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Habit of Happiness – Handouts

Handout 3

Happiness Principle: Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth

Practice: Fostering Appreciation After Hardship

The research on gratitude suggests that it's *especially* important to foster this practice during hard times. Practicing gratitude enables us to feel hope when things are seemingly hopeless, inspires us when we are demoralized, and connects us to others when we feel alone. No wonder that gratitude has been found beneficial among people facing incredible challenges, including people suffering from breast cancer, chronic disease, and terminal illness. In fact, the ability to foster appreciation after hardship has even been shown to be a key skill in the development of Posttraumatic Growth!

When times are smooth, it's easy for us to notice what we're appreciative for. But what about when times are tough? And what about when we've gone through something painful, even traumatic? Remember, there's nothing about gratitude that dismisses the hard stuff in life, but it does help us recognize the good that persists within us and around us, even (or especially) when life's challenges make them hard to see. While certain types of trials and tribulations make it harder to notice the good parts of our lives, many trauma survivors report increased feelings of appreciation for those good parts following their experience. Some describe the intense pain they experienced from the trauma as offering them a newfound appreciation for the good in life—in other words, by seeing the depths of the human experience, they became more able to appreciate the sweeter parts of life.

Take a moment to reflect on the toll that life's challenges have taken on you. Acknowledge whatever feelings or pain come up for you but also make room for the good stuff too. What parts of your life have remained intact, or even strengthened, in the wake of this struggle? A specific part of your life may come to mind, or it may be simply gratitude for being alive in spite of what you've experienced. And if it's hard in this moment to come up with something, maybe because the pain is still too fresh, that's okay too. But if you can do so, and if it feels right, make room for any feelings of gratitude that feel genuine to you and allow a sense of appreciation to remain even as we acknowledge the painful things we've been through.

**The above exercise has been adapted from my forthcoming book, *Happily Even After*. Click [here](#) to get your copy today!

Handout 2

Happiness Principle: *Awe*

Practice: *Forest Bathing*

If I told you to go bathe in a forest, what images might it conjure in your mind? Taking a skinny-dip in a stream somewhere in the woods, perhaps? In fact, *shinrin-yoku*—translated as “forest bathing”—refers to a different idea altogether. This practice emerged in Japan a few decades back as a remedy for our widespread disconnection with nature, but in recent years, forest bathing has exploded in popularity. Nowadays, there are even certified guides that take participants on immersive forest-bathing experiences, along with hundreds of articles and books on the subject.

As the word “bathing” suggests, this is a practice of simply being in the woods—no swimsuit required. It is not hiking, camping, or listening to a podcast as we walk. Instead, it’s about slowing down, zeroing in on our senses, and spending time to make a deep, intentional connection with nature. Along with feeling good in the moment, forest bathing is good *for* us, too. In recent years, studies have linked forest bathing to a host of benefits, including:

- Decreased stress
- Increased parasympathetic nervous system response (think: relaxation response)
- Improved immune system
- Lower blood pressure
- Decreased stress hormones (such as cortisol)
- Increased white blood cell activity

Care to try it? Start by finding a nice, quiet place in nature. This could, of course, be an actual forest (as the name implies), but really could be any green space, like a local park or trail. Be sure to set aside any distractions—that means no cell phone (the horror!)—so that you can lock into your senses, as they’re your own personal guide to forest bathing. Try to spend at least thirty minutes or so noticing the sights and listening to the sounds around you. See if you can detect any smells and take note of how your feet feel as they make contact with the earth. Feel the temperature of the air against your skin and notice if you feel any sort of breeze. Gently touch something nearby—the trunk of a tree or some blades of grass—and pay attention to the different colors and textures under your fingertips. Close your eyes and allow yourself to go even deeper, really immersing yourself in the full sensory experience. If you feel so inclined, you can even try lying down and allowing more of your body to make contact with the earth. Most importantly, take your time—remind yourself that you’re in no rush. As you immerse yourself in the experience, open your mind and heart up to feelings of wonder and amazement.

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Handout 1
Happiness Principle: *Gratitude*
Practice: *Three Good Things*

Overview: Because of our brain’s built-in negativity bias, many of us find ourselves constantly stuck on problems, or ruminating about negative events from our day. This helps to contribute to a host of problems, including depression and anxiety. Research suggests that to combat this tendency of the mind, we must deliberately and consciously shift our attention away from the negative and towards the good. In this exercise, you’ll be taking the time to notice and appreciate the positive experiences that occur throughout your day. Over time, this will help shift your focus more naturally to these events.

Instructions: Each night for the next two weeks before you go to bed, write down three things that went well for you that day. These good things can be relatively small, even seemingly minor occurrences throughout your day. Or they can be larger, more significant events. There’s no right or wrong answer. Simply write three positive experiences from the day, followed by a brief explanation of why you think it happened. To challenge yourself further, and make the exercise even more powerful, I recommend never repeating an item from your list over the course of the two weeks (or longer, if you so choose!).

Example:

Good Thing #1: I had a fulfilling day at work and my sessions with patients went well.

Why this happened/My contribution: I made sure I got plenty of sleep last night, and I tried to be very present and attuned in my sessions.

Good Thing #2: My partner cooked my favorite dinner, spaghetti and meatballs.

Why this happened/My contribution: I expressed gratitude and thanked her the last time she cooked.

Good Thing #3: It was a beautiful and sunny day when I was driving to work.

Why this happened/My contribution: I took the time to notice and appreciate the weather, rather than being stuck on “autopilot” as I drove.

Practice:

Good Thing #1:

Why this happened:

Good Thing #2:

Why this happened:

Good Thing #3:

Why this happened:

Key Points to Consider:

- ✓ Make sure your “good things” are experiences from the same day you’re journaling, rather than more general sources of gratitude.
- ✓ By never repeating an item on your list, you force yourself to stretch your comfort zone and make the exercise even more powerful.
- ✓ Don’t worry about spelling or grammar.
Make sure you write down your good things; although mentally reflecting on positive experiences

never hurts, research suggests that taking the time to actually write them down is much more effective.

How and why it works: As you continue to practice this skill, you’ll begin noticing a shift in your outlook and the way you view the world. Rather than focusing on sources of stress or negative things that happened throughout your day, you’ll find yourself having more and more appreciation for the positives in your life. Over time, you may even begin to find yourself seeking out things to be grateful for throughout the day, in anticipation of writing in your journal. By becoming more able to notice good things as they occur, and to savor them in hindsight, you’ll be able to cultivate a deep sense of gratitude and thereby increase your overall happiness and well-being.

**The above exercise has been adapted from The Happiness Toolbox. Click [here](#) to check out the full book