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Habit of Happiness – Handouts

## 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