



TAKE-HOME SKILL: CREATING HAPPY MEMORIES

"Variety's the very spice of life, that gives it all its flavour."

-William Cowper

OVERVIEW

Students make a plan for doing a variety of meaningful activities, including on their own and with another person, and for helping others. They then carry out their plan and reflect on how it made them feel.

LEVELS

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time, but particularly when you think your child may benefit from a boost of happiness
- To encourage your child to reconnect with others
- To help your child break routines and engage in a variety of activities

TIME REQUIRED

- 1 day and/or multiple sessions

MATERIALS

- Paper/journal
- Pencil/pen

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify activities that they enjoy and find meaningful
- Create a plan for engaging in various activities
- Process their experiences by writing a short reflection

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 Awareness
- Self Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

For parents/caregivers: Take a moment to engage in three different types of activities that you enjoy—activities you enjoy doing alone, with others, and in service of others. Then, reflect on how you felt after each experience and how each went.

INSTRUCTIONS

This exercise is best completed on a day (or two) when your child or teen has a lot of free time, such as on a weekend. Some steps may require some advanced planning with others.

Encourage your child or teen to make a plan, following the guidelines below, for how they will spend one weekend or one day.

- Choose an activity that you enjoy doing alone, such as reading, listening to music, watching a TV show, or meditating. Set aside some time during the day to complete this activity.
- Choose an activity that you enjoy doing with others, such as going out for coffee, going for a bike ride, or watching a movie. Set aside some time during the day to complete this activity.
- Choose an activity that you consider personally important and meaningful, such as helping a neighbor, calling to check in on a friend who is sick, or volunteering for a local charitable organization. Set aside some time during the day to complete this activity.
- Carry out your plan.
- At the end of the weekend or day, record what occurred during and after each of your three activities. Use the following reflection questions to guide your writing:
 - What did you do, and how did it make you feel?

- Did different activities make you feel different kinds of happiness?
- What feelings or associations linger with you now, after you have completed all of the activities?

CLOSURE

Ask your teen about how the weekend or the day went. You may use some of the following questions:

- Did anything surprise you?
- What did you enjoy the most?
- Did you learn anything about yourself or others?
- Was it useful to make this kind of plan for how to spend your time?

SOURCE

[Jeffrey Huffman, M.D.](#), Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts General Hospital

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Did you notice changes in your child's (or your own) mood?
- How might this practice be done as a family to help encourage greater happiness for each family member, but also stronger relationships with each other as you make space to spend time together doing a variety of activities?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In one [study](#), seeking happiness through pleasurable, engaging, and meaningful activities was found to predict life satisfaction in a sample of 845 predominately adults. Activities that involved deep mental engagement or meaningful pursuits were more strongly associated with happiness than pleasure-seeking activities, but the combination of all three types of activity was associated with the highest levels of life satisfaction.

In another [study](#), psychiatric patients hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or behaviors reported increased optimism and decreased hopelessness after completing this exercise.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

One of the most direct ways to increase happiness is to do more of the things that make us happy. But when life gets busy, we don't always remember to make time for enjoyable activities. Intentionally scheduling a variety of enjoyable activities into the day can help overcome this barrier to happiness.

This exercise prompts children and teens to engage in a variety of activities associated with happiness and reflect on how they make you feel. Different kinds of activities bring different kinds of satisfaction, all of which contribute uniquely to happiness. Research suggests that variety and novelty in daily activities is an important component of happiness, so trying a number of different activities can prevent you and your children from getting so used to any one activity that it ceases to bring you

pleasure.

TERMS OF USE

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