EXPLORING WHAT MATTERS
THE ACTION FOR HAPPINESS COURSE

HOW TO BECOME A COURSE LEADER
Thank you so much for stepping forward as a leader of Exploring What Matters. This is a course that changes lives and it is wonderful volunteers like you that make it happen.

There are so many people out there who are either seeking happiness or looking to spread happiness in their community, but often aren’t sure where to turn to.

By running this course you’ll be bringing people together - to tune in to what really matters, connect with each another through meaningful conversations, and inspire actions that ripple out to hundreds of people. The course is ready to go straight from the book and both leaders and participants regularly refer to it as “life-changing”.

This guide will help you to understand if now is the right time to step forward as a leader and what steps are involved when you do.

But before that, we invite you to reflect on these three questions:

- **Do I want to be part of a movement taking action for a happier world?**
- **Would I enjoy bringing together a group to explore what really matters in life?**
- **Am I ready to take action myself and inspire a group to come along with me?**

If that sounds like you, then read on to find out all about what makes these courses happen and why they are so powerful for all involved.

This is a chance to do something very special for yourself and others in your community. Although it takes real commitment to make the course a success, it’s very rewarding too.

Thanks for joining our movement and taking action for a happier and kinder world.

*Mark and the Action for Happiness team*

“I wholeheartedly support the Exploring What Matters course and hope that many thousands will benefit from it and be inspired to take their own action to create a happier world”

*The Dalai Lama*, patron of Action for Happiness
EXPLORING WHAT MATTERS

This course is unique way to get people taking action for a happier and kinder world. We designed it to be straightforward enough to be run by non-expert volunteers who gather groups in their local community to go through the course together.

It runs over 8 weekly sessions of 2 hours, with each exploring a big question, such as: *What really matters in life? What actually makes us happy? and How should we treat others?* (For a full list of the course themes please see Appendix A).

Each session follows the same inspiring and interactive format, which includes:

- **TUNING IN** - where we use mindfulness practice, gratitude exercises and reflecting on positive actions to help us tune in to what matters and to focus on what’s good.

- **CONNECTING** - bringing in the latest research, including short TED-style videos to open up personal reflections and then have a discussion with others.

- **TAKING ACTION** - inspired by the discussion, everyone commits to an action they’d like to take over the week ahead, which they reflect back on at the next session.

**WHY TAKING ACTION MATTERS**

While conversations can open us up to new ways of thinking, it’s only when we take action that we experience the benefits. Each week participants (and leaders) commit to a practical action to try out. It’s called ACTION for Happiness, remember 😊

The course includes a lovely book, which everyone works through - plus videos, slides and weekly emails that remind people to take action and provide links to additional resources.

For a sample of the format, check out the Week 1 materials: [www.bit.ly/EWM-session-1](http://www.bit.ly/EWM-session-1)

“Of all the amazing experiences I’ve had in the years I’ve been running Action for Happiness, leading the 8-week course was the most rewarding and life-enhancing experience of all”

**Mark Williamson**, course leader (and Director of AfH)
People have stepped up all over the world to run this course, with many leaders running it again and again. What each leader gets out of the experience is very personal, but there are three themes that often come up when they talk about why they love the course.

It is a chance to give back to your community
Many of us look at the world and wish things were different, but often can’t see anything practical we can do. By running the course, leaders get to see the positive impact of inspiring people to take action and how these actions ripple out in the community too.

Participants find it life-changing
The chance to explore these big questions, connect deeply with like-minded people and experiment with actions out in the real world is a pretty powerful experience - in fact, we regularly have people tell us it has changed their life!

Leaders LOVE doing it
The course is effective and simple to run, so leaders can concentrate on enjoying it for themselves too. They go on a rewarding personal journey of discovery, connect with new and inspiring people and build their confidence as a community activist and changemaker.

