# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ground Rules</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 1: What really matters in life?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2: What actually makes us happy?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4: How should we treat others?</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5: What makes for great relationships?</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 6: Can we be happier at work?</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 7: Can we build happier communities?</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 8: How can we create a happier world?</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Welcome to the ‘Exploring What Matters’ course from Action for Happiness

The aim of this course is to bring people together to explore the issues that really matter for a happy and meaningful life. It is intended for people of all backgrounds and particularly those who would like to be part of a more positive and caring society.

The course is intended to be run over 8 weekly sessions of 2 hours. Each session has a theme, based on a ‘big question’, such as What really matters in life? What actually makes us happy? or How should we treat others?

Each session follows a similar inspiring and interactive format, which includes:

- **Tuning In**: starting the session with simple Mindfulness and Good Things activities
- **Expert View**: an inspiring 15 minute video/talk from a leading expert
- **Personal View**: a chance for people to reflect on their own experiences
- **Did You Know?**: fascinating and surprising research findings relating to the theme
- **Group Discussion**: sharing ideas in groups and listening to each other’s perspectives
- **Action Ideas**: everybody comes away with an action they hope to take as a result

The course is led by volunteers who support Action for Happiness and want to help make a difference to their local communities.

Thank you so much to all the generous people around the world who contributed to our campaign to support the roll-out of this course


For a full list of backers please visit: [www.actionforhappiness.org/course](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/course)
The Action for Happiness course is open to all and designed so that it can be set up and run by volunteers who support Action for Happiness, without the need for special expertise.

Because we are using this ‘open and trusting’ model for the course, it is important that all participants agree to some ground rules to respect and support each other. These will help ensure that the course runs smoothly and remains true to its underlying principles.

1) **We welcome different perspectives.** The course welcomes people from all backgrounds and points of view. There are no single right answers to these questions and all constructive perspectives are welcome.

2) **We are supportive and friendly.** The general spirit of the course is one where we treat each other in a supportive and friendly way. We may not always agree with each other, but we always treat each other the way we would like to be treated ourselves.

3) **We let everyone have a voice.** We respect each other by giving everybody the chance to contribute, listening to each other and not dominating or disrupting the conversation.

4) **We use the expertise in the room.** Although the course includes expert views and carefully designed materials, the real expertise is here in the room too. Our facilitator’s role is to lead the session, not act as the expert. We can all contribute to each other’s learning and what we get out depends on what we put in.

5) **We share a bit of ourselves.** We are each willing to share some of our unique personal perspectives. This is NOT group therapy and no-one should feel under pressure to say anything. But the best conversations tend to happen when we’re willing to reveal a bit about ourselves and share how we feel inside, not just our intellectual ideas.

6) **We act with integrity.** We respect other people’s confidentiality and trust others to do the same for us. We are willing to speak up if we feel other members of the group are not keeping to the spirit of the course or not showing respect for other participants.

7) **We are present.** We avoid distractions from phones or other devices so we can stay present in the room and give our whole selves during each session. We try not to derail the conversation and respect each other by allowing sessions to start and end on time.

All participants have a responsibility to ensure these ground rules are observed. If anyone feels they are not, they are encouraged to raise this in the group in a constructive way.
EXPLORING WHAT MATTERS
THE ACTION FOR HAPPINESS COURSE

SESSION 1
WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN LIFE?
Welcome!  We really hope you enjoy the course...

This 8-week course explores what matters for a happy and meaningful life. Together we’ll look at some of life’s most important questions, like What really matters in life? What actually makes us happy? and How should we treat others?

Each week we’ll explore a different theme. We’ll hear opinions from leading experts and explore fascinating findings from the latest research. But even more importantly, we’ll reflect on our own experiences and discuss these together in a friendly and supportive group.

We hope that you’ll come away inspired with practical ideas to contribute to a happier world, not just for yourself, but for others around you and for society as a whole.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING ACTION

This course involves lots of great ideas and conversations. But if we want to be happier and help create a better world, we have to be willing to do things differently. So each week you’ll be asked to choose a practical action that you will take as a result. And during the course you’ll have the chance to share what you’ve done and discuss the impact these actions have had in your life.

COURSE THEMES

Session 1: What really matters in life?
Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
Session 4: How should we treat others?
Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
TUNING IN

Before we begin to look at this week’s theme, let’s take a few minutes to tune in.

One Moment Meditation

Let’s start by trying this One Moment Meditation exercise. It’s a great way to help us tune in to how we’re feeling and a nice introduction to the benefits of being more ‘mindful’.

Good things

Now take a moment to reflect on the past week and think of at least three good things that have happened. They can be big or small. Write them down below and try to include why each thing was good. Then tell someone about one or more of your good things.

What good things have happened for you this week?
WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN LIFE?

Lots of things are important in life. But how should we decide what really matters to us? And what should we prioritise as a society?

Rich countries have made great progress in material terms over the last fifty years. Yet modern life remains full of problems. As individuals, many of us are struggling with anxiety, depression and broken relationships. And as a society, we have seen declines in trust, values and social connectedness.

This session asks us to reflect on what really matters in our lives and explores whether a greater focus on happiness and wellbeing might be better for all of us. Can happiness be thought of as the ultimate good for society?

"Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life. The whole aim and end of human existence"

~ Aristotle

What do you think matters most in life?
In this week's Expert View, Richard Layard explains why he believes Happiness matters most - for each of us as individuals, but also as the defining feature of a good society.

“The purpose of our lives should be to try and create as much happiness in the world as we possibly can”

Richard Layard

Lord Richard Layard is Head of the Wellbeing Programme at London School of Economics. He is author of *Happiness: Lessons from a new science* and co-founder of Action for Happiness.

**Summary of main points in talk**

- Many things matter but happiness can be thought of as the ultimate good
- The starting point for a happier society is to care about the happiness of others
- We need to move from “zero sum” to “positive sum” activities, where people can succeed in harmony, rather than in competition with each other
- Although income affects happiness, the factors that matter the most are our relationships with others and our inner mental health

**What is your reaction to Richard's talk?**

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAzwvTV3CyQ
Here are three interesting facts relating to this week's theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. Happiness can be measured in a meaningful way

How we feel about our lives is personal. No-one can tell us how happy we are just by looking at our lives from the outside. But although happiness is subjective, it can still be measured in a meaningful and reliable way. Researchers do this using people's own reports of how they feel about their lives. A typical question would be "Taking all things together, how happy are you?" with possible answers from 0 (extremely unhappy) to 10 (extremely happy).

We know these subjective reports are meaningful because they correspond with objective measurements of bodily functions, such as our immune system responses. They correlate with measurements of brain activity, with positive emotional states linked to activity in the left side of the pre-frontal cortex and negative emotions linked to activity on the right side. They also correlate with subsequent actions that people take in their lives (e.g. leaving a job) and with independent assessments from others.

2. We've been getting richer but no happier

People's income levels have a significant effect on their happiness. In any given society richer people are on average happier than poorer people (although each additional increase in income has relatively less impact on happiness). However, as the average income of a country rises over time, the population does not necessarily become happier. For example in the United States and some of the other rich economies, there has been no increase in average levels of happiness over the last fifty years, despite decades of strong economic growth.

One of the main reasons for this is that, once people's basic needs are met, they tend to be more concerned with their income relative to others than their absolute level of income. This suggests that if we want to raise happiness levels we need to target more than just economic growth.
3. Happiness brings huge benefits

Happiness doesn’t just feel good, it has also been shown to lead to a wide range of other beneficial outcomes, both for us as individuals and for society as a whole.

Firstly, happy people tend to experience better overall health and live longer than people who are less happy.[8] For example, people with high psychological wellbeing are half as likely to catch the cold virus[9] and people who experience greater levels of optimism and positive emotions are significantly less likely to suffer from heart attacks, stroke or other types of cardiovascular disease.[10]

Secondly, people who are happier tend to function better. Experiencing positive emotions broadens our perceptions and build our capabilities, helping us to make better decisions and cope more effectively with adversity.[11] Happier people have also been found to be more productive at work.[12] And people who are happy as young adults have even been shown to earn more than their peers later in life.[13]

And finally, happier people are better for society as a whole. They tend to have better relationships [14] and they are more likely to make a positive contribution to society.[15] They are also less likely to engage in risky behaviour - for example, people who are more satisfied with their lives have been found to be more likely to wear seat belts and less likely to be involved in road accidents.[16]

References for facts

[7] Layard et al. (2010)
[12] Oswald et al. (2009)
[14] Lyubomirsky et al. (2005)
Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Imagine you are towards the end of your life - hopefully many years from now.

You are looking back at your life as a whole - your family life, your relationships, your work, your achievements, your joys and your sorrows - all the things you've done with your time on earth.

You start to think about the things you're feeling proud of and grateful for, but also about the things that you wish you'd spent more time focusing on, or less time worrying about.

Once you've got a good sense of how your "future self" might feel, answer this question...

What advice would your future self give you about what really matters?

"Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you'll look back and realize they were big things"

~ Robert Brault
GROUP DISCUSSION

Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week's theme.

This can just be an open conversation based on whatever you'd like to focus on as a group. Or alternatively here are some discussion points you might like to follow:

- **Share one thing.** Take turns to share one thing that has had a big impact on you from this week's session. This could be something you think is really important, something you were surprised by or something that has really inspired or affected you.

- **The big question.** Discuss your answers to this week's main question: "What really matters in life?". Listen to other people's perspectives and notice in what ways they're similar or different from your own views.

- **So what?** What are the implications of what you've discussed - e.g. what might this mean for you personally, for the people you care about, or for society as a whole?

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?
Take a minute to reflect on everything we’ve covered in this session - including your initial thoughts, the expert talk, the facts, your personal perspective and your group discussions.

Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week’s session.

This could be something personal for you, or something you plan to do at home, at work, in your community or elsewhere. It could even be something that you’d like to see change in society and how you plan to help make that happen.

Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you’re going to do and when.

**A few example action ideas**

- Spend more time focusing on something, or someone, that really matters to you
- Stop doing something that you know makes you or others unhappy
- Start more conversations with others about what really matters in life
- Join the Action for Happiness movement and encourage others to as well

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say and what you do are in harmony"

~ Gandhi

What action will you take as a result of this week's session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week's theme:

**BOOKS**
- Happiness: Lessons from a new science - Richard Layard
- Man's search for meaning - Viktor Frankl
- Philosophy for Life: and other dangerous situations - Jules Evans
- The Happiness Hypothesis - Jonathan Haidt

**ARTICLES**
- Top five regrets of the dying
  [www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/feb/01/top-five-regrets-of-the-dying](www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/feb/01/top-five-regrets-of-the-dying)
- Why does happiness matter?
  [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/03/why-does-happiness-matter](www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/03/why-does-happiness-matter)

**VIDEOS**
- Alan Watts: What if money was no object?
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5yHWMdH9gk](www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5yHWMdH9gk)
- Mark Williamson on Action for Happiness
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENPVC0hE2Ug](www.youtube.com/watch?v=ENPVC0hE2Ug)
- Satish Kumar on Wellbeing
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-lGjerasb0](www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-lGjerasb0)

**WEBSITES**
- Action for Happiness
  [www.actionforhappiness.org](www.actionforhappiness.org)
- Happy City
  [www.happycity.org.uk](www.happycity.org.uk)
- Greater Good Science Center
  [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

**REPORTS**
- World Happiness Report
  [http://worldhappiness.report](http://worldhappiness.report)
SESSION 2
WHAT ACTUALLY MAKES US HAPPY?
Welcome back! We really hope you enjoyed first session.

Did you do the action you wrote down last time? If so how did it go and how did you feel?

This week we’re going to be exploring what really makes us happy. But before diving in, let’s start by looking at what we mean by happiness.

### WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

**Happiness is feeling good about life.**

Some may prefer to call this ‘contentment’ or ‘satisfaction’ - but whatever words we use, we’re talking about the feeling that life is going well and wanting things to carry on that way.

Happiness has both short-term and long-term aspects to it. It includes the day-to-day experience of positive emotions - like joy, amusement, gratitude and love. But it also goes deeper than that and includes an overall sense that life is fulfilling, meaningful and going well.

Happiness is not about being happy all the time, which is unrealistic. We all experience sadness, loss and fear. A happy life is one where we generally feel good, despite life’s inevitable difficulties.

### COURSE THEMES

- Session 1: What really matters in life?
- Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
- Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
- Session 4: How should we treat others?
- Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
- Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
- Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
- Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
TUNING IN

Before we begin to look at this week’s theme, let’s take a few minutes to tune in.

Breathing Space

This guided meditation is a great way to start. It can help us connect with how we’re feeling and leave us feeling calmer and better able to engage with the course.

What good things have happened for you this week?

Good things

Now take a moment to reflect on the past week and think of at least three good things that have happened. These could include any actions that you took as a result of last week’s session. Write them down below and try to include why each thing was good.
WHAT ACTUALLY MAKES US HAPPY?

Modern society bombards us with messages and images about what makes for a good life. We’re told that happiness comes from having more and earning more - and that if we want to be happy we need the beautiful house, the latest gadgets and the perfect appearance.

Our lives may be more comfortable than ever, but this materialistic and individualistic culture is leaving many of us feeling empty and isolated. In recent years, we’ve seen a big increase in the use of anti-depressants and a worrying rise in anxiety and depression in young people.

In this session we’ll explore what actually makes us happy. Is our happiness set in stone by our genes and early life experiences? Does it come from our external circumstances or from our inner attitudes and values? To be happy, should we focus on ourselves or care about others? And can anyone actually learn how to be happier?

"Three essentials for happiness in this life are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for"  
~ Joseph Addison

What do you think really makes people happy?
In this week's Expert View, Ed Diener describes some of the key findings from the scientific study of happiness and explains the typical characteristics and behaviours of happy people.

“The happiest people always have somebody in their life who they care about or who cares about them”
Ed Diener

Ed Diener is Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois and one of the world's leading authorities on subjective wellbeing. He has spent over 25 years studying human happiness.

Summary of main points in talk
- Our relationships with other people are fundamental for our happiness
- The happiest people have work, hobbies or activities in their lives that they love and that make use of their strengths
- Everyone faces problems, but happy people find positive ways to move forward
- The happiest countries have high levels of trust and strong social connections
- Happiness comes from having goals and values that are bigger than ourselves

What is your reaction to Ed’s talk?
Here are three interesting facts relating to this week’s theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. **Our happiness is not set in stone**

   For many years, wellbeing research was dominated by the "set point theory", which said that although we each have different levels of subjective wellbeing (happiness), these don’t really change during our adult lives. [1] Examples were given of people who returned to their previous happiness "set point" after major life events, like winning the lottery or becoming a paraplegic.[2]

   However, recent research has led to this theory being revised and shown that people can and do become lastingly happier (or unhappier) during their adult lives.[3] Also, people who tend to pursue outward-looking (e.g. family or altruistic) life goals experience larger increases in happiness than those who tend to just pursue their own interest (e.g. career advancement or material gains).[4]

   The best way to think about our happiness levels is that we have a "set range", determined by our genetics and early life experiences. But that range is fairly broad and the events, and actions we take, in our adult lives can have a significant impact on where in the range we are. Psychologists have estimated that 40% of the differences in happiness between people are actually down to our intentional activities - and therefore potentially within our control.[5]

2. **There are skills we can learn to be happier**

   The last two decades have seen major breakthroughs in our understanding of what affects people’s happiness, in particular thanks to the relatively new field of positive psychology.[6] Rather than the traditional focus on illness and pathology, positive psychologists are studying how human beings flourish and what helps people to live happy and meaningful lives.[7]

   Positive psychology research has identified certain activities that people can do which tend to make them happier.[8] In fact many of these can be thought of as 'life skills' that people can learn to enhance their wellbeing. An example is taking a few minutes each night to write down three good things that have happened that day. People who did this each night for a week have been found to be significantly happier and to have much lower depressive symptoms up to six months later.[9]
3. Ten Keys to Happier Living

The main areas where people can take action to improve their subjective wellbeing are summarised in these ‘Ten Keys to Happier Living’. They are based on a review of the latest research from positive psychology and related fields.[10]

Everyone’s path to happiness is different, but the evidence suggests these Ten Keys are all areas that affect our happiness and are broadly within our control, rather than being dependent on our circumstances.

The first five keys (GREAT) focus on how we interact with the outside world in our daily activities. They are based on the Five Ways to Wellbeing developed by nef as part of the Foresight Project.[11]

The second five keys (DREAM) relate more to our inner values and approach to life.

www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys

References for facts

PERSONAL VIEW: HAPPIEST TIMES

"Happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognising and appreciating what we do have" ~ Frederick Keonig

Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think back to a time when you remember feeling very happy or having a real sense of inner contentment. It might have been many years ago or fairly recently. (If you can't recall a time you would describe as "happy" then just think of a time you felt good, or better than normal).

Now try to take yourself back to that time and place and really connect with the details of what you were doing, who you were spending time with and how you were feeling.

What really contributed to you feeling good? Was it to do with where you were? Or the things you had? Or your relationships with others? Or perhaps your activities or achievements? Be honest with yourself – what really made the biggest difference?

When were you happy and what contributed to it?
GROUP DISCUSSION

Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week's theme.

This can just be an open conversation based on whatever you'd like to focus on as a group. Or alternatively here are some discussion points you might like to follow:

- **Share one thing.** Take turns to share one thing that has had a big impact on you from this week's session. This could be something you think is really important, something you were surprised by or something that has really inspired or affected you.

- **The big question.** Discuss your answers to this week's main question: "What actually makes us happy?". Listen to other people's perspectives and notice in what ways they're similar or different from your own views.

- **So what?** What are the implications of what you've discussed - e.g. what might this mean for you personally, for the people you care about, or for society as a whole?

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?

**Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life. The whole aim and end of human existence** ~ Aristotle
ACTION IDEAS

Did you do the action you wrote down last time? If so, how did it go?

Take a minute to reflect on everything we’ve covered in this session - including your initial thoughts, the expert talk, the facts, your personal perspective and your group discussions.

Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week’s session. This could be something personal for you, or something you plan to do at home, at work, in your community or elsewhere.

Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you’re going to do and when.

