

Habits of Happiness

A handout from a six-week class on the science of happiness.

About the class

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About this accessible version

This is an accessibility-formatted version of the Habits of Happiness handout. It uses a single-column linear reading order, proper heading levels for screen-reader navigation, and spells out every web address in full so the document is usable whether it is read aloud, printed, or viewed on screen. Use your screen reader's heading navigation commands to jump between sections.

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Part 1: What the class looks like

Approach: learn, practice, share

- Reflection helps adults process information.
- Sharing validates experiences and builds relationships.

Structure: six weeks covering six core aspects of happiness science

The six topics covered, one per week, are:

- Gratitude.
- Self-care.
- Relationships.
- Resilience.
- Kindness.
- Meaning.

Weekly format

With the exception of week 1, when there was no previous learning or homework, each week followed this pattern:

- Summarize last week's topic.
- Discuss our experience with our homework.
- Explore the next topic through video and discussion.
- Make an action plan of things to practice.
- Close with a meditation on positive thoughts.

Part 2: The six happiness habits

These are the six habits explored in the class. Each one is something you can practice in daily life.

Gratitude

Establish the habit of finding time to focus on things you are grateful for every day.

Self-care

Incorporate self-care into your daily routine. Include yourself on the list of things to take care of.

Relationships

Let people know that you appreciate them and that you are grateful they are in your life.

Resilience

Think about the strengths that have helped you through tough times in the past. Avoid negative thinking traps. Look for what is good.

Kindness

Practice kindness. It contributes to the wellbeing of others and of ourselves, and it helps create happier communities.

Meaning

Cultivate meaning by how you show up, contribute, and connect to people, places, and the world around you. Notice how you are part of the world in many wonderful ways.

Editor's note: the original handout pairs this section with an illustration of a polar bear holding a glowing heart (artwork credited to Sherri Bishop, 2025) and a short inspirational verse by Nanea Hoffman. The verse is omitted from this accessible version for copyright reasons, but its theme is gentle: a wish for more kindness, laughter, conversation, art, and ordinary, everyday wonder.

Part 3: Closing meditation

Begin your two-minute meditation by settling into a comfortable position. Gently close your eyes or soften your gaze, allowing the body to relax.

Breath

Bring your attention to your breath. Notice the natural rhythm of each inhale and exhale. Take a deep, slow breath in, and a long, easy breath out. Letting go of any tension with each exhale.

Wishes for yourself

Repeat these phrases silently to yourself a few times, sending warmth and positive intentions inwards with each breath:

- May I be safe.
- May I be well.
- May I be happy.

Wishes for someone you care for

Now think of someone you care for. As you focus on this person, silently offer them these wishes, sending warmth and positive intentions towards them with each breath:

- May you be safe.
- May you be well.
- May you be happy.

Closing

Take one more deep, cleansing breath in, and let it go with a gentle sigh.

Part 4: Recommended books

The following books were recommended in the class. Two of them have free PDF versions available online; the links are spelled out below.

- How to Be Happy: 10 Keys to Happier Living, by Vanessa King.
- The Art of Happiness, by the Dalai Lama.
- **The Gifts of Imperfection, by Brené Brown.** A free PDF version is available. Link: https://ati.dae.gov.in/ati12052021_4.pdf
- 10% Happier, by Dan Harris.
- **Aging With Grace: What the Nun Study Teaches Us About Living Longer, Healthier, and More Meaningful Lives, by David Snowdon.** A free PDF version is available. Link: https://www.academia.edu/43965557/David_snowdon_aging_with_grace
- Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.
- The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness, by Robert Waldinger.
- Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom, by William Glasser.
- The Aging of Aquarius: The Hippies of the 60s in Their 60s and Beyond, by Galit Nimrod.
- Feeling Good: The Science of Well-Being, by C. Robert Cloninger.

Part 5: Research and articles

Each item below includes the title and a full web address that you can follow.

- **Therapeutic Benefits of Physical Activity for Mood: A Systematic Review on the Effects of Exercise Intensity, Duration, and Modality.** Link: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30321106/>
- **Thinking Traps: How to Let Go of Negative Thoughts, from the Chelsea Psychology Clinic.** Link: <https://www.thechelseapsychologyclinic.com/mood-management/thinking-traps/>
- **The Science of Kindness, from Cedars-Sinai.** Link: <https://www.cedars-sinai.org/stories-and-insights/healthy-living/science-of-kindness>
- **Four Daily Habits of Truly Happy People, from Fortune.** Link: <https://fortune.com/well/article/happiness-daily-habits/>
- **Giving Thanks Can Make You Happier, from Harvard Health.** Link: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>
- **Does Gratitude Rewire Your Brain?, from the American Brain Foundation.** Link: <https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/does-gratitude-rewire-your-brain/>
- **Seven Ways to Bring More Meaning to Your Life, from Greater Good Magazine at U.C. Berkeley.** Link: https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/seven_ways_to_bring_more_meaning_to_your_life
- **Reconsidering Change and Continuity in Later Life: Toward an Innovation Theory of Successful Aging.** Link: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17703747/>

Part 6: Free happiness classes

- **HarvardX: Managing Happiness**, taught by Arthur Brooks. A six-week class.
Link: <https://pll.harvard.edu/course/managing-happiness>
- **BerkeleyX: The Science of Happiness**. An eight-week class. Link:
https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/what_we_do/event/the_science_of_happiness
- **Action for Happiness: a six-week course** plus many additional resources.
Link: <https://actionforhappiness.org/>

Part 7: Resource video channels

Two YouTube channels recommended for ongoing learning.

- **Greater Good Science Center on YouTube.** Link: <https://www.youtube.com/@greatergoodscience>
- **Action for Happiness on YouTube.** Link: <https://www.youtube.com/@actionforhappiness>

Part 8: YouTube videos used in the six-week class

These are the individual videos used as discussion starters during the class, in the order they appeared in the original handout.

- **The Science of Gratitude.** Link:
https://youtu.be/JMd1CcGZYwU?si=Qx6ddNALhGODAqd_
- **A Self-Care Action Plan.** Link:
<https://youtu.be/w0iVTQS8ftg?si=0gG0QiB2TsqUX4H7>
- **The Importance of Relationships.** Link:
https://youtu.be/6Ntt28LfCp4?si=twWzrJ3Df7_MeQ7i
- **Causing a Scene with Improv Everywhere.** Link:
<https://youtu.be/ysln0YyjUok?si=4r9vC37DwH7wPbsn>
- **What Are Thinking Traps?.** Link:
https://youtu.be/rfrvrNekzLE?si=ZKKmcqoiM7_Wl1eu
- **An Experiment in Gratitude, from The Science of Happiness.** Link:
<https://youtu.be/oHv6vTKD6lg?si=J7ZASlz4SQnKayg6>
- **What Makes Life Meaningful?.** Link:
<https://youtu.be/RLFVoEF2RI0?si=ah0Va8LDjDzzGuef>

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