THE IMPACT OF THE COURSE
Exploring What Matters has been found to have a profound impact on participants, including big increases in levels of Life Satisfaction (+20%), Mental Wellbeing (+13%), Compassion (+9%) and Social Trust (+16%). For more on the impacts of the course and a collection of quotes from leaders and participants, see Appendices B and C.

“I wouldn't be where I am now without that course. I still have bad days and life certainly isn't perfect. But it has really helped me so much. Now I'm trying to be the change that I want to see”

Jasmine Hodge-Lake, course participant
This isn’t a course in the traditional sense; there is nothing to learn, and nothing to teach. So you don’t need to be an expert or an experienced course leader.

You just need to be willing to go on a personal journey, with the enthusiasm to gather a group around you and the sensitivity to create a space where everyone feels listened to.

There are three core skills that leaders need to be comfortable with:

**Holding space for others**

You need to be someone who is skilled in active, non-judgemental listening, aware of who’s in the room and the needs they have. You need the tact to be able to interact in a way that inspires free-flowing, meaningful conversations.

> Are you someone who is genuinely interested in other people?

**Leading by example**

Sometimes it can be hard for participants to know what to share in a discussion or how to talk about the actions they have taken. So it’s important for leaders to be fully involved as participants on the course too, so they can lead by example and show the way.

> Are you ready to go on a personal journey and be open to sharing that with others?

**Keeping things on track**

Although we’ve done everything possible to make the course straightforward to run, there are various things we rely on leaders to do, such as finding a suitable venue, promoting the course locally and ensuring the course is run to time and in the way it was designed.

> Are you ready to really take ownership of your course and ensure its success?

“What I loved most about running the course was being part of a group of people connecting on a deep level to effect positive change in the world outside us. I was profoundly moved by the experience and would recommend it to everyone”

Lucy Roberts, course leader
The first requirement for running a course is having someone to run it with. Your co-leader will be a big help with getting things organised, spreading the word and even covering a session if you’re not well. Plus the whole process is more fun when there’s someone to share it with. (And we can usually match you up with someone if needed - see page 9).

Between you and your co-leader there are two roles that need to be covered. These can either be split between you - or you can share both roles together:

**Organiser**

- Arranging the venue
- Promoting the course
- Communicating with participants
- Making sure everything is in place

**Facilitator**

- Creating a positive group atmosphere
- Guiding the activities and discussions
- Encouraging people to participate
- Keeping sessions to time

Both co-leaders need to be full participants on the course - turning up, engaging in exercises and taking action each week to help inspire others to do the same.

The course leader is NOT an expert or teacher - your role is to facilitate conversations.

“Setting the right atmosphere by creating a warm welcome was really important. The hardest thing was having to interrupt some great conversations in order to move on and keep to time!”

**Natasha Warne**, course leader
WHO COMES ON THE COURSE?

The course isn’t just about changing a few people’s lives for the better, it’s about starting local ripples of action that add up to much bigger change.

We want the course to be available to all, so that’s why we’ve designed it to be:

- **Open to anyone** - aged 18 and above, from all sorts of backgrounds.
- **Run in a local public venue** - drawing in people from all across the community, who otherwise may not often get the chance to meet and get to know each other.
- **Run on donations** - with people able to give whatever they can (see Appendix D).

People who take part in *Exploring What Matters* generally fall into one of two camps (although everyone is unique and many people have a mix of both these aims):

- **SEEKERS**: people who are searching for a little more happiness and want to join the course to find out about actions they can take to be happier themselves.
- **SPREADERS**: people who want the world around them to be a happier and kinder place and are looking for ways to increase happiness for others too.

And the magic happens when we mix these people together!

You might assume that *Exploring What Matters* helps people because of the knowledge and ideas it passes on. But the real power comes from people **tuning in** to their own feelings, thoughts and behaviours, **connecting** together and relating to others, and then experimenting by **taking action** in their daily lives.

What makes this so powerful is doing it as part of a group. And the more varied the members of that group, the more wide-ranging and inspiring the discussions can be.