A few example action ideas

- Work through the Ten Keys to Happier Living Guidebook
- Try something new to make you or others happier. For example, try writing down Three Good Things each night for a week and see how you feel
- Talk about happiness with family, friends or colleagues and share the Ten Keys

"Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions"

~ Dalai Lama

What action will you take as a result of this week's session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week's theme:

**BOOKS**
- 10 Keys to Happier Living: A Practical Handbook - Vanessa King
- The How of Happiness / The Myths of Happiness - Sonja Lyubomirsky
- Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill - Ricard
- Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness & Well-Being - Seligman

**ARTICLES**
- Ten easy steps to happier living
  [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/03/ten-easy-steps-that-will-make-you-a-happier-person](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/nov/03/ten-easy-steps-that-will-make-you-a-happier-person)
- Why seeking meaning instead of pleasure makes you happier
  [www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-tenney/mindfulness-meditation_b_3195247.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/matt-tenney/mindfulness-meditation_b_3195247.html)
- What does science teach us about well-being?
- How a Gratitude Journal Stopped Me Feeling Half-Empty
  [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/brogan-driscoll/gratitude-diary-review_b_10398994.html](http://www.huffington.co.uk/brogan-driscoll/gratitude-diary-review_b_10398994.html)
- Debunking the myths of happiness
  [http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/articles/item/sonja_lyubomirsky_on_the_myths_of_happiness](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/articles/item/sonja_lyubomirsky_on_the_myths_of_happiness)

**VIDEOS**
- Dan Gilbert: The surprising science of happiness
  [www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_gilbert_asks_why_are_we_happy.html)
- Matthieu Ricard: The habits of happiness
- Want to be happier? Stay in the moment
  [www.ted.com/talks/matt_killingsworth_want_to_be_happier_stay_in_the_moment.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/matt_killingsworth_want_to_be_happier_stay_in_the_moment.html)

**WEBSITES**
- Authentic Happiness
  [www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu)
- BBC Happiness Formula
  [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/happiness_formula](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/happiness_formula)

**OTHER**
- Ten Keys to Happier Living - Guidebook
  [www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys-guidebook](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys-guidebook)
- Happiness Action Pack
  [www.actionforhappiness.org/media/80216/happiness_action_pack.pdf](http://www.actionforhappiness.org/media/80216/happiness_action_pack.pdf)
SESSION 3
HOW CAN WE FIND PEACE OF MIND?
Welcome back! We really hope you enjoyed the second session.

Did you do the action you wrote down last time? If so how did it go and how did you feel?

This week we’ll be exploring how to find peace of mind in our stressful and frantic world. But before diving in, let’s start by defining a word we’ll be using a lot today: ‘mindfulness’.

**WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?**

Mindfulness is choosing to pay attention to what’s happening in the present moment.

It involves having conscious awareness of our current thoughts, feelings and surroundings, but also adopting an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance to whatever arises in the moment.

Although mindfulness was originally inspired by teachings from the East, and particularly Buddhist traditions, it is not inherently religious. The 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn has spread throughout the Western world in recent years.

Mindfulness has been found to help significantly reduce stress and improve health and wellbeing.

**COURSE THEMES**

- Session 1: What really matters in life?
- Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
- Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
- Session 4: How should we treat others?
- Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
- Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
- Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
- Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
Before we begin to look at this week’s theme, let’s take a few minutes to tune in.

**The Mindful Check-In**

This week let’s start with two short videos to tune in. The first explains how observing our thoughts helps us see things more clearly. The second is a short mindfulness exercise.

[Video 1](http://vimeo.com/95143880)

[Video 2](www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1Ez_hpnhDM)

**Good things**

Now take a moment to reflect on the past week and think of at least three good things that have happened. These could include any actions that you took as a result of last week’s session. Write them down below and try to include why each thing was good.

**What good things have happened for you this week?**
CAN WE FIND PEACE OF MIND?

Life can be highly stressful. Work problems, money worries and relationship issues often leave us feeling under pressure and overloaded. Technology can make things worse too, with many of us permanently connected to our digital devices and bombarded by information.

Our culture seems to glorify being ‘busy’. Some days we hardly take a moment to stop, with our heads so full of thoughts that we’re rarely actually living in the moment. We can be highly self-critical and many of us experience periods of stress, anxiety or depression. And of course, all of us will encounter loss, failure, sadness and illness at times in our lives.

In this session we’ll explore how to deal effectively with life’s ups and downs and cope with adversity. Is there a better and more ‘conscious’ way to live? What does it mean to be resilient? And is peace of mind about control of our destiny or accepting things as they are?

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human Freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances" 
~ Victor Frankl

What causes stress and anxiety in your life?
EXPERT VIEW: JON KABAT-ZINN

In this week’s Expert View, Jon Kabat-Zinn explores how taking a more mindful and conscious approach to life can help us become calmer and happier and deal better with life’s challenges.

“This is a radical notion... that you are actually fine just the way you are”

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Jon Kabat-Zinn is professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He is the ‘father’ of modern mindfulness practice and Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR).

Summary of main points in talk

- Mindfulness is paying attention in the present moment, without judgement
- We often drive ourselves crazy with unhelpful thinking patterns. Mindfulness helps us to see our thoughts as ‘weather patterns’ and to let them go
- Focusing on ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’ helps us discover that we’re ok as we are
- Mindfulness has profound positive effects on our brains and our health and influences how we are in the family, at work and in the world.

What is your reaction to Jon’s talk?
DID YOU KNOW?

Here are three interesting facts relating to this week’s theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. Our ‘inner life’ is vitally important, but at risk

Our overall emotional (or mental) health is the biggest single influence on how happy our lives are.\(^1\) As adults, our life satisfaction is more closely related to our emotional health (measured eight years previously), than it is to our current level of income, marital status, health or level of education. Also, a child’s emotional health has a much greater impact on their happiness later in adult life than any other aspect of their early years, including their socio-economic situation, family circumstances or intellectual development.\(^2\)

Many indicators suggest that general levels of stress and anxiety are on the increase. For example, antidepressant use in the UK has grown by around 500% in the last 20 years \(^3\) and the proportion of adolescents with emotional or behavioural problems is twice as high as in the 1970s.\(^4\)

Mental illness is a huge hidden problem in our society, actually accounting for nearly 40% of all illness - more than the combined impact of all cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, digestive diseases, musculoskeletal diseases, cancer, diabetes and accidents put together. Yet only a quarter of all those with mental illness are in treatment, compared with the vast majority of those with physical conditions.\(^5\) One in six adults has a mental health problem at any one time \(^6\) and over a third of all adults will experience at least one episode of depression during their lifetime.\(^7\)

2. Mindfulness can help us find peace of mind

Whereas stress activates the “fight or flight” part of our nervous system, mindfulness meditation helps to activate our “relaxation response”, slowing our heart rate and breathing and lowering our blood pressure.\(^8\) People who take 8 sessions of mindfulness meditation training have been shown to be significantly happier a month later and to have better immune system responses.\(^9\)

Mindfulness training can also lead to structural brain changes, including increased grey-matter density in the hippocampus, known to be important for learning and memory, and in structures associated with self-awareness, compassion and introspection.\(^10\) Mindfulness has also been found to bring benefits in the treatment of people with clinical levels of anxiety or depression.\(^11\)
Resilience comes from the Latin word ‘resilio’ - to jump back - and is increasingly used to describe our ability to cope with and bounce back from adversity. Rather than being a rare quality found in a few, extraordinary people, resilience comes from our everyday capabilities and, like many other life skills, it can be learned. A vital contributor to our resilience is how we choose to interpret events, which in turn affects our emotional responses and our behaviour.

A helpful way to understand this is the ABC model. Many of us believe that unpleasant events themselves cause us to act in certain ways and feel particular emotions. That is, we believe that adversity (A) leads to consequences (C). But what actually determines these consequences are our beliefs (B) about the event. And these beliefs can often be inaccurate and prone to ‘thinking errors’, such as assuming the worst, over-generalising, or jumping to conclusions. By tuning in to our beliefs - and challenging our unhelpful thoughts - we can change how we feel and behave.

This ABC Model is one of the central ideas behind Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which extensive studies have shown to be beneficial in helping people recover from anxiety and depression. It is also now increasingly being used in a range of programmes to build emotional resilience, for groups as diverse as secondary school children and the US Army.

References for facts

[1] Layard (2013)  
[2] Layard et al. (2014)  
[10] Hölzel et al. (2011)  
[14] Ellis (1962)  
[17] Seligman et al. (2009)  
[18] Reivich et al. (2011)
PERSONAL VIEW: COPING WELL

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference"  ~ The Serenity Prayer

Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think of a few times in your life when you have faced adversity - perhaps a stressful situation at work, an argument or relationship breakdown, a challenge in the family, a bereavement, a failure or a problem that seemed insurmountable.

Now pick out a time when you feel you handled this adversity well, found positive ways to cope and managed to ‘bounce back’ effectively.

What really contributed to you coping well and being resilient? Was it taking a different perspective, ignoring the problem, getting support, changing behaviour or something else?

What has helped you cope well in difficult times?
GROUP DISCUSSION

Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week's theme.

This can just be an open conversation based on whatever you'd like to focus on as a group. Or alternatively here are some discussion points you might like to follow:

- **Share one thing.** Take turns to share one thing that has had a big impact on you from this week's session. This could be something you think is really important, something you were surprised by or something that has really inspired or affected you.

- **The big question.** Discuss your answers to this week's main question: "Can we find peace of mind?". Listen to other people's perspectives and notice in what ways they're similar or different from your own views.

- **So what?** What are the implications of what you've discussed - e.g. what might this mean for you personally, for the people you care about, or for society as a whole?

