



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

WHAT KIND OF HAPPY ARE YOU?

"Positivity opens us. The first core truth about positive emotions is that they open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and more creative."

— Barbara Fredrickson

OVERVIEW

Students learn about 10 positive emotions and share when and where they have felt some of these emotions. They also learn about how their peers access positive emotions and reflect on the range of ways they might experience positive emotions more frequently.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To help students identify how they're feeling
- To develop a larger vocabulary for positive emotions
- To promote a positive classroom climate
- To support (neurodiverse) learners who might benefit from visual supports in learning about and identifying different emotions

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- Students receiving specialized instruction and/or Special Education services and supports

MATERIALS

- Print out and display the [36x24" What Kind of Happy Are You?" Poster](#) OR create a do-it-yourself poster using the [Printable Poster Pieces](#). Print and cut enough ["What Kind of Happy Are You?" slips](#) for each class member.
- Journal and writing instruments

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify and understand positive emotions
- Reflect on scenarios that evoke specific positive emotions
- Discuss their positive emotional experiences with their class
- Brainstorm ways to feel positive emotions in the future

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Bravery/Courage
- Honesty
- Curiosity
- Perspective

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social Awareness

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Focused Attention

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Many people think of happiness as “feeling good.” [Happiness](#) is also associated with “subjective well-being” and a range of positive emotions like joy, contentment, or amusement. Positive psychology researcher [Sonja Lyubomirsky](#) describes happiness as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”
- How would *you* define “happiness”?
- What do positive emotions feel like in your body and mind?

INSTRUCTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Questions to ask yourself before doing this activity with students are: What is the emotional climate in the classroom right now? Are my students tired, agitated, anxious, energized, or something else? What steps can I take to gently acknowledge their current emotional experiences and while inviting them to meaningfully engage in this exercise?
- Once students begin the activity, remember that there are no right or wrong responses; students' responses may differ based on their worldview, culture, mood, intensity of emotion, or depth of mindful engagement.
- As a teacher, consider how you may practice being open-minded as you hear students' responses while also noting responses that may indicate the student is unhappy or struggling to identify situations where they experience positive emotions. Consider how you might encourage and support students' well-being in these cases.

PART I: DISCOVERING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

- Introduce the session by asking students: *Have you ever thought about what makes you happy? Today, we're going to talk about moments when we felt happiness. and we will figure out how to have more of those moments! Think back to a moment when you felt happy. Perhaps you were with a person, like a family member, with whom you like to play or talk about sports. Or maybe it's when you're in a quiet place in your house where you like to read. Spending time with a favorite stuffed animal with a soft texture can also make some people feel happiness and a sense of comfort. What did your happy moment feel like in your body and mind?*
- Consider sharing a time that you experienced happiness. Describe what that experience felt like in terms of body sensations, mood, connection to yourself and others, and the sense of meaning you may have felt. Then, call on students or popcorn around with students to share their moment of happiness and what it felt like.
- Next, introduce the activity by saying: ***Happiness is something we feel when we are satisfied or enjoying what we're doing.*** *There are 10 different words to describe that enjoyable feeling, and they're called the 10 Big Positive Emotions. Today, we're going to identify which positive emotions we were feeling in the happy moments you shared.*
- Reference poster with emotions and definitions. Give a brief overview of the emotions: awe, inspiration, pride, interest, serenity, love, gratitude, hope, joy, and amusement.
 - Tell students that learning and using this vocabulary can help them learn about and experience more good in our lives.
 - Use the images and definitions to describe a few examples of what Awe might look or feel like in your body and mind.
- Give students an opportunity to pair-share and then take a few responses from individual student volunteers.