“I love running the course. Getting together with people from completely different backgrounds to honestly explore some of the deepest subjects in life is just magic ... it’s also loads of fun”

Alex Nunn, course leader
One of the most important parts of being a course leader is promoting the course in such a way that local people find out about it and feel excited to sign up.

The most powerful way to do this is to look deeply at your own reasons for being excited to run the course, and then be open about sharing this with people at every opportunity.

There are three main ways to get people interested in joining your course:

- **Personal contacts and word of mouth** - leaders tell their friends, family and colleagues and get everyone they know locally helping to build a buzz about the course.
  > *Who do you know that might be interested to join or help promote your course?*

- **Online promotion** - leaders share regular posts on social media in the run up to the course and target local online wellbeing-focused groups (e.g. yoga meetups)
  > *What groups do you know of locally that you might try promoting the course to?*

- **Getting creative locally** - leaders find fun and novel ways to get the word out such as running free local ‘pop-up’ events and finding clever places to put up course posters.
  > *What ideas do you have for promoting the course to the community?*

**SUPPORT FROM ACTION FOR HAPPINESS HQ...**

We do everything we can to help promote courses and ensure they get as many participants as possible. This includes emailing people we know nearby and taking out paid advertising on social media. However, our ability to recruit participants varies by location and it’s vital that leaders get out and promote their course too.

“Long after the course, so many of the great things that I picked up during those enjoyable weeks still remain with me. Attending was one of the most worthwhile things I’ve ever invested my time in”

**Anh Nguyen**, course participant
HOW IT WORKS

WHAT YOU NEED:

- **Co-leader** - either someone you know already who is up for supporting you. Or if need be we can try to match you up with someone nearby from our network.
- **Venue** - public venue with a private space where people would feel comfortable sharing and also with the capability to show videos and slides (see Appendix E).
- **Timings** - run over 8 consecutive weeks (ideally Tues-Thus evenings, avoiding holidays where possible) and with an 8-week ‘run-up’ between your application and start date.

WHAT YOU COMMIT TO:

- **Promoting to as many people as possible** - the ideal number of people is 16 and you need a minimum of 6 (in addition to the two leaders) for the course to go ahead.
- **Running it in the intended way** - using the set materials, structure and content and staying true to the Action for Happiness mission and ethos at all times.
- **Keeping costs as low as possible** - ideally free or low-cost venue with a charity discount and low-cost refreshments (or even some brought along by the group).

WHAT YOU GET:

- **Course materials** - downloadable course pack, videos and slides (sent up front) plus hard copies of the course books once the number of participants is confirmed.
- **Guidance** - Leader Guide with detailed advice on how to organise and facilitate the course, plus support calls and email with our team and connection to other leaders.
- **Event page** - dedicated webpage for your course (where all attendees have to sign up) and help promoting this to any existing Action for Happiness supporters nearby.
- **Expenses** - the costs of delivering your course will be covered by Action for Happiness, up to a limit we'll agree together when planning your course.

“Organising the logistics for the course was challenging at times - like making sure the videos ran smoothly. But I wouldn't have missed it for the world - there is something very special about running it”

Izzy McRae, course leader
GETTING STARTED

So you’re ready to get started? Wonderful! Just follow the simple process below:

- **STEP 1: Register as a course leader**
  a simple form taking 10-15 minutes: [www.actionforhappiness.org/leader](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/leader)

- **STEP 2: Find a co-leader**
  or let us know in your leader form if you’d like to be matched with someone nearby.

- **STEP 3: Find a venue**
  a public, friendly, low cost venue, with a private space and ability to show videos.

- **STEP 4: Pick timings that work**
  e.g. 8 weekday evenings avoiding holidays with 8 weeks from application to start date.

- **STEP 5: Fill out a course application**
  a simple form taking 5-10 minutes: [www.actionforhappiness.org/apply](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/apply)

What happens then...

- We review your application - and if it all looks good we arrange a call with you and your co-leader to discuss the plans together.
- Once agreed we set up your booking page and work with you to promote it.
- We check in with you shortly before your start date to check you’ve reached the minimum number of participants and then send the course books out to you.
- You run your course and we check in with you during the process and provide a summary of the feedback from your participants at the end.