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?
“Move out of your comfort zone. You can only grow if you are willing to feel awkward and uncomfortable when you try something new” ~ Brian Tracey

What action will you take as a result of this week's session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week's theme:

### BOOKS
- Mindfulness: Finding peace in a frantic world – Mark Williams
- Overcoming Depression / The Compassionate Mind – Paul Gilbert
- Self Compassion – Kristin Neff
- Full Catastrophe Living – Jon Kabat-Zinn

### ARTICLES
- Anxious? Depressed? Try Greek philosophy  
  [www.telegraph.co.uk/health/wellbeing/10146546/Anxious-Depressed-Try-Greek-philosophy.html](www.telegraph.co.uk/health/wellbeing/10146546/Anxious-Depressed-Try-Greek-philosophy.html)
- Mindfulness Meditation and the Brain  
  [www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/mindfulness-meditation_b_3238677.html](www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/mindfulness-meditation_b_3238677.html)
- 5 Ways To Bring Mindfulness Into Everyday Life  
- The How and Why of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy  

### VIDEOS
- 90:10 The Single Most Important Thing You Can Do For Your Stress  
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6402QJp52M](www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6402QJp52M)
- Andy Puddicombe: All it takes is 10 mindful minutes  
  [www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes.html](www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes.html)
- Paul Gilbert – Compassion for self and others  
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3JDokddPts](www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3JDokddPts)
- Richard Burnett – Mindfulness in Schools  
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mIK6x6O_xAQ](www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mIK6x6O_xAQ)

### WEBSITES
- Headspace  
  [www.headspace.com](www.headspace.com)
- Moodscope  
  [www.moodscope.com](www.moodscope.com)
- Mood Gym  
  [https://moodgym.anu.edu.au](https://moodgym.anu.edu.au)
- Mindfulnet  
  [www.mindfulnet.org](www.mindfulnet.org)

### OTHER
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) - introduction  
  [https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation/therapies/cognitivebehaviouraltherapy.aspx](https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation/therapies/cognitivebehaviouraltherapy.aspx)
EXPLORING WHAT MATTERS
THE ACTION FOR HAPPINESS COURSE

SESSION 4
HOW SHOULD WE TREAT OTHERS?
Welcome back! We really hope you found the last session helpful.

Did you do the action you wrote down last time? If so, how did it go?

This week we’re exploring how we should treat others if we want to live a happy life and help create a happier world. But let’s start by defining a key word for this session: compassion.

**WHAT IS COMPASSION?**

Compassion is caring about the suffering of others and wanting to help.

It is more than just sympathy for someone in need, or an act that benefits someone else. It involves an emotional response to another person’s suffering and an authentic desire to help.

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion"

~ Dalai Lama

**COURSE THEMES**

- Session 1: What really matters in life?
- Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
- Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
- Session 4: How should we treat others?
- Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
- Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
- Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
- Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
Before we begin, let’s take a few minutes to tune in.

**Kindness Meditation**

In keeping with this week’s theme, let’s start with a short mindfulness exercise which focuses on kindness and can help us to cultivate good feelings towards others.

[Video Link](http://vimeo.com/20121374)

**Good things**

Now take a moment to reflect on the past week and think of at least three good things that have happened. These could include any actions that you took as a result of last week’s session. Write them down below and try to include why each thing was good.

What good things have happened for you this week?
HOW SHOULD WE TREAT OTHERS?

Our society seems to be increasingly individualistic and competitive. We’re often told that “nice guys finish last” and that we need to be ruthless if we want to “get ahead in life”. All around us people are focusing on their own narrow interests, often at the expense of others.

Is this just an inevitable part of human nature - a modern example of the “survival of the fittest” principle which Charles Darwin wrote about? Are people naturally unkind, or are we all just struggling along and trying to deal with life’s challenges as best we can? Is there another side to our nature which is more caring, collaborative and generous?

In this session, we’ll explore how we should treat others if we want to live in a society that is good for our collective happiness and wellbeing. Is empathy part of our nature? Are there benefits from being good to others? And can we learn to be more compassionate?

“No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted”

~ Aesop

How do you like other people to treat you?

How do you NOT like to be treated by others?
EXPERT VIEW: KAREN ARMSTRONG

In this week’s Expert View, Karen Armstrong explores how a happier and more peaceful society is possible, if we connect with the compassionate side of our human nature.

“Look into your own heart, discover what gives you pain and then refuse to inflict that pain on anybody else”

Karen Armstrong

Karen Armstrong is an expert on the history of religion. She won the 2008 TED Prize and used it to launch the Charter for Compassion, a global movement to encourage more compassion.

Summary of main points in talk

- Although the oldest part of the human brain is self-centred, other parts evolved to allow us to care for others and to put others’ needs ahead of our own
- The path to inner peace lies in observing the Golden Rule, which says "never treat others as you would not like to be treated yourself"
- Everyone suffers pain - we all get sick, feel sorrow and lose people we love. By facing up to our own pain we are better able to recognise that others suffer too

What is your reaction to Karen’s talk?
Here are three interesting facts relating to this week’s theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. We are born to be caring and compassionate

Compassion has a biological basis, which starts with the parent-infant bond. Human offspring are born less developed and more dependent than the young of any other mammal - and mothers’ brains are wired to experience positive emotions when they bond with their children.[1]

But this goes beyond parent-child relationships. Helping others has been found to trigger activity in the same areas of the brain that turn on when people receive rewards or experience pleasure.[2] People are also found to be happier when they spend money on others than on themselves.[3]

This makes a lot of sense in evolutionary terms. When Charles Darwin wrote about human evolution in 1871, he noted that “those communities which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members would flourish best and rear the greatest number of offspring”. [4]

In recent years, neuroscientists have also discovered “mirror neurons” in the brain. These activate in the same way when we see another person experiencing something, as they do when we experience it ourselves. Some researchers believe these provide the neural basis for our ability to feel empathy for others.[5]

Although our concern for others is innate, our levels of kindness do not appear to be set in stone and recent research has shown that compassion can also be cultivated with training.[6]

2. Kindness is contagious

Cooperative behaviour has been found to be contagious and to spread from person to person. When people benefit from kindness they often “pay it forward” by helping others who were not originally involved, and this creates a cascade of cooperation that influences dozens more in a social network. So our acts of kindness spread to people we don’t know or have never met.[7]

When people experience the “moral elevation” that comes from doing a good deed - or are even just reminded of altruistic things they have done before - this actually increases their motivation to be kind and makes it more likely they will engage in helpful behaviour in future.[8]
As we might expect, receiving warmth and compassion from others brings benefits for our own health and wellbeing. In one study, healthy young men were given questionnaires about their perceptions of the love and warmth they felt from their parents. Thirty-five years later, 100% of those who did not perceive themselves to have had warm relationships with their parents had diagnosed midlife diseases (e.g. coronary artery disease, high blood pressure or alcoholism) as opposed to only 47% of those who reported both parents as being warm and close.[9]

More surprisingly, when we show kindness and compassion to others, this also brings benefits for our own well-being, health, and longevity - provided we don’t become overwhelmed with the burden of helping.[10] As well as activating the ‘pleasure centres’ in our brains, kind behaviour can result in deeper social integration, distract us from personal problems and encourage other positive emotions. Compassionate behaviour also releases the so-called “love hormone” oxytocin [11] and this in turn has been linked to benefits for our relationships and heart health.[12] Caregiving behaviour has also been found to be associated with reduced mortality risk.[13]

Even in the world of business, research shows that people who contribute to others without expecting anything in return very often achieve outstanding results and are more successful than those who simply pursue their own success and take from others.[14]

References for facts


DID YOU KNOW?
PERSONAL VIEW: HELPING OTHERS

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give"

~ Winston Churchill

Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think of some recent times when you’ve done things to help others or be kind to them - where your main motivation was to help the other person, rather than to benefit yourself.

These might be big things, like giving significant time or money to support a cause, or supporting a loved one who’s been seriously ill. Or they could be much smaller things, like paying a compliment, cheering up a colleague, holding a door open or carrying a bag.

Now try to re-live the experience of doing these things. What motivated you to do what you did? And what was the outcome for you and the others involved? Did it make you think differently about your own problems and challenges?

What have you done recently to help others - and how did it feel?
GROUP DISCUSSION

Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week’s theme.

For this session, we suggest that you base your discussion around the following two questions, one personal and one societal:

1) **What practical things can each of us do to be kinder and more compassionate?**

2) **What wider changes in our society might help to encourage greater empathy and compassion for others?**

Take turns to share your ideas and discuss their implications together.

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?
Take a minute to reflect on everything we’ve covered in this session.

Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week’s session.

Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you’re going to do and when.

A few example action ideas

- Try to include more acts of kindness into your day-to-day behaviour
- Cultivate empathy by trying to see things from other people’s perspectives
- Forgive someone who has wronged you and try to understand their behaviour
- Do something to support a cause or help someone who’s struggling
- Spread the word about why compassion is the key to a better world

"Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world"

~ Desmond Tutu

What action will you take as a result of this week’s session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week's theme:

**BOOKS**
- Altruism: The Power of Compassion - Matthieu Ricard
- Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life - Karen Armstrong
- Why Kindness is Good For You - Dr. David Hamilton
- Give and Take: A revolutionary approach to success - Adam Grant

**ARTICLES**
- The Compassionate Instinct: [Link](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_compassionate_instinct)
- Brain can be trained in compassion, study shows: [Link](http://news.wisc.edu/21811)
- Selfish traits not favoured by evolution, study shows: [Link](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-23529849)

**VIDEOS**
- The Power of Outrospection - Roman Krznaric: [Link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG46IwVfSu8)
- Designing for Generosity - Nipun Mehta: [Link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpyc84kamhw)
- How to buy happiness (by spending on others) - Michael Norton: [Link](http://www.ted.com/talks/michael_norton_how_to_buy_happiness.html)
- Disarming with Empathy - Jo Berry: [Link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coljnvVH18o)

**WEBSITES**
- Charter for Compassion: [Link](http://charterforcompassion.org)
- Random Acts of Kindness Foundation: [Link](http://randomactsofkindness.org)
- Greater Good Science Center: [Link](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)
- Daily Good: [Link](http://www.dailygood.org)

**OTHER**
SESSION 5
WHAT MAKES FOR GREAT RELATIONSHIPS?
Welcome back! We really hope you found the last session thought-provoking.

We’re now half-way through the Action for Happiness course. How do you feel things are going so far? Have you been putting any of what we’ve covered into practice?

This week we’re exploring the secrets of great relationships. Let’s start by defining a concept which is hugely important for our wellbeing: emotional and social intelligence.

**EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE**

‘Emotional and Social Intelligence’ refers to our skills in awareness and management of our own emotions, our awareness of the emotions of others and our behaviour in social interactions.

For many years, intelligence (or IQ) was considered the most important factor in determining success in life or work. However, it is now recognised that how we handle our emotions and how we relate to others have a huge impact too. In fact our emotional and social intelligence may even matter more than our IQ; and the good news is that they can be learned and improved over time.

**COURSE THEMES**

- Session 1: What really matters in life?
- Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
- Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
- Session 4: How should we treat others?
- Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
  - Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
  - Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
  - Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
Before we begin, let’s take a few minutes to calm our minds and tune in.

**Just Like Me**

This guided meditation will help us get in the right frame of mind for today’s session. It involves us noticing some of the many similarities between ourselves and others.

[YouTube link]

**Good things**

This week’s Good Things exercise is a bit different! Think of someone who you really care about but perhaps take for granted sometimes. Send them a short text message right now to tell them how much they mean to you or to share something good. If you don’t have a mobile device with you then simply write your message below and send it later today.

Who are you sending your message to and what does it say?
WHAT MAKES FOR GREAT RELATIONSHIPS?

Modern society often seems to put money and things ahead of people. But we are a deeply social species and most of us know that our relationships with others are vitally important.

So what really affects our relationships and what impact do they have on our happiness and wellbeing? Is relating well to others all about being extroverted, confident and funny? Or do we form better connections with people when we’re thoughtful and sensitive?

Is good friendship more about supporting each other through tough times or celebrating the good times together? Is it more important to be kind or honest? And are there practical things we can do to enhance our relationships, especially the ones that we find difficult?

To start with, let’s take a moment to think about the people who matter most to us.

"The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return"

~ Nat King Cole

Who are the people that matter most to you and why?
In this week's Expert View, Brené Brown explains how we can only really connect with others and experience the fullness of life when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

“Connection is why we’re here. It’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives”

Brené Brown

www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html

Brené Brown is an expert in human connection and author of The Gifts of Imperfection and Daring Greatly. Her research focuses on vulnerability, courage, authenticity and shame.

Summary of main points in talk

- The ability to feel connected is vital to human wellbeing; shame is the fear that we are not worthy of connection with others
- The people who are able to live full and ‘wholehearted’ lives are willing to be vulnerable, to admit their imperfection and to let others see them as they are
- When we numb ourselves from vulnerability, this also numbs our ability to experience joy, gratitude and happiness

What is your reaction to Brené’s talk?
DID YOU KNOW?

Here are three interesting facts relating to this week’s theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. Relationships are a matter of life and death

We all share a basic psychological need to feel closely connected to others. Studies of the happiest people find that they always have close relationships in their lives and high levels of social integration are also associated with significant health benefits too.

In the 1960s, controversial research discovered that monkeys reared in isolation ended up severely disturbed and in some cases even died as a result. Similarly, human social isolation and lack of close social ties are associated with higher mortality risk. And if the significant relationships in our lives come to an end this can also be very detrimental for our health and wellbeing. Being separated or divorced is a strong predictor of early mortality.

Our ability to form close relationships (and hence our lifelong wellbeing) is very strongly affected by the connections we have with our caregivers in our earliest years. Children who are “securely attached” to their caregivers tend to have better relationships in later life as well as being more independent and successful. Conversely, children whose caregivers are inconsistent, neglectful or abusive tend to be much more prone to behavioural problems, anxiety and depression.

However, bad experiences in our early years don’t necessarily condemn us to poor relationships and an unhappy life. Evidence shows that people can recover and still flourish as adults.

2. Our small daily interactions have a big impact

Our day-to-day interactions with others matter. Studies of hundreds of couples show that the ratio of positive interactions (e.g. praise or support) to negative interactions (e.g. anger or criticism) is strongly related to relationship success. An average ratio of 5:1 is found in stable relationships, as opposed 0.8:1 in unstable relationships. Astonishingly, studies of such interactions have been found to predict future marital stability or divorce with an accuracy of around 80%.

Also, the way we feel - and the way we make others feel as a result - has a contagious impact through the social networks that we’re part of. Our happiness has been shown to affect people we’ve never even met, across three degrees of separation (i.e. the friend of a friend of a friend).
Having good relationships isn’t just about making sure we spend time with people and look after them - although this obviously matters. There are practical habits we can adopt that have been proven to enhance our connections with others. Here are four examples:

1) **Really listen to what people are saying.** We spend more time listening than any other form of communication, but often very little of what we hear is really taken in or understood. Being a good listener is a skill which involves giving our full attention, being non-judgemental, encouraging people to share what they’re feeling and reflecting back what we hear.[12]

2) **Respond to others’ good news.** We tend to think that being there in the tough times is the most important aspect of a close relationship. But research shows that what’s even more important is how we react to other people’s good news. When we respond constructively and enthusiastically this has been shown to bring lasting benefits for our relationships.[13]

3) **Raise issues constructively.** A sign of a strong relationship is the ability to raise concerns and issues without this undermining the relationship. The key is to describe the issue in a non-judgemental way and to explain how it makes you feel and why. For example: “When you leave your things on the table, I feel frustrated because it makes more work for me”.[12]

4) **Tell people how much you appreciate them.** An effective way to enhance our relationships - and our happiness - is to take the time to tell people how much they mean to us. In one study, people who delivered a letter of thanks to someone they were grateful to saw a significant boost in happiness and a reduction in depressive symptoms for a whole month.[14]

---

**References for facts**

[4] Harlow et al. (1965)
Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think of a few specific times when you’ve felt really connected to others or had a very good relationship with a particular person. These don’t have to be romantic relationships; they could equally be connections with family members, friends, colleagues or neighbours.

Now try to really identify the things that made that relationship really good. What is it that both of you contribute to make it that way? Is it about the time you’ve spent together, the way you support each other, your trust, your humour, or something else?

If you had to pick out the most important factor for great relationships, what would it be?

What has helped make your relationships good?
GROUP DISCUSSION

Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week’s theme.

For this session, we suggest that you base your discussion around the following two questions, one personal and one societal:

1) What can you do today to help improve your relationships?

2) How can we encourage a culture where people are willing to be vulnerable and have more authentic connections with others?

Take turns to share your ideas and discuss their implications together.

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?
Session 5: What makes for great relationships?

Take a minute to reflect on everything we’ve covered in this session. Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week’s session. Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you’re going to do and when.

A few example action ideas

- Practice your people skills - be a good listener and raise issues constructively
- Be willing to be vulnerable and authentic in your relationships
- Tell someone how much they mean to you or how grateful you are to them
- Make time to connect with new people
- Encourage a greater focus on Emotional and Social intelligence

"Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much"

~ Helen Keller

What action will you take as a result of this week's session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week’s theme:

### BOOKS
- The Gifts of Imperfection / Daring Greatly - Brené Brown
- Emotional Intelligence - Daniel Goleman
- People Skills - Robert Bolton
- The Relationship Cure - John Gottman
- Getting the love you want - Harville Hendrix
- Connected - Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler

### ARTICLES
- What are the secrets to a happy life? [article](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/what_are_secrets_to_happy_life)
- Most of us are bad listeners - here are some small ways to fix that [article](https://verilymag.com/2017/12/listening-skills-relationship-communication-active-constructive-responding)
- Why you should care about having friends at work [article](www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/08/work-relationships_n_3561568.html)
- How to keep love going strong [article](www.yesmagazine.org/issues/what-happy-families-know/how-to-keep-love-going-strong)

### VIDEOS
- Making Marriage Work - Dr. John Gottman [video](www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkTyPgwfflg)
- Daniel Goleman Introduces Emotional Intelligence [video](www.youtube.com/watch?v=9m9eNo83NU)
- RSA Animate: The Empathic Civilisation [video](www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PAwPff0ks)
- BBC Happiness Challenge - Gratitude letter [video](www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsIPXw9BQoE)
- BBC Happiness Challenge - The importance of relationships [video](www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsGT8D-W0jE)

### WEBSITES
- Relate [website](www.relate.org.uk)
- Daniel Goleman: emotional and social intelligence [website](http://danielgoleman.info)
- Psychology Today: Relationships [website](www.psychologytoday.com/topics/relationships)
EXPLORING WHAT MATTERS
THE ACTION FOR HAPPINESS COURSE

SESSION 6
CAN WE BE HAPPIER AT WORK?
Hello again. We really hope you’re getting a lot out of the course so far...

Have you been putting your action ideas into practice? If so, hopefully you’ve already started to see benefits in your relationships and wellbeing - and for others around you too.

This week we’re moving to the workplace to look at what makes organisations great places to work and whether there are things we can do be happier in our working lives.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY WORK?**

Not all of us are in paid work right now - you may be a home-maker, unemployed or retired. But this week’s session is still relevant. Think about “work” here as being whatever it is you do with the majority of your waking life - whether a job, raising a family, caring for a relative or anything else.

"Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life"

~ Anon

**COURSE THEMES**

- Session 1: What really matters in life?
- Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
- Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
- Session 4: How should we treat others?
- Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
- Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
- Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
- Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
Before we begin, we’ll take a few minutes to tune in.

5 minute meditation

Let’s start with 5 minutes of mindful meditation. This video is taken from our *Happiness Challenge* series with BBC Breakfast and features Andy Puddicombe from *Headspace*.


Good things

For this week’s Good Things exercise, let’s focus on our theme of work. Take a moment to reflect on the past week and think of at least three good things that have happened in connection with your work. Write them down below, including why each thing was good.

What good things have happened at work recently?
CAN WE BE HAPPIER AT WORK?

Work is a huge part of our lives. Most of us spend more of our waking hours working than doing anything else, so it’s obviously good if we can enjoy our work. But sadly, many of us find our working lives to be stressful, frustrating, confrontational or uninspiring.

