

What is 'happiness'?

The 'World Happiness Report' is usually released in the springtime each year, and ranks 156 countries according to how happy people report themselves to be. The UK currently ranks 15th – so, could be better, but not too shabby! But what is happiness anyway? And where does it come from?

What we think of as 'happiness' actually isn't the same as long term 'happy'. When we think of happiness, we normally think of the temporary high we get from an external 'fix' – be it chocolate or a bit of extra time on the Xbox. True 'happy' is a lasting state of contentment.

Lasting contentment comes from having a sense of purpose: feeling that what you do matters and seeing that your efforts make a difference. Small children quite naturally have this sense of purpose: their mission is to explore, to learn and to create. As they grow however, this purpose seems to dilute into the many distractions and general busy-ness of life. After a while, it can begin to feel like a full-on mission to try and get them motivated by anything other than the PlayStation or latest YouTube videos. This booklet gives ideas about how we can help them keep this sense of purpose and hang on to their long term happy!

In this booklet:

- **What is happiness?**
- **How can we nurture 'happy' in our children?**
- **Why a sense of purpose matters.**
- **Top Tips**
- **Where to find out more.**



Where can they find it?

The truth is, they have to grow it. And in a world where increasing numbers of adults have 'lost their happy' and so look for it in external things – their status, their follow count, their possessions, their appearance – how can we help our young ones to spot the little seeds of their happiness and nurture them until they bloom?



How we can help them:

Firstly, we can help them to notice the small things. You can do this by pointing out the small things that bring you joy: feeling the sun on the back of your neck, hearing birds in the morning again after the winter, or just being in your dressing gown. Don't let the dismissive shoulder shrugs put you off – they need to hear it, and it will stay with them. The small stuff really does matter, and connecting it to the physical senses fosters mindfulness, which according to the NHS is one of the 5 steps to wellbeing.

Secondly, feeling good at things feels...well, good. Having a sense of purpose and seeing your efforts pay off are both important to our happiness. But first we need to get them to make an effort! This is a bit of a chicken and egg situation because research suggests that we don't need motivation to make an effort, we need to make an effort to become motivated (which is why a bit of initial bribery could be a necessary evil!). More on this on the next page.



Sense of Purpose

Getting them to take the leap: they might need you to do something with them the first time, if possible, or to hear about when you did something similar.

Supporting their small successes: once you know what their end goal is, help them to plan smaller steps that they can achieve along the way. If they want to start getting up an hour earlier, can they do 15 minutes earlier for a while? Then 30 minutes earlier etc.

We can actually take a lead from one of the many games that seem to have no problem keeping them motivated! In a game like Fortnite, for example:

- What they have to do to succeed is obvious – and success isn't just about reaching 'the end', it's also about lots of individual actions during the game.
- They are engaged in deliberate practice. They are not just aimlessly playing for fun, they use feedback to improve their performance and get better each time.
- There's constant challenge, but also constant feedback about both success and failure. Children don't lose motivation when they repeatedly die in these games, so they won't lose motivation when they're told they've got something wrong, as long as it's balanced so they can see their small successes and their progress along the way.

Did you know...

1. **A young person's own expectations of their achievement has the greatest influence on their achievement.**
2. **Young people tend to underestimate what they are able to achieve.**

Top Tips for Nurturing 'Happy'

1. Don't demand 'happy' all the time! People naturally feel a range of emotions and they're all valid. Being allowed to feel how you feel and having that respected is important to that lasting contentment we're after.
2. Foster their sense of purpose by helping them to achieve their goals. This can be done by supporting them to take small steps towards their goal – whether it's maths homework, basketball or getting out of bed on time, the key is to provide stepping stones to help them move forward.
3. Help them to see that their efforts make a difference by pointing out their small successes along the way. Getting 5/10 this week when it was only 4/10 last week is progress – praise the progress (however small!). By seeing small successes, they begin to expect more success and their levels of confidence and contentment increase.
4. Help them to develop their mindfulness by pointing out the small things related to the physical senses (sight/sound/touch/taste/smell) that make you feel happy.
5. Teach gratitude. Focusing on the things you have to be grateful for has been shown to increase levels of happiness. You can do this by sharing one thing each from your day, journaling or drawing a picture of the things from the day that you're grateful for. Doing these things together has the added bonus of providing a sense of connection, which is also important for happiness.



Top Tips

More Resources

Where to find out more:

NHS

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/feel-better-and-happy/>

Mental Health Foundation

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/how-to-mental-health>

Thrive 365

<https://www.dragonflyimpact.com/thrive365%231>

About Dragonfly: Impact Education

We wholly believe in the potential of young people and their ability to soar through life and make a success of whatever path they choose to go down. But we also recognise that whilst modern life is bursting with opportunity, it's also a bit scary and complicated.

We know first-hand that some children are dealing with some big issues. We've found that they often need an outlet, a listening ear, a chat, a different perspective. And the people that look after them – their families, their carers and their teachers – sometimes need a little help too. That's where we come in.

Through bespoke one-to-one sessions, workshops, presentations, training, talks and programmes - our ambition is simple: to create a world where our children are emotionally healthy, with the tools to successfully steer through modern life.



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