

# Happiness 101: Part 1



## Activity Handouts

# **Your Personal Definition of Happiness**

1) What does authentic happiness mean to *you*? (Your ***personal*** definition of happiness)?

2) When you are in the state you described above, how might you be behaving (ie/ what would others see you doing or not doing)?

# Extremely Happy People

Think about the happiest person you know. In partners, tell each other about your “happy person”. Try to include as many details as possible such as...

- What are they like? What traits or characteristics do they have?
- What is their attitude like?
- How do they act towards other people?
- What kind of activities do they engage in?
- What is their social life like?
- What are their life circumstances (financial, career, marital status etc)?

## Timing:

- 2 minutes per person
- When Partner A is speaking, Partner B just listens. Then switch.

# **“You at Your Best” Exercise**

## **Instructions:**

Think of a situation when you were at your best – when you were really flourishing. This could relate to work, home, family or any other arena of your life. It doesn't have to be a long time period (although it could be if applicable), it could just be one short situation.

(Note: If it is difficult to think of a “flourishing” situation, you could alternatively think about “a time when I was proud of what I accomplished” – maybe the circumstances weren't perfect or easy but you were proud of how you got through it)

Take 1-2 minutes to think about this story.

1. What was the situation?
2. What were the conditions that allowed you to be at your best?
3. What skills or strengths were you using?
4. How did you feel? Why?
5. Jot down some point form notes below

Now, working with your partner, share your story. As the listener, listen out for your partner's strengths and values and then reflect these back when your partner is done sharing.

## **Timing:**

- 1-2 minutes – on your own
- 10 minutes – with a partner (3 minutes of sharing your story, 2 minutes of receiving feedback then switch)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

This exercise adapted from: Louisa Jewell, [www.louisajewell.com](http://www.louisajewell.com)

# Strengths List

- ☐ **Creativity**  
To have new and original ideas
- ☐ **Curiosity**  
Exploring and discovering
- ☐ **Critical Thinking**  
Thinking things through and examining all aspects
- ☐ **Love of Learning**  
To continually learn and grow
- ☐ **Wisdom**
- ☐ **Bravery/Courage**
- ☐ **Perseverance**  
To keep going in spite of obstacles
- ☐ **Honesty**  
To be honest and truthful
- ☐ **Zest**  
Approaching life with excitement and energy
- ☐ **Loving**  
To give love to others
- ☐ **Kindness**
- ☐ **Social Intelligence**  
Knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; Being aware of others' emotions
- ☐ **Team Player**  
Working well with others
- ☐ **Fairness**  
Treating everyone the same
- ☐ **Leadership**
- ☐ **Forgiving**
- ☐ **Humble**
- ☐ **Thoughtful/Careful**  
Being careful about one's choices
- ☐ **Self-Control**
- ☐ **Appreciative of Beauty and Excellence**
- ☐ **Grateful**
- ☐ **Hopeful**  
To maintain a positive and optimistic outlook
- ☐ **Good sense of Humour**
- ☐ **Spiritual**
- ☐ **Compassion**  
To feel and act on concern for others
- ☐ **Competence**
- ☐ **Contribution**  
To make a lasting contribution in the world
- ☐ **Cooperation**  
To work collaboratively with others
- ☐ **Courtesy**  
To be considerate and polite toward others
- ☐ **Dependability**  
To be reliable and trustworthy
- ☐ **Efficiency**  
To get things done faster and without waste
- ☐ **Faithfulness**  
To be loyal and true in relationships
- ☐ **Flexibility**  
To adjust to new circumstances easily
- ☐ **Mindful**  
To live conscious and mindful of the present moment
- ☐ **Helpfulness**  
To be helpful to others
- ☐ **Generosity**  
To give what I have to others
- ☐ **Genuineness**  
To act in a manner that is true to who I am
- ☐ **Nurturing**  
To take care of and nurture others
- ☐ **Openness**  
To be open to new experiences, ideas and options
- ☐ **Organized**
- ☐ **Passionate**  
To have deep feelings about ideas, activities or people
- ☐ **Responsibility**  
To make and carry out responsible decisions
- ☐ **Independence**  
To be free from dependence on others
- ☐ **Industrious**  
To work hard and well at life tasks
- ☐ **Stability**  
To have a life that stays fairly consistent
- ☐ **Tolerance**  
To accept and respect those who differ from me

# Using Signature Strengths in a New Way - Instructions

## Assignment

First, take the “VIA survey of signature strengths” to find out your top 5 strengths, found at [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org)

Next, create at least one designated time in your schedule over the next weeks specifically for you to exercise one or more of your signature strengths in a new way. This could be at home, work or during leisure time – just make sure that you create a clearly defined opportunity to use it. For example:

- If your signature strength is creativity, you may choose to set aside two hours to write, draw or paint
- If your signature strength is gratitude, you could write thank-you letters or cards to people that you would like to express gratitude to
- If your signature strength is appreciation of beauty and excellence, you might take a longer, more beautiful route to and from work, even though it adds twenty minutes more to your commute

If you need some more ideas, see these articles: <http://www.viacharacter.org/blog/new-ways-to-happiness-with-strengths/> and [http://tayyabrashid.com/pdf/via\\_strengths.pdf](http://tayyabrashid.com/pdf/via_strengths.pdf) After you have completed the assignment, write down how you used your strength; how you felt before, during and after, and whether you plan to repeat what you did.