Is this just an inevitable aspect of working life? Isn’t work meant to be difficult, which is why we get paid for it? Or is there a better way of working - one where we can enjoy what we do, get on with the people we work with and perform better as a result?

In this session, we’ll explore how we feel at work and how this relates to our performance. Are happy workers just laid-back underachievers or are they actually more creative and productive? Do happier organisations get better results? What really affects happiness at work? And are there things we can do to make our workplaces and working lives better?

"Chose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life"

~ Confucius

How happy are you at work and why?
EXPERT VIEW: SHAWN ACHOR

In this week’s Expert View, Shawn Achor describes a new model for success, explaining how positive psychology ideas can inspire happier workplaces and help people to thrive at work.

“Your brain at positive performs significantly better than it does at negative, neutral or stressed”

Shawn Achor

What is your reaction to Shawn’s talk?

www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work.html

Summary of main points in talk

- Our formula for success and happiness is backwards. We think that when we’re successful then we’ll be happy. But in fact happiness leads to success
- Positive Psychology is showing us how we can help people and organisations move to higher levels of wellbeing and performance at work
- There are practical things we can do to create more positive experiences in the workplace - and so increase our creativity, productivity and resilience
Here are three interesting facts relating to this week’s theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. Happiness is great for organisations as well as people

In the first session of this course we looked at the many benefits that happiness brings for people. For example, happy people tend to experience better overall health and live longer. They have better relationships, make better decisions and cope more effectively with adversity.[1]

But it is also in the interests of organisations for their people to be happy at work. Although success at work can obviously lead to people being happier as a result, research also shows that increasing happiness leads to greater success. Happier people tend to be more engaged, have fewer days off sick, demonstrate greater flexibility and creativity and respond better to difficult feedback.[2] Happier doctors even make faster and better diagnoses.[3]

Unhappiness of course matters too. Anxiety and depression are not only terrible for the people who experience them, they also have a big cost for organisations. In the UK, around 40% of all sickness absence is estimated to be due to mental health problems and the total cost to employers of mental health issues among their staff is estimated to be £26 billion each year.[4]

In terms of the “bottom line” of business performance, people who are happier have been found to be more productive.[5] Similarly, organisations with happier employees tend to outperform their competitors. For example, the share prices of the “100 Best Workplaces” in the US (based on positive feedback from employees about working there) significantly outperformed the stock market over a 25 year period.[6] So caring about happiness makes great business sense too.

2. Our relationships at work really matter

Having good relationships is one of our core human needs and this is just as true in the workplace as anywhere else. People who say they have a best friend at work have been found to be seven times more likely to engage fully in their work.[7] And people who care about others at work are happier, more likely to help colleagues, more committed and less likely to quit their jobs.[8]

How people relate to their line manager has a particularly big impact on their happiness at work. Poor ‘management style’ is a major cause of stress [9] and the number one driver of engagement at work is employees feeling that their line manager has a “sincere interest in their wellbeing”.[10]
How happy and effective we are at work depends on how our work makes us feel and the way in which it motivates us. People who find their work intrinsically rewarding (worth doing for its own sake) tend to perform better, and be more satisfied, than those motivated by external rewards like pay or status.[11] Here are five ways to help increase happiness and motivation at work:

1) **Trust people.** One of our core psychological needs is for *autonomy* – to feel that we’re in control of our own lives. If people’s work is closely controlled by others this undermines their autonomy and is demotivating. When we empower people and trust them to do a good job they are more likely to take initiative, care about their work and be intrinsically motivated.[12]

2) **Aim for daily progress.** Another of our core needs is for *competence* – to feel that we’re getting better at something that matters. Making progress each day, however small, has been found to be the biggest difference between a "good day" and a "bad day" at work.[13]

3) **Be people-focused.** Positive relationships are a vital contributor to happiness at work. Taking time to say hello, getting to know colleagues, listening, giving encouragement, noticing what’s good, recognising achievement, helping out and saying thanks all make a big difference.[14]

4) **See the bigger purpose.** People want to feel that their work matters and is about more than just earning a living. Whatever the job is, it helps if people are able to see why what they do makes a difference for others and is part of something bigger.[15]

5) **Play to strengths.** Too often organisations focus on people’s shortcomings. But when people use their strengths they are happier, more confident, more resilient and are more likely to achieve goals. So it’s in everyone’s interest to help people find and use their talents.[16] *

It is also essential that employers take mental health seriously and help those who need support.

**References for facts**

[1] See references from Session 1  
[16] Linley et al. (2010)

* You can discover your own character strengths using this free only survey: www.viame.org/survey
PERSONAL VIEW: YOU AT YOUR BEST

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful"
~ Albert Schweitzer

Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think of a specific time when you were really at your best at work; a time when you felt you performed really well, enjoyed what you were doing and got great results. Really try to visualise the situation - what you did, who you were with and the working environment.

Now try to identify what factors were really important to you being at your best. Was it how well you were paid, or your working conditions? Was it the strategic guidance or good communication from management? Or was it the fact you felt trusted, or that you had great relationships with your colleagues or that you were doing something meaningful?

If you had to pick out the most important factor for working at your best, what would it be?

When did you work at your best and why?
GROUP DISCUSSION

Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week’s theme.

For this session, we suggest that you base your discussion around the following two questions, one personal and one societal:

1) What practical things can you do to be happier at work yourself?

2) How can you help to create a happier environment across the organisations, groups, teams or clubs that you’re involved with?

Take turns to share your ideas and discuss their implications together.

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?
ACTION IDEAS

Did you do the action you wrote down last time? If so, how did it go?

Take a minute to reflect on everything we've covered in this session.

Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week's session.

Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you're going to do and when.

A few example action ideas

- Make your own experience of work happier - see the bigger purpose, aim for daily progress or improve your work/life balance
- Create a more positive and friendly working atmosphere with colleagues
- Identify your strengths and try to make more use of them
- Encourage your organisation to do more to increase happiness or to provide proper support for those who may be stressed or depressed

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm"

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

What action will you take as a result of this week's session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week's theme:

### BOOKS
- The Happiness Advantage - Shawn Achor
- The Happy Manifesto - Henry Stewart
- The Art of Happiness at Work - Dalai Lama and Howard Cutler
- Delivering Happiness - Tony Hsieh
- Great Days at Work - Suzanne Hazelton

### ARTICLES
- How happiness directly impacts your success
- Helping others makes us happier at work
  [www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/30/helping-others-happy-altruism-work_n_3672477.html](www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/30/helping-others-happy-altruism-work_n_3672477.html)
- 9 ways to be happy at work
- Six ways to stop worrying and find work you love

### VIDEOS
- RSA Animate - Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuJyc](www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuJyc)
- Henry Stewart on Happiness at Work
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1aEWFPhnII](www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1aEWFPhnII)
- TEDxCopenhagen - Alexander Kjerulf: Happiness at work
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9l81wx6aPbA](www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9l81wx6aPbA)
- Mark Williamson at Creating Happy Workplaces
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=DN_nvFtobU](www.youtube.com/watch?v=DN_nvFtobU)

### WEBSITES & TOOLS
- Good Day at Work
  [www.robertsoncooper.com/gooddayatwork](www.robertsoncooper.com/gooddayatwork)
- How to be Happier at Work - Infographic
  [www.happify.com/hd/happiness-at-work-infographic](www.happify.com/hd/happiness-at-work-infographic)
- i-resilience: free personal resilience report
  [www.robertsoncooper.com/resilience](www.robertsoncooper.com/resilience)
- VIA Character Strengths survey
  [www.viame.org/survey](www.viame.org/survey)
- Happy at Work - a personal manifesto
Hello again. Only two weeks of the course left now. We hope you’re enjoying it.

Have you found yourself seeing things differently, behaving differently or treating others differently as a result of things we’ve discussed?

This week we’re going to turn our attention to the bigger picture and ask ourselves what a good community or society really looks like. But first a quick note of caution and a request…

**LET’S KEEP IT CONSTRUCTIVE!**

As this session brings in topics relating to society as a whole, it could be all too easy for us just to spend our session complaining and blaming others for the way things are. But let’s not do that. Let’s keep it constructive and look at how we might make things better.

"The creation of a more peaceful and happier society has to begin from the level of the individual, and from there it can expand to one’s family, to one’s neighbourhood, to one’s community and so on"  
~ Dalai Lama

**COURSE THEMES**

- Session 1: **What really matters in life?**
- Session 2: **What actually makes us happy?**
- Session 3: **Can we find peace of mind?**
- Session 4: **How should we treat others?**
- Session 5: **What makes for great relationships?**
- Session 6: **Can we be happier at work?**
- Session 7: **Can we build happier communities?**
- Session 8: **How can we create a happier world?**
TUNING IN

Before we begin, let’s again start by taking a few minutes to tune in after a busy day.

Mindfulness

This week we’re going to try a different activity, to illustrate how mindfulness can help us pay more attention - to our physical sensations, our environment, our feelings and more.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOnBxjLuFNc

Good things

Now take a moment to reflect on the past week and think of at least three good things that have happened. These could include any actions that you took as a result of last week’s session. Write them down below and try to include why each thing was good.

What good things have happened for you this week?
What does it mean to live well together - and why are some communities happier than others? Is a good community one with the highest standards of living? Or is it one where people trust each other, know their neighbours and get involved in local community life?

Although recent decades have seen increases in average incomes and living standards, this has been accompanied by falling levels of trust and community cohesion, and more income inequality. We are a social species and thrive when we feel connected to others - but we are facing an epidemic of loneliness, with far more people feeling isolated and disconnected.