If you have questions or need more information email [courses@actionforhappiness.org](mailto:courses@actionforhappiness.org)

Thank you so much for stepping forward as a potential course leader. We look forward to receiving your registration form and supporting you to make your course happen.

With gratitude and warmest wishes,

_The Action for Happiness Team_
The world is changed by your example, not your opinion.
APPENDIX A: COURSE THEMES

WEEK 1: What really matters in life?
Lots of things are important in life, but how should we decide what really matters to us? This session explores whether a greater focus on happiness and wellbeing might be better for all of us. (Video: Richard Layard)

WEEK 2: What actually makes us happy?
We’re told that happiness comes from having more and earning more, but is this really true? Does happiness come from our circumstances or our inner attitudes? And can we learn how to be happier? (Video: Ed Diener)

WEEK 3: Can we find peace of mind?
Life can be highly stressful. In this session we’ll explore how to deal effectively with life’s ups and downs and cope with adversity. And we’ll look at some skills which can help us be more resilient. (Video: Jon Kabat-Zinn)

WEEK 4: How should we treat others?
Our society appears increasingly individualistic and competitive. Is this just human nature or are we naturally altruistic too? How should we behave towards others - and can we learn to be more compassionate? (Video: Karen Armstrong)

WEEK 5: What makes for great relationships?
We’re a social species and most of us know that our connections with others are vitally important. But what really affects our relationships and are there practical things we can do to enhance them? (Video: Brené Brown)

WEEK 6: Can we be happier at work?
Work is a huge part of our lives, but many of us find our work to be stressful and frustrating. Do happier organisations get better results? What makes us happy at work? And what can we do about it? (Video: Shawn Achor)

WEEK 7: Can we build happier communities?
What does it mean to live well together - and why are some communities or societies much happier than others? In this session we’ll explore how to create communities that are more caring, connected and happy. (Video: Geoff Mulgan / Jody Williams)

WEEK 8: How can we create a happier world?
This session brings together everything we’ve covered during the course. It aims to inspire each of us to live in a way that contributes to a happier world, not just for ourselves but for others too. (Video: Mark Williamson / Narayanan Krishnan)
APPENDIX B: COURSE IMPACT

The feedback from courses has been very positive, with 93% of people rating it as “Very Good” or “Good”. Analysis of the course has also found that it brings two fantastic benefits:

1. PEOPLE BECOME HAPPIER THEMSELVES

Participants have been found to be personally happier after the course, as shown by measurable increases in their average levels of Life Satisfaction and Mental Wellbeing.

![Graphs showing Life Satisfaction and Mental Wellbeing before and after the course, with average increases.]

2. PEOPLE CARE MORE ABOUT OTHERS TOO

Participants are also more likely to contribute to a happier world, as shown by measurable increases in their average levels of Compassion for others and Social Trust.

![Graphs showing Compassion and Social Trust before and after the course, with average increases.]

“I thoroughly enjoyed exploring the research on happiness with the group and seeing the positive actions they’d taken each week. It inspired me to apply more of the techniques to my own life too”

Helen Eveleigh, course leader
APPENDIX C: WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT IT

WHAT LEADERS HAVE SAID ...

“Thank you. It has been a great opportunity, and hearing just how deeply this has impacted people’s lives has genuinely surprised me. It has been a privilege to be a part of that process with them. The materials and the course that you have designed are a wonderful tool for change.”

“I love the simplicity and structure of the course. I really think most people could run this. It’s so simply laid out. I feel like I could stand up and run it without feeling anxious.”

“It was an amazing experience. This movement is my passion so I was very happy I could transmit it to different people.”

“In my eyes the world will certainly be a happier place because of Action for Happiness.”

WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAVE SAID ...

