HAPPY HABITS FOR HARD TIMES

HOW TO APPLY EVIDENCE-BASED HAPPINESS INTERVENTIONS TO YOURSELF AND YOUR STUDENTS

JOHN SOMMERS-FLANAGAN

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

JOHNSOMMERSFLANAGAN.COM

TO START ... JUST FEEL THIS ...



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Objective I: Define and describe the significance of happiness as the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia

Objective 2: Identify and describe six evidence-based strategies that school psychologists can apply to themselves and with their students

Objective 3: Articulate the natural human obstacles to happiness and well-being

LEARNING PROCESS

- We are distant, but can still be engaged
- I describe positive psychology interventions (chat comments)
- You imagine enacting them or volunteer to role play with me
- We nurture our experimental or "scientific" mindsets by thinking: "Which of these can I weave into my life ... Or my students' lives?"
- You take-away new (or old) ideas and skills

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Keep yourself engaged and actively participate
- Be open to experiences yes, that means volunteering!
- Communicate respectfully

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

- Psychology has a history of looking at what's wrong with people. We do
 psychiatric and learning diagnoses and focus on the negative.
- This changed around 1998, with a movement toward positive psychology
- The question and focus of much psychological research is now on what strengthens people, what makes them emotionally healthy and well?
- Seligman and others created evidence-based happiness/well-being activities

DEFINING HAPPINESS

True confessions: I'm not just talking about smiley hedonistic

(material) happiness ... That won't last because of hedonic adaptation ... and emotional opponent process theory



DEFINING HAPPINESS – 2

- Hedonic adaptation: Your new car (or house or boyfriend or award or facelift gets old and you want more)
- Emotional opponent process theory: What

goes up, must come down; and what goes down, must come up



DEFINING HAPPINESS – 3

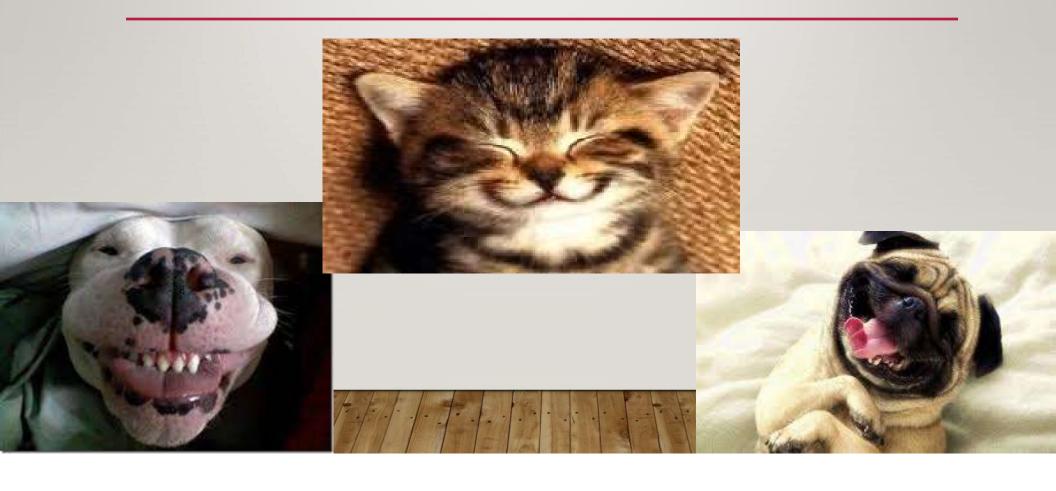
I'm talking about **eudaimonic happiness** that involves living well physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually, emotionally, and more



FOUR BIG PRINCIPLES

- **#I: Nothing works for everyone (even EBTs)**
- #2: Pick a tool or intervention and practice with an experimental mindset
- #3: Build on your strengths and past successes
- #4: Focus on your or your client/students' goals
 - Mindfulness?, Calmness (or anxiety reduction)?, Sleep better?, Improve mood? Greater satisfaction with life?

LET'S EXPERIENCE HAPPINESS



STRATEGY #1:THREE GOOD THINGS

- Going to bed [Survey]
- Write down (or think about) three good things that happened during the day
- Then track down in your mind "Why" those things happened

NIGHTTIME COGNITIONS AND EMOTIONS







DEMONSTRATION #1

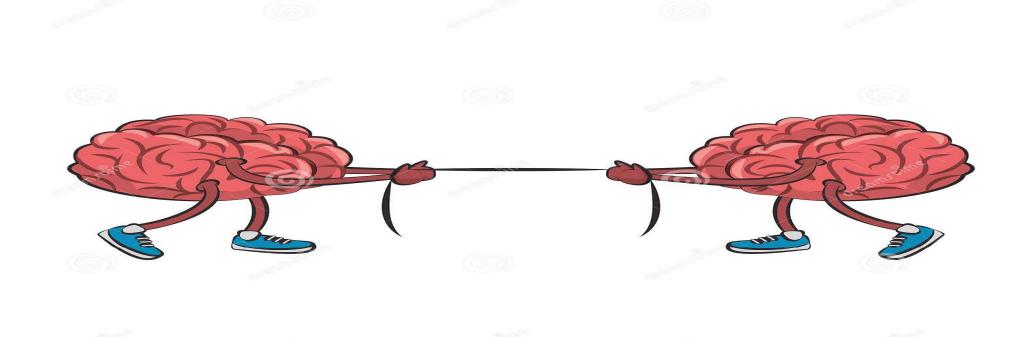
- Volunteer Three Good Things
- Plan:
 - We talk and simultaneously engage in a self-awareness (self-reflection) process
 - We debrief and take questions



WHY DOES THREE GOOD THINGS WORK?

