awareness that there is much room for growth. In order for a flow state to happen and reach that ‘loss of self-consciousness’ moment, the activity you are performing should be **voluntary** and **motivating**, it must **require skill** and be **challenging** enough to motivate you.

No clue what that activity could be? **Ask yourself the following questions:**

- *What did you do as a child that made you lose track of time?*
- *What about it motivated/inspired you?*
- *How can you find this in your activities today?*



5. Visualise success

Visualisation is a simple technique that can help us to create a strong **mental image of future events**. As our goals are most often future-oriented, mentally picturing success is a powerful tool to think positively and reinforce our confidence. "Seeing" ourselves succeed - even if only initially in our mind - helps us believe that it can actually happen.

When we imagine every step of an event going in the right way, **we prepare mentally and physically** to take those steps in real life.



Take home **message**

As humans, we need to **thrive** and **cultivate the best version of ourselves** to truly bloom and grow. There are many different routes to a flourishing life. Although working on improving our weaknesses is important, it is vital to also focus on personal strengths to achieve a healthy balance between the two.

Through the principles of **positive psychology**, we can learn to build on our strengths and grow our capacities for love, compassion, self-worth, creativity, resilience, and integrity which are essential to achieve a **meaningful life** and **improve your mental well-being**.



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