



SEEING THE POSITIVE SIDE OF THINGS

"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."

-Dr. Wayne Dyer

OVERVIEW

Students and/or staff members make a list of positive aspects of their lives, then choose a negative one and change their outlook on it.

LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When students are feeling frustrated, irritated, or upset
- At a staff meeting when staff members' stress levels are high
- Any time of the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 10 minutes, if possible daily over 3 weeks

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/Pen

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students and staff will:

- Learn how to change their outlook on events to better cope with negative experiences

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Try this practice for yourself by first reflecting on several things in your life that you are grateful for. Then think of a recent negative experience and try to identify three things that can help you see the bright side of the situation.
- How did you feel about the negative experience after engaging with this practice? Was it challenging to look at it in a positive light? How might you support students or staff who have a difficult time with the task? How might you prevent them from seeing this practice as an invalidation of their emotional responses or of their understanding of an experience?

INSTRUCTIONS

- If doing this exercise with students, begin by explaining to them that we all experience moments that do not go as planned and that can give rise to negative emotions; however, research shows that changing our perspective on negative events can help us cope with those negative emotions.
- For students and staff, have them list five things that make them feel like their life is enjoyable, enriching, or worthwhile at this moment.
 - For example, these things can be as general as “being in good health” or as specific as “getting to talk to a close friend over lunch, right before this class.”
 - The purpose of this first step is to help students and staff shift into a positive state of mind about their life in general.
- Next, have students and staff think about the most recent time when something didn’t go their way, or when they felt frustrated, irritated, or upset.
- Ask them to write a few sentences to briefly describe the situation.
- Then, have them list three things that can help them see the bright side of the situation.
 - For example, perhaps they missed the bus this morning. Three ways to look on the bright side of this situation might be:
 - Even though they missed the bus, they got some good exercise when they were running to catch it.
 - They’re fortunate to live in a city where there was another bus just 10 minutes later, or where buses run reliably at all.
 - Ten years from now, they likely won’t remember what happened this morning.

- *If doing this practice with students:* If you have the time in your schedule, let them know that they will do this same exercise over the next three weeks. If your schedule does not allow this, you may encourage them to practice this exercise at home over the next three weeks.
- *If doing this practice with staff members:* Let them know that research has found that repeating this practice daily for three weeks has the most impact.

CLOSURE

Ask students:

- *How do you feel now that you took a broader outlook of the negative situation? Did you find this practice useful?*

SOURCE

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REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How successful were students in identifying three things that could help them see the bright side of a situation? Would you change anything for the next time?
- Do you notice a change in how students respond to negative events in your classroom?
- If you did this practice with staff, do you notice a change in how they handle school challenges?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Participants who completed a set of optimism exercises ([this exercise](#) and the [Goal Visualization](#) task) daily for three weeks reported greater engagement in life and less dysfunctional thinking (e.g., believing that small failures make one a failure as a person) at the end of the study than they had at the start of it. Participants who had a tendency to be pessimistic especially benefited from the exercise and showed fewer depressive symptoms afterward. However, these effects seemed to wear off two months later, suggesting the need to repeat this practice periodically. Majority of participants in this study were between 20-45 years of age and identified as Caucasian (44%) or Asian (35%).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Looking on the bright side of life in general, or of a bad situation in particular, can increase [happiness](#) by boosting students' sense of self-worth, motivating them to go after their goals, and enhancing their enjoyment of life. Regularly completing the silver linings exercise can help students get in the habit of recognizing positive aspects of their life and seeing the upside to challenging situations rather than fixating on the downsides. With repeated practice, students may find that it comes more naturally to look on the bright side, even when faced with difficulties in their life.

Given that students are often faced with various challenging experiences—learning difficult subjects, navigating peer relationships, coping with personal family problems—this practice might help buffer against student [burnout](#) and disengagement. The benefits of taking a more positive outlook on life are not just psychological, but some evidence suggests that optimism is related to better [physical health](#).

TERMS OF USE

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