- When you go to bed, you inevitably and NATURALLY embark on either a negative (depressive) review or anticipatory (anxiety) preview
- Thinking three good things shifts you partway
- Identifying "Why" those things happened activates a brain search toward positivity and empowerment

THE ATTENTION FOCUS TUG OF WAR



STRATEGY #2: ATTENTION TRAINING AND ATTENTION CONTROL

- Attention control (aka mindfulness) nearly always fails; this failure is another natural obstacle to eudaimonic happiness
- But Harvard study (n = 2,000+) paying attention to what you're doing increases happiness ratings (JKZ)
- The amazing brain Now

ACTIVITY

- Everyone
- Two minutes
- Begin at I and mentally count your "out" breaths
- If you lose track, start back at I
- Be mindfully non-judgmental of losing track

MINDFULNESS TRICKS

- The mind is a yapping dog Give it a bone Mantra
- Balance how much you care about being mindful with not caring
 AT ALL about being mindful
- Extend your outbreath (or use a soothing object) to engage the parasympathetic nervous system (and be less mentally jumpy)
- Practice. But remember, practice DOES NOT make perfect

STRATEGY #3: SAVORING

- What is savoring?
- Deliberate effort to extend and expand positive experiences [improves mood; increases satisfaction]
 - Track/review fun
 - Track/review meaning
 - Your next run

THE OPPOSITE OF SAVORING

 We often dampen or spoil good experiences, while savoring or chewing on our mistakes

 Anybody ever get stuck chewing on the negative or spoiling the positives? [Yet another natural obstacle to happiness]

EASIER SAVORING

- Mutual savoring
- Find a friend Remember when . . .
 - Improves mood and hope
 - Improves likelihood of repeating
 - Increases planning

STRATEGY #4: DEALING WITH TRIGGERS

- You will get emotionally triggered and upset. Accept that as a part of life.
- But you can make an emotion trigger response plan (How do you WANT to deal with the triggers? Selfregulation coping skills)
- You can also use distraction temporarily, not habitually

COPING WITH SOCIAL COMPARISON

- "Compare and Despair" [This is one type of trigger]
- Social comparison can become an unconscious, conscious, and malignant process, creating depression, anxiety, and despair
- But how do we stop??

ACTIVITY

- How to play
- One person asks the other person the same question 10 times
- You ask: "What's Good About You?" You repeat back the answer and write it down. You say "Thank-you." And you ask: "What's Good About You?"
- Pair up in break-out "rooms." Do the activity. Come back and debrief or debrief and come back [8 minutes] . . . Ready, set, go

ACTIVITY - DEBRIEF

- Create a self-regulation reminder card
- Keep it somewhere
- Problems and alternatives

BACK TO SOCIAL COMPARISON

 Happy people tend to do less social comparison and when they do, they notice comparisons, but quickly let go of caring very much. What do they do instead?

They lean hard toward internal self-evaluation

RESPONDING TO TRIGGERS

Make an activation plan

You can use distraction – temporarily, not habitually

 You can pull out your self-regulation reminder card [Where do you keep it?]

STRATEGY #5: GRATITUDE

 Do you want to increase optimism, improve life satisfaction, be healthier, and exercise more?

Weave intentional gratitude into your life





GRATITUDE – PART 2

- But the mind is built to count up hassles rather than blessings
- "My two years of rejections"
 - ▼ There had been many
 - ✓ But there had also been much more
 - ✓ This was like counting cloudy days the outcome is easy

GRATITUDE – PART 3

- Write a postcard or letter or email or text or IM of gratitude to a person you value
- Even better: Tell the person directly
- Results?? Not about the response.

ACTIVITY

- Gratitude talk time [Talk to yourself ... Jot down ideas]
 - Who would you express gratitude toward?
 - How would you do it?
 - Can you drop all expectations of how the person should respond?



ACTIVITY - DEBRIEF

• How was it to plan some gratitude?



STRATEGY #6: YOUR BEST SELF

 For those of you who like to write, one researcher invented the Best Possible Self activity.

 If you write about specific positive things that you want in your future, people tend to feel more hopeful and satisfied with life

BONUS: SPIRITUAL/CULTURAL ROADS TO WELL-BEING

- Active pursuit of meaning
 - But it's so easy to watch television and play on Instagram
- Regular involvement in spiritual, religious, or social justice groups
 - But staying home can feel good in the moment

BONUS SLIDE: ASSIGNING HOMEWORK

- Describe and explain the procedure or intervention
- Make sure that it's logically or emotionally linked to your goals or your client's goals
- Ask for feedback and permission to try it
- Try it
- Monitor how it went and get feedback to tweak or change

ONE LAST POSITIVE DISTRACTION

- Social comparison is a pain
- Emotions are a pain in
- Finding methods to deal with social comparison
 and manage emotions is part of positive psychology and wellness
- What songs help you feel your feelings?
- What songs help boost your mood?

STUNNING CONCLUSIONS

- Well-being (eudemonic happiness) requires (at least) awareness, intention, effort, reminders, and persistence
- Most of us forget to apply these unless we have a reminder plan
- Work with students (and yourselves) to select and practice a few evidence-based positive psychology interventions and then see what happens
- What would you like to remember and apply?

RESOURCES

- Greater Good Magazine: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/
- Happy Habits for Hard Times Series:
 https://coehs.umt.edu/happy_habits_series_2020/default.php
- https://johnsommersflanagan.com/