

Taking Care of You and Yours

Segment Six: Cultivate and Savor Joy

At present, most of us can find a few things to complain out. We wish we could go out more; we wish we could go to the gym or the movies or a favorite restaurant. We wish we could hang out with friends in person. Some of us miss physical touch. So, the spread of COVID-19 has provided us with a few negative things to notice. But truth be told, most of us can find a few things to complain about most of the time. No outbreak required.

Have you ever noticed that you or others tend to focus more on the insults than the compliments? That we tend to think more about what went wrong than reflect on what went right? That we respond more quickly and more strongly to negative events? That we focus more quickly on the negative than the positive? If you've noticed this about you – or someone you are close to – it is because of what we know to be an adaptive and evolutionary function called “negativity bias.” Negativity bias is simply the human precondition to prioritize negative input over positive. As a human race, it has been important for us to recognize negative information, including danger. We have learned to scan our environments for threats. This bias can keep us safe, but when overactive in modern times it can also lead to a lower sense of well-being and lower our experience of happiness. We don't live with the same level of threats to life that we once did (lions and tigers and bears, oh my!), but our bodies are still processing the threats (emails and traffic and cares, oh my!) in the same way. This can lead to overwhelm. The good news is that there are myriad ways and practices for us to address this bias and to work to increase positivity in our daily lives. We need that now as much if not more than ever. One way is through savoring joy.

Beyond the obvious advantages of feeling more joyful, intentionally cultivating and expanding joy can help us to feel more present and increase both attention and concentration. How does one intentionally cultivate joy? One great way is through savoring – appreciating and revisiting our experiences of joy, which is easier than it may initially sound...

- Take a moment and think about a recent joyful moment in your life. What is something you have recently enjoyed? A moment in relationship with someone that has recently brought you joy? A moment in nature? A moment doing something that you really enjoy?
- Play it over in your mind.
- Reflect on the experience and the joy it brought to you. What was happening during this moment?



How does it feel as you relive that experience? Where do you feel it? Can you relax into this feeling of joy?

- Let that grow.

As we savor the joy in our lives, we anchor it. We give it attention and help it to grow. As we focus more on the positive, we see more of it. (We will think about this concept again soon when we review the benefits of practicing gratitude.) This helps us to work against the natural negativity bias, and recognize and experience more positives – and more joy. We may also want to increase the number of our joyful experiences. What are the things you most enjoy? Whether it is time spent with family or outside or doing something creative, how can you plan to include more into your day or week? This week, if you would like to cultivate joy, see if you can do more things that bring you joy, and take the time to savor those moments. Have a week filled with more joy!