PART II: LABELING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

- Tell students to pick one of the 10 positive emotions now. This can be one of the emotions they shared during the prior activity or an entirely new one. On a slip or a sticky note, they should write their name and a time, place, or activity when they feel that emotion. For example, "I feel joy when I'm playing with my dog," or "I feel pride when I score a goal." Then, ask students to attach their slip or sticky note to the poster next to the positive emotion you picked. Remind them to look up at the poster to help them choose!
- To model the activity, select a positive emotion from the board, write your name and a time, place, or activity when you felt that emotion on the slip, and stick it on the positive emotion you picked on the poster..
- Invite students to share and discuss their positive emotional experiences.
 - Additional reflection questions could be: *How was this example different from other times you felt happy? In what ways were they the same? Which positive emotions do you feel more frequently? Which do you feel less frequently? Which positive emotions would you like to feel more often?*

CLOSURE/EXTENSIONS

To support learning beyond the lesson, ask students to write down and/or share ways they can experience more positive emotions in the future. Encourage students to focus on how they can induce positive emotions in their lives.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- [Picture & Emoji Matching Activity](#)
- [Word Matching Activity](#)
- [Matching Positive Emotions to Self Activity](#)

ADDITIONAL MODIFICATIONS:

- If your students struggle to reflect on experiences of positive emotions, you can ask them to name the positive emotion they're feeling at the moment. They can put their name on the slip and pin it on the poster or bulletin board next to the positive emotion they're feeling (e.g. I feel joy or pride).
- For some learners, learning about the 10 positive emotions might start with a teacher or a parent simply labeling the emotions when there's an opportunity. Maybe a student expresses significant joy when swimming; label that with "you look joyful in the pool," or when a student is peacefully listening to music, you could quietly mention, "It looks like that music gives you the feeling of serenity ."This is a great way to start building the vocabulary for students who may not have had many opportunities to hear these words.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were students intrigued by seeing the 10 positive emotions? How did you know?
- How might you incorporate this activity into a daily or weekly well-being check-in?

- Are there other times you can use this expanded happiness vocabulary to describe how you or your students are feeling throughout the school day?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In her groundbreaking work on positive emotions, researcher Barbara Frederickson introduces us to the extensive benefits of feeling good, described in her "[Broaden-and-Build-Theory](#)" of positive emotions. Her findings demonstrate that when individuals experience positive emotions, their awareness broadens. "Broadening" suggests that positive emotions quite literally open your mind. As positive emotions are triggered, you may even think more creatively and solve problems faster.

Frederickson's research also pinpoints [10 Positive Emotions](#), including pride, gratitude, joy, love, amusement, inspiration, awe, interest, serenity, and hope are all positive emotions. Ongoing experiences of positive emotions can help students to develop the mental, physical, and social resources they need to thrive and flourish. When we intentionally enhance our experiences of positivity, we nourish our minds, bodies, and relationships.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Educators can play a role in supporting students' emotion regulation skills, helping them to address challenging emotions—as well as stress, anxiety, and depression. However, learning about [positive](#) emotions and how to experience more positive emotions can also benefit students' emotion regulation skills while potentially benefiting student learning.

For example, a student who is feeling joyful might be more open to seeing a different way of viewing a problem, perhaps through the perspective of a peer, than a student who is feeling neutral or negative. Or, a student may be more motivated to learn a new skill if they experience a positive emotion prior to the task, as positive emotions can foster curiosity. Finally, if students are in need of additional resources to manage stress and adversity, experiencing positive emotions can build psychological resources like optimism and self-efficacy. Students who can identify and increase their access to positive emotions can better manage stress.

This lesson's positive focus may also be particularly important for students who struggle with emotional regulation due to a disability or learning difference. This lesson could be included in a behavior intervention plan (BIP), which features support strategies for skill development so that students no longer need to rely upon challenging behavior to communicate and get their needs met. Teaching positive emotions in this way can be a meaningful intervention strategy and integral to developing self-regulation.

SOURCE

Thanks to our friends at [Proof Positive](#) who collaborated with us in creating this activity. Proof Positive is a nonprofit organization dedicated to spreading the science and skills of happiness.