As individuals we often feel powerless to change things and frustrated with the behaviour and priorities of our government. So what can we do to make a difference? And how can we get more involved in our communities and contribute to a happier and more caring society?

"The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only legitimate object of good government"

~ Thomas Jefferson

What creates happiness in your community?
In this week’s Expert View, we’re going to watch two short videos. The first is a talk about creating happier communities from Geoff Mulgan, one of the co-founders of Action for Happiness. The second is based on a talk by Nobel Peace Prize winner Jody Williams, who believes that each and every one of us can contribute to creating a better world.

**Summary of main points in videos**

- Disconnection and isolation cause a huge amount of unnecessary suffering in our society - but there are practical actions we can take to help put this right
- Evidence shows that increased levels of community participation and charitable giving correlate with higher levels of happiness
- Anybody can be an agent of change. We all have a choice of whether or not to act on the issues we care about in society

**What is your reaction to Geoff and Jody’s talks?**
DID YOU KNOW?

Here are three interesting facts relating to this week's theme, taken from the latest research. Take a few minutes to absorb them and think about their implications.

1. Some communities are much happier than others

Levels of happiness vary hugely around the world. The least happy communities tend to be those where people’s basic human needs (such as for food, shelter, safety and freedom) are unmet or at risk. For example, nine of the ten least happy countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa.[1]

The world's happiest countries tend to be in Northern Europe. Denmark tops the list, closely followed by nearby Norway, with Sweden and Finland not far behind. Other European nations like Switzerland, the Netherlands and Austria also do well, as do Canada, Australia and Iceland.[1]

Most of the variations in happiness within and across societies can be explained by six main factors: GDP per capita, social support (whether you have someone to count on), healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity and perceptions of corruption.[1]

Although the happiest communities normally have fairly good standards of living, there are many places where average incomes are extremely high, but happiness levels are rather lower - for example Qatar, Singapore, Luxembourg and the United States.[1] So what is it about Denmark that makes people happy? One key aspect is thought to be its very high levels of trust.[2] 89% of Danes express a high level of trust in others, compared to 69% in the UK and just 49% in the US.[3]

2. Countries and communities are now taking happiness seriously

Since the 1930s, most countries have measured their success in terms of growth in GDP (Gross Domestic Product). But more recently, some have started adopting broader measures of progress, recognising that economic growth does not necessarily lead to improvements in people’s quality of life. The most well known example is the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, which has made GNH (Gross National Happiness) its primary focus, rather than GDP. As a result, Bhutan has consciously prioritised areas like culture, community and the environment over economic growth.[4]

Happiness is now getting serious attention from policy makers across the world. The United Nations has adopted a resolution encouraging all member states to promote people’s happiness[5] and the first ever UN conference on Happiness and Wellbeing was held in 2012.[6] Lots of countries, such as the UK[7], are now measuring national wellbeing - with the OECD encouraging others to follow.[8] And individual cities, such as Santa Monica in the US[9], are now focusing on wellbeing too.
DID YOU KNOW?

3. There are things we can do to improve community wellbeing

These are some of the most important areas where action can increase national wellbeing:

1) **Enhance human relationships.** In every community, people’s relationships are the most important contributor to their happiness.[10] We should be working to reduce loneliness and social isolation; and to support people whose relationships are in difficulty.

2) **Prioritise mental health.** Mental illness causes an enormous amount of suffering. Yet less than a third of people who suffer receive appropriate help.[11] We should be helping people in our communities to access the proven therapies, medication and support they need.

3) **Support early years.** The earliest years of children’s lives have a huge impact on their lifelong success [12] and their emotional health is the strongest predictor of later wellbeing.[13] We must give priority to children’s emotional wellbeing, including support for new parents, troubled families and young people who are at risk of mental health issues.

4) **Help people find work.** Unemployment is very bad for wellbeing and the longer people are out of work the worse things get.[14] Our communities need long-term economic stability and low unemployment - and we should be doing all we can to help the unemployed find work.

And here are some things we can do personally to help create happier communities:

- Get to know our neighbours better
- Volunteer our time for a local charity, cause or project that we care about
- Join our local residents association or community group
- Campaign for changes to improve wellbeing in our local community
- Set up a local ‘Happy Cafe’ - see www.actionforhappiness.org/happy-cafe

References for facts

PERSONAL VIEW: STATE OF HAPPINESS?

"Create all the happiness you are able to create; remove all the misery you are able to remove"

~ Jeremy Bentham

Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think of some of the different ways that your community affects your happiness and wellbeing. And also how it affects other people that you care about.

You may want to include the impact of the state and services provided by the public sector, such as safety, healthcare, education, transport, justice etc. How do these affect and enhance your life? And in what ways are they a strain on wellbeing?

Now try to identify the things that have the biggest positive impact and biggest negative impact on your quality of life. Try to think of at least 3 of each.

In what ways does your community most affect your wellbeing?

Positive ways

Negative ways
Get together in a small group of around 3-5 people and spend around 20 minutes discussing your thoughts and feelings about this week’s theme.

For this session, we suggest that you base your discussion around these two questions:

1) **What one change would make the biggest impact on happiness in your community?**

2) **What could you do, alone or with others, to help make it happen?**

Take turns to share your ideas and discuss their implications together.

What were the main points that came out of your discussion?
Session 7: Can we build happier communities?

Take a minute to reflect on everything we’ve covered in this session.

Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week’s session. This could be a local change you’d like to see and how you plan to help make it happen.

Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you’re going to do and when.

A few example action ideas

- Get involved in a local community activity, meeting or project
- Campaign on a local or national issue that you really care about
- Give time to support a cause or charity working to make things better
- Make more of an effort to meet and spend time with people in your community
- Reach out to local people who might be feeling isolated or lonely

"Action may not always bring happiness; but there is no happiness without action"

~ Benjamin Disraeli

What action will you take as a result of this week’s session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week's theme:

### BOOKS

- Happiness: Lessons from a new science - Richard Layard
- The Politics of Happiness - Derek Bok
- Nudge - Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein
- How much is enough? - Robert and Edward Skidelsky

### ARTICLES

- Improving wellbeing should be our global priority  
  [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-mark-williamson/enhancing-human-wellbeing_b_3887498.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-mark-williamson/enhancing-human-wellbeing_b_3887498.html)
- Look hard: today’s day of happiness may be historic  
  [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/geoff-mulgan/day-of-happiness-historic_b_2906265.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/geoff-mulgan/day-of-happiness-historic_b_2906265.html)
- Measuring what we treasure: what if contentment shaped policymaking?  
- Jeff Sachs: America and the pursuit of Happiness  
- International happiness: why it’s a serious global issue  
  [www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/international-happiness-day-global-issue](http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/international-happiness-day-global-issue)

### VIDEOS

- What is Gross National Happiness?  
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Zqdp4YHvl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Zqdp4YHvl)
- BBC News: Measuring the nation’s happiness  
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs48ciooohw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cs48ciooohw)
- The high price of materialism  
  [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VioGAb38pKscw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VioGAb38pKscw)

### WEBSITES

- What Works Centre for Wellbeing  
  [https://whatworkswellbeing.org](https://whatworkswellbeing.org)
- Office for National Statistics: Measuring National Wellbeing  
  [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing)

### REPORTS

- World Happiness Report  
  [http://worldhappiness.report](http://worldhappiness.report)
- A well-being manifesto for a flourishing society  
- The State of Happiness: can public policy shape people’s wellbeing?  
SESSION 8
HOW CAN WE CREATE A HAPPIER WORLD?
Welcome back for the final time! Yes, sadly this is the last of our eight sessions together.

We’ve covered a wide range of topics, heard lots of different ideas and had a chance to share our own unique perspectives. Hopefully you may now have a clearer understanding about what really matters for a happy life - and how to put this into practice!

This last session aims to bring it all together and inspire each of us to live in a way that contributes to a happier world, not just for ourselves but for everyone else too.

We really hope you’ve enjoyed the course and especially the chance to meet and share ideas with other people in a friendly, informal and supportive atmosphere. If you’ve found the course helpful, it would be wonderful if you wanted to tell others about it too.

We would also be delighted if you wanted to run the course locally yourself. Please get in touch if so and we’ll explain more about how this works and how we can support you.

Thanks so much for being involved. Wishing you every happiness for the future.

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world"
~ Anne Frank

COURSE THEMES

- Session 1: What really matters in life?
- Session 2: What actually makes us happy?
- Session 3: Can we find peace of mind?
- Session 4: How should we treat others?
- Session 5: What makes for great relationships?
- Session 6: Can we be happier at work?
- Session 7: Can we build happier communities?
- Session 8: How can we create a happier world?
TUNING IN

As with all our sessions, we’ll start by taking a few minutes to tune in after a busy day.

Kindness Meditation

In keeping with this week’s theme of creating a happier world, let’s revisit one of our previous mindfulness exercises which focuses on kindness towards ourselves and others.

http://vimeo.com/20121374

Good things

As this is our last session, let’s reflect on our eight weeks together and think of good things to do with this course. These could be things we’ve learned, people we’ve met here or things that happened. Try to write down at least three good things, including why each was good.

What good things have happened for you on this course?
A HAPPIER WORLD?

Our world has seen some amazing progress over the last century. Yet everywhere we look there is still a great deal of suffering and misery, much of which could potentially be avoided.

During this course we’ve explored what really matters for a happy and meaningful life. We’ve looked at what really makes us happy, learned how interconnected we are with each other and seen how our attitudes and daily actions can make a difference.

So what might a happier society look like? How would family life be different? What would education be like? How would our working lives be different? How would people treat each other in their communities? And what would government be aiming to achieve?

If we want to create a happier world, we need a vision for how things could be better.