Signature Strength	How I used it in a different way	How I felt before	How I felt during	How I felt after	Will I repeat this? Y/N

## Background

Identifying and intentionally finding ways to use our character strengths leads to positive emotion, fulfillment, meaning and life satisfaction. It also contributes to successful outcomes and has the potential to elevate and inspire others. In a study done by Seligman and colleagues (2005), participants who used one of their “signature strengths” (identified by the VIA survey) in a new different way every day for one week showed a significant increase in happiness and a decrease in depressive symptoms. These gains were maintained at a six month follow up.

## References

Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410 - 421.  
Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). *Authentic Happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York: Free Press.

## Activity: Increasing Your Positivity Ratio



**POSITIVE**



**NEGATIVE**

## Instructions: Increasing your Positivity Ratio

---

Research has shown that people who are flourishing are not devoid of negative emotion, but they do have a higher positivity ratio overall. That is, they experience far more positive emotions relative to negative emotions. The goal, then, is not to completely rid ourselves of negative emotions (which is an unattainable goal anyway) but to try to increase our positivity ratio by finding ways to reduce our frequency/intensity of negative emotions and increase our frequency/intensity of positive emotions.

To increase your positivity ratio, brainstorm as many quick and simple ways that you can think of to....

- 1. Create more opportunities to experience positive emotions in your day**
- 2. Decrease unnecessary negative emotions in your day**

To help with #1, it may help to think of different kinds of positive emotions, and a time you experienced each emotion. Jot down a word or two (or a sentence if needed) to represent the situation/time that you are thinking of.

Positive Emotion	A time that I experienced this was....
Joy	
Gratitude	
Serenity	
Vitality	
Interest/Curiosity	
Hope/Optimism	
Pride	
Amusement	
Inspiration	
Awe	
Love	

If you want to take it one step further you could try this for two weeks and take a before and after test of your positivity ratio to see the difference. The test can be found at <http://www.positivityratio.com/single.php>



# Three Good Things - Instructions

## Overview

For at least one week, take few minutes each night before you go to bed to write down three good things that happened that day and why you think they happened. These can be big (e.g. “I got a raise”) or small (e. g. “I had a really good cup of coffee this morning”). On days when it’s hard to identify anything, it could also just be recognizing the absence of something bad happening – for example “My car *didn’t* break down today”.

## Background

The Three Good Things Exercise helps to counteract our negativity bias, which filters out our awareness of positive events, feelings and thoughts and gives more weight to negative events, feelings and thoughts in our day. If we know that we have to write down three good things at the end of our day, this makes us more conscious of all of the good things happening throughout the day, and helps them to “sink in” so that we remember them. It also increases feelings of gratitude. Identifying *why* these good things happened forces us to reflect more about the good thing rather than just quickly writing it down and forgetting about it. Also, it helps to build optimism about ourselves, others and the world when we examine the causes of good things (which can either be attributed to our own strengths and choices, others beneficence, or good things in the world).

In a study done by Seligman and colleagues (2005), participants who wrote about three good things every day for one week showed a significant increase in happiness and a decrease in depressive symptoms. These gains were maintained at a six month follow up.

## Further Instructions

It is important to actually write down the three good things at the end of the day; it does not have the same impact if you just do this exercise in your head. As you write, follow these instructions:

1. Write down a title for the event (e.g., “Got a Raise”)
2. Write as much detail as possible about what happened (e.g. what was said, who was there, how you felt).
3. Explain why you think the event happened (e.g., “I worked really hard. My boss appreciates how much I’ve helped the company”).
4. Don’t worry about having perfect spelling or grammar; this is just for you.

## References

Seligman, M. E., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410 - 421.

Greater Good Science Centre, University of California, Berkely. <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>

# Three Good Things

## SAMPLE

**Date:** *Monday May 1<sup>st</sup>*

**Positive event # 1:** *Got a Raise*

**Details:** *Laura called me in to her office and told me that she had something to tell me. She then praised all of my hard work on the project I just finished and told me that I had made her job so much easier and she is so glad to have someone she can trust to do great work. Then she told me that she is giving me a raise. I felt completely valued and appreciated; it was so nice to know that all my hard work didn't go unnoticed.*

**Cause of This Event:** *I worked really hard, and really went above and beyond. I have a really good work ethic in general. Also, I work for a company that acknowledges and rewards people's efforts.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Date:**

**Positive event # 1:**

**Details:**

**Cause of This Event:**

---

**Date:**

**Positive event # 2:**

**Details:**

**Cause of This Event:**

# Happiness 101 “Home Play”

---

**Choose one of the following three assignments to work on this week:**

## **1. Gratitude Exercise**

Try out a gratitude practice this week. It could be the “Three Good Things” exercise (see instruction sheet earlier in this handout package titled “Three Good Things – Instructions”), another activity mentioned today, or something you just make up! If you already have a gratitude practice, change it up a bit and try something different this week.

## **2. Use Signature Strengths in a New Way**

See instruction sheet earlier in this handout package titled “Using Signature Strengths in a New Way – Instruction”

## **3. Savour**

At least once, take the time to enjoy something that you usually hurry through. When it’s over, write down what you did, how you did it differently, and how it felt compared to when you rush through it.

Additional possibilities for savouring include (depending on time available):

- a. *Create* a positive moment by intentionally doing something pleasurable and then savouring it.
- b. *Create a beautiful day*. If you have time, plan a full day from start to finish with all kinds of activities that you enjoy. On this day stop to savour and extend the experience by doing things like journaling about it, taking pictures, etc.
- c. *Take a Pleasure Walk*. Take a 15-30 minute walk with a goal to notice as many pleasant things as possible, taking time to focus on each one.