

CHAMPS/WMT AHEC RESILIENCY LEARNING COMMUNITY

BUILDING RESILIENCY SKILLS: WALKING TOGETHER TOWARDS HEALING IN A TIME OF COLLECTIVE LOSS

WEEK FOUR: POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY IN DIFFICULT TIMES

PRESENTER: JOHN SOMMERS-FLANAGAN, PHD –
PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING EDUCATION,
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA



Dealing with Difficult Emotions with Eudaimonic Happiness

John Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D., Professor
Department of Counseling, University of Montana
john.sf@mso.umt.edu or johnsommersflanagan.com

Openings

- Introduction and welcome
- Sign in using the chat box with a positive thought or experience that you've already had today (although you can create one now if you need to)

Today's Goals

- Recognize the natural power of negative thoughts and experiences
- Identify tools for dealing with negative thoughts and experiences
- Practice . . . and . . . homework
- Quotation: "The mind is a terrible place . . ."
- Let's go there together

Emotional Redundancy

- Ever have a . . . “I’ve been here before” sort of feeling?
- All humans tend to have patterns around particular emotions
- Whispering story
- It might be anger or fear/anxiety or guilt or sadness [these are the most troubling]

How Emotional Redundancy Works

- There's a trigger
- Whispering story – I want things to go the way I want things to go and if they don't I feel angry and try to force them to.
- Sometimes we're aware of our triggers
- Other times the triggers are slippery and hard to identify and anticipate

What Are Your Triggers?

- Usually people and situations:
 - Someone is condescending, or acts morally superior
 - Something is unfair or unjust
 - Someone say's something annoying: "If he says that again"
 - Someone cuts you off in traffic
 - Basketball refs; government officials
 - Parents/siblings/romantic partners
 - What's triggering in YOUR world?

The 1st 100 Years of Psychotherapy

- Focus on the negative [This is terribly fun]
- What's wrong with you?
- Build your awareness of ways that you're engaging in maladaptive and unhealthy ways
- Try to fix them

The Last 15 Years of Psychotherapy

- We're all flawed
- Our own thoughts undermine us . . . that's perfectly normal . . . we spoil good times and linger on the negative (bedtime stories)
- Of course we can think ourselves into the pit of depression or a fit of anger
- Let's mindfully accept our flaws and practice behaviors and thinking that represent our most positive values (knowing we'll fail)

Homework 1: Savoring Choices

- Make a list of positive memories. Then, transport yourself to reminisce. Choose one. Retrieve it. Play it back. Explore it, feel it, elaborate on the details.
- Engage in mutual reminiscence
- Celebrate good news longer than you would
- Be open to noticing and lingering with observations of beauty (in eye of beholder) and excellence

Homework 2: Best Possible Self

- From Laura King, professor at U of Missouri-Columbia
- Spend 10 minutes a day for four consecutive days writing a narrative description of your “best possible future self.”
- Pick a point in the future – write about what you’ll be doing/thinking then – and these things need to capture a vision of you being “your best” successful self

Homework 3: Three Good Things

- The most well-known evidence-based happiness assignment is Martin Seligman's Three Good Things activity.
- Write down, for one week, before you go to sleep, three things that went well for you during the day, and then reflect on why they went well.
- Here's a one-minute video of Seligman describing the activity:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOGAp9dw8A>
[C](#)

Homework 4: Happy Songs

- Select a song that has triggers positive emotions for you.
- Listen to the song twice, just letting the song do its work. You can do this with a friend or by yourself. Don't WATCH the song. If it's a music video, shut your eyes and listen.
- After you've listened twice and let the positive feelings come, linger with the positivity

Homework 5: Witness Inspiration

- Over this coming weekend you could watch John Krasinski's "Some Good News"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5pgG1M_h_U
- Or you could watch John and Rita S-F's Happy Habits video series:
https://coehs.umt.edu/happy_habits_series_2020/default.php

Homework 5 (cont.)

- But instead, your assignment is to witness something inspiring in the REAL WORLD.
- Remind yourself to watch for something inspiring. It can be anything, a sunset, an act of kindness, a musical performance, whatever.
- Just watch and listen for it. . . and see what happens

Closing and Resources

- For more homework, and more in-depth discussion, search: john sommers-flanagan + happiness homework
- Example:
<https://johnsommersflanagan.com/2020/01/18/happiness-homework-week-one-university-of-montana/>