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream”

~ C. S. Lewis

What would a happier world look like? What would be different?
EXPERT VIEW: ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

In this week's Expert View, we're going to watch two different videos. The first is a short talk from Mark Williamson, who explains the philosophy behind the Action for Happiness movement and how we can each contribute to creating a happier world. The second is about Narayanan Krishnan and the inspiring way that he tries to bring happiness to others.


Summary of main points in talk

- The Action for Happiness movement is all about making a personal commitment to try to live in a way that creates more happiness and less unhappiness
- Although we need to push for systemic changes, we can also “be the change” in the way that we approach our lives in our homes, workplaces and communities
- One of the greatest ways to be happier ourselves - and to contribute to a happier world - is to look beyond ourselves and discover the joy of giving to others

What’s your reaction to what Mark and Narayanan have said?
PERSONAL VIEW: YOUR CONTRIBUTION

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. It is the only thing that ever has" ~ Margaret Mead

Take a few minutes to stop and reflect.

Think back to what we’ve discussed and shared during the course: the things that bring happiness to you and others; the ways in which you can contribute to happiness in your relationships or at work; and the things you’d like to see change in society.

Now try to identify areas where you can personally contribute to creating a happier world. These are likely to be areas you’re passionate about or that make use of your strengths.

Perhaps you’d like to create more harmony in your own home, or encourage a change in ethos at your organisation or school? Or perhaps you want to help others learn more about happiness, get involved in your local community or just try to connect more with others?

What can you personally contribute to creating a happier world?
WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. Put happiness at the heart of our approach to life
To live a good life, it helps to have a clear philosophy to guide our priorities. Action for Happiness proposes a simple philosophy: that the best way to live is for each of us to try to create as much happiness and as little unhappiness in the world. We can put this into practice every day.

2. Work on our own happiness
If we’re happy ourselves, we’re much better placed to help make others happier too. There are many things we can do to be happier, like practicing mindfulness, noticing the good things, spending more time with loved ones, enhancing our relationships and using our strengths.

3. Spread the word to others
Many people around us are unaware of the practical things they could do to be happier. So we can help to spread the word. We can tell people about our own experiences; share inspiring books, videos and websites; distribute AfH postcards and posters; or share ideas via social media.

4. Make a difference in our organisations
We can each help to create a happier environment at work. All of us can take time to get to know colleagues, notice the good things and be supportive towards others. And as leaders or managers we can create a culture which encourages trust, positive relationships and a sense of meaning.

5. Make a difference in our local communities
The strength of our communities lies in the quality of our relationships. We can contribute to a happier community by getting to know more people, supporting local events, working together to address local issues and doing things to help our neighbours meet, trust and support each other.

6. Encourage kindness, compassion and generosity
All around us people are caught up in self-centred and competitive behaviour, trying to “get ahead” often at the expense of others. By showing people kindness and compassion, even if they treat us badly, we can help to inspire a more positive, collaborative and caring way of living.

7. Campaign for better policies
Many existing policies, systems and services fail to do enough to promote people’s wellbeing. We can support campaigns (or create our own) to push for changes to these - for example in relation to mental health, employment, education, equality or community facilities.

8. Start a local Action for Happiness course or group
Action for Happiness has a growing network of local groups where people meet to put many of these ideas into practice. We can join a local group or set up our own group if one doesn’t exist. Or we could run the 8-week Action for Happiness Course locally ourselves.
“Happiness just a vague, subjective concept”
All human beings want their overall experience of life to be happy rather than unhappy. What makes us happy differs a lot between us, but we share a universal desire to feel good. Happiness is subjective, but that’s why it’s important - people’s actual experience of life is what really matters.

“Are you saying it’s wrong to be unhappy?”
Of course not. Periods of unhappiness are an inevitable part of life; we all encounter loss, failure and trauma. Focusing on happiness isn’t about shutting out unhappiness, it’s about finding ways to cope with life’s inevitable difficulties, so that people can live the happiest possible lives overall.

“Focusing on happiness just encourages more selfishness”
Quite the opposite. People who are happier are more generous and do more for others. And one of the best ways to be happier is to do more to help others. The aim of the Action for Happiness movement is to inspire people to live in a way that creates more happiness in the world around us.

“Happiness is a by-product of other things”
Yes there are many activities and actions that lead indirectly to happiness. And constantly asking ourselves if we are happy is unhelpful. But there are also practical things that we can actively do to increase happiness - both for ourselves and for others. Our actions really do make a difference.

“Happiness can’t be measured accurately”
Measuring happiness is straightforward: you simply ask people how happy they are (e.g. on a scale of 0-10). The results are highly meaningful and correspond with a wide range of objective factors, including patterns of brain activity, independent reports and subsequent behaviour.

“Unhappiness is essential for creativity and progress”
We all know examples of famous people who were unhappy yet did amazing things, but these are the exceptions rather than the rule. Research shows that happiness enhances creativity, cognitive function and productivity. People generally function much less well when unhappy or depressed.

“Positive thinking is naive and encourages us to ignore real problems”
Yes, unrealistic positive thinking (e.g. “Law of Attraction”) is unhelpful. We advocate positive but realistic thinking. We have to be aware of problems and act accordingly. But we also have a natural “negativity bias”, which we can choose to overcome by focusing more on what’s going well.

“Government should steer clear of happiness and focus on other things”
Governments can’t make us happy. But governments have a vital role in creating the conditions for people to lead good lives. When deciding on policies it is essential that the government looks beyond just economic considerations and considers the overall impact on people’s wellbeing.
Group discussions have been the most important part of this course. We really hope you’ve enjoyed connecting and sharing ideas and stories with others.

Now the course is coming to an end, some members of the group may want to carry on meeting or to stay in touch in some way. So for this final group discussion, let’s explore ways in which the group could continue to support each other.

Here are a few options, although you will no doubt have other ideas too:

1. Keep meeting up as a group using our monthly Get-Together packs
   www.actionforhappiness.org/get-together

2. Start a local Happy Cafe to support your local community
   www.actionforhappiness.org/happy-cafe

3. Step forward to run another Exploring What Matters course locally
   www.actionforhappiness.org/lead

How would you like the group to carry on? What have you agreed?
Take a minute to reflect on everything we've covered in this session.

Then write down at least one action that you plan to take as a result of this week's session to help create a happier and more caring world.

Try to be as specific as you can and focus on what you're going to do and when.

**A few example action ideas**

- Make the Mindfulness and Good Things exercises part of your daily routine
- Stay in touch with the group (e.g. by organising a monthly Get-Together)
- Order some Action for Happiness postcards and share these locally
- Put happiness on the agenda in the organisation where you work
- Find out more about running the Action for Happiness course

"Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does"

~ William James

What action will you take as a result of this week's session?
Here are some other useful resources relating to this week’s theme:

**BOOKS**
- How to change the world - John-Paul Flintoff
- The power of just doing stuff - Rob Hopkins
- Flourish - Martin Seligman
- How To Be Compassionate: Handbook for a Happier World - Dalai Lama
- Change the world for a fiver - We Are What We Do

**ARTICLES**
- My manifesto for a happier world
  www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-mark-williamson/happiness-manifesto-b_2867241.html
- Is a happier society possible?
  www.actionforhappiness.org/news/is-a-happier-society-possible
- Why happiness matters
  www.actionforhappiness.org/news/why-happiness-matters
- How to be happy and save the world?

**VIDEOS**
- Nic Marks: Ideas for a happier world
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=4j0ZmahiZYA
- Nipun Mehta: happiness and generosity
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyYC_2QSvNg
- TED: Nic Marks - The Happy Planet Index
  www.ted.com/talks/nic_marks_the_happy_planet_index.html

**WEBSITES**
- Action for Happiness: 50 practical actions
  www.actionforhappiness.org/take-action
- The Happiness Initiative
  www.happycounts.org

**RESOURCES**
- Happy: the movie
  www.thehappymovie.com
- Ten Keys to Happier Living - postcards to share
  www.actionforhappiness.org/postcards
- Ten Keys to Happier Living - free set of posters
  www.actionforhappiness.org/posters
REFERENCES: A-E

- Action for Happiness (2010), Ten Keys to Happier Living.
- Bolton, R. (1979), People skills: How to assert yourself, listen to others and resolve conflicts, Simon & Schuster publishing.
- Centre for Mental Health (2007), Mental Health at Work: Developing the business case, Policy Paper 8.
REFERENCES: F-M


• Grant, A. (2013), Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success, Viking Press.


• Headey, B., Muffels, R. Wagner, G. (2010), Long-running German panel survey shows that personal and economic choices, not just genes, matter for happiness, PNAS 2010 107 (42) 17922-17926.


• Institut for Lykkeforskning (2013), Der er et lykkeligt land – en kortlægning af årsagerne til danskernes lykke (There is a happy country - An analysis of the causes of the Danish population’s happiness), ISBN 978-87-996511-0-8, 2013.

• Layard, R. and Dunn, J. (2008), A Good Childhood: Searching for values in a competitive age, Penguin.


· New Economics Foundation (2008), Five ways to well-being: the evidence, Mental Capital and Wellbeing: Making the most of ourselves in the 21st century, UK Government’s Foresight Project.


· Office for National Statistics (2012), Analysis of Experimental Subjective Wellbeing Data from the Annual Population Survey, April to September 2011, 28 February 2012.


· Oswald, A.J., Proto, E., Sgroi, D (2009), Happiness and Productivity, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).


· Steptoe, A., Shankar, A., Demakakos, P., and Wardle, J. (2013), Social isolation, loneliness, and all-cause mortality in older men and women, PNAS April 9, 2013 vol. 110 no. 15


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

“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

© Action for Happiness 2020