“I think that everyone will get something out of this course - and I imagine that it will be very different for each individual - but it is really useful for everyone, in all walks of life. What a lovely, positive thing to go to each week, and to concentrate on in my life!”

“This course has turned my life around and given me a new found positivity in my every day encounters. I am now nicer to my family and if stressed use the mindfulness. I have a greater outlook on life and have managed to lose weight and exercise and feel good about myself. I cannot praise this course enough for what it has done for me.”

“This course is necessary and life changing. I loved it.”

“Thinking about actions for happiness is very powerful - that we can actually make a difference in the world. Also, letting go of material possessions, wealth and status, as those things don’t make you happier was very powerful too.”

“Thank you for the opportunity to use this course to make me a better and happier human being. I will now cast more stones and make more ripples!”
APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT DONATIONS

OUR DONATION-BASED MODEL

The full 8-week course is valued at £90 (approx. $140 or €120), which consists of £10 for each weekly session (approx. $15 or €13) and £10 for the printed course book.

To keep the course accessible to the widest range of people, participants are asked to make a donation of their choice to sign up for the course. The recommended donation is £90, but if people cannot afford this they are able to donate what they can instead. And if people want to donate more (to help support those who have less) that is encouraged too.

Donations are made directly to Action for Happiness up front (via the event sign-up page) so course leaders don’t need to handle the donations directly.

WHY ARE WE TAKING THIS APPROACH?

- We want the course to be accessible to as many people as possible - everyone deserves the chance to be happier and help create a happier world!
- But we also need to cover the costs of running the course (e.g. venue hire, materials) and we know that people value things more when they make a financial commitment.
- Some courses may generate a small surplus while others will end up costing more than participants donate. Our hope is that surplus donations in more affluent areas will help to support the course being made available in more disadvantaged areas.
- This approach also takes pressure off course leaders - because they are asking their participants to make a donation to a registered charity (rather than a fixed payment to them as an individual), while still having their costs covered.

“I wasn’t happy at work but hadn’t really taken the time to think about what I could do to change that. The course gave me the confidence to ask for a review of my role and create an action plan”

Helen Thompson, course participant
APPENDIX E: COURSE VENUE

TYPES OF VENUE

As a course leader you are free to choose the local venue where you feel it would be most appropriate to run your course. There are lots of types of potential venues, including:

- Community centre
- Church hall
- Education centre
- Cafe/pub
- Library
- Town hall
- Yoga studio
- Health centre
- Training room

We always recommend visiting your venue before booking it to be sure it’s appropriate.

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING YOUR VENUE

- **Equipment** - does the venue have the equipment needed (see next page)?
- **Style** - does it have a welcoming and friendly feel?
- **Perception** - what other activities is the venue associated with? (Note: some venues have specific associations locally, e.g. a church or mental health clinic)
- **Convenience** - how convenient is the venue for the people who will be attending (e.g. central rather than remote; fairly easy to get to)?
- **Parking** - if people will be driving, is there suitable parking space nearby?
- **Refreshments** - can people get refreshments at the venue (e.g. on-site cafe) or might you need to bring some for them?
- **Insurance** - does the venue have Public Liability Insurance?
- **Accessibility** - does the venue allow easy access for wheelchairs if needed?
- **Promotion** - are there opportunities to promote the course to existing users of that building (e.g. notice boards, newsletters)?
APPENDIX F: COURSE LEADER PROCESS

YOUR NEXT STEP IS TO...

- Register as a course leader: www.actionforhappiness.org/leader (10-15 mins)

After this you can follow the other steps on page 10 (finding a co-leader, venue, timings and filling out a Course Application) and then a member of our team will be in touch.

If you need any help we’d LOVE to hear from you at courses@actionforhappiness.org
Join the movement. Be the change

www.actionforhappiness.org

“I wouldn’t be where I am now without that course. I still have bad days and life certainly isn’t perfect. But it has really helped me so much. Now I’m trying to be the change that I want to see”

Jasmine Hodge-Lake, course participant

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The Dalai Lama, patron of Action for Happiness