

Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Course: Finding Happiness

Level: High School



Objective: Students will gain an understanding about the concept of happiness and define positive psychology. Students will implement daily practices to help increase personal happiness and identify the benefits of said practices.

Objective: In this module, students will discuss the definition of positive psychology and what it means to be happy, brainstorm how to perform acts of kindness in small groups, form social connections with other students, and reflect on and find time to engage in personal interests.

Application & Benefits: Students will gain an understanding about the concept of happiness and define positive psychology. Students will implement daily practices to help increase personal happiness and identify the benefits of said practices.

Course Snapshot

This lesson incorporates the following activities, information and Teacher Tools.

- #1
- #2
- #3
- #4

LESSONS	ACTIVITY	TIME REQUIRED	RESOURCES & MATERIALS NEEDED
Introductory Lesson: Positive Psychology and Happiness	Discussion	5 – 10 minutes	About Happiness Student Instructions Activity Definitions White board and expo markers
Performing Acts of Kindness	Group Activity	10 minutes	About Happiness Student Instructions Activity Definitions Timer, Notecards, one per student
Forming Positive Social Relationships	Group Activity	10 minutes	About Happiness Student Instructions Activity Definitions White board and expo markers
Happiness Through Self-Improvement	Discussion Journaling	5 – 10 minutes	About Happiness Student Instructions Activity Definitions Timer, Student Planners

ABOUT HAPPINESS

Defining Positive Psychology and Happiness

What is positive psychology?

Positive psychology was introduced by Martin Seligman in 1998. Positive psychology focuses on what makes individuals want to have happy, meaningful and fulfilling lives, and attempts to prevent mental illness. In other words, the goal of positive psychology is to minimize the chances that an individual will experience mental struggles, instead of trying to fix mental health illnesses that have already developed.



What is happiness?

Happiness is defined as the presence of positive emotions and a positive attitude. Happiness isn't something to be found or reached, but rather it is a state of being. In other words, happiness is not a 'place,' but a 'state' and it is up to each individual to each person to find happiness in what they do. What makes one person happy doesn't necessarily make another person happy.



Although this definition seems straight forward, many individuals struggle with it. Experiencing overall happiness does not mean that you cannot or will not feel negative emotions once in a while. Everyone experiences negative emotions like sadness and anxiety, but finding happiness is about refocusing and minimizing those emotions. Also, understanding that it is unrealistic to be happy all the time is a key component of finding happiness. The key is to not dwell on the emotions of frustration, anger or other negative emotions.

Module Rationale:

Although some individuals are naturally happier than others, research shows that happiness can be taught. Teaching students to find happiness has future implications, such as improved mental health throughout life, increased learning and retention, and higher resilience in the face of challenging life events. People who engage in exercises to find happiness are less likely to develop depression and show less feelings of anxiety, worthlessness, loneliness, and suicidal ideation. Researchers have also discovered correlations between happiness and heart health, lower blood pressure and even stronger immune systems. Researchers have also discovered correlations between happiness and heart health, lower blood pressure and even stronger immune systems.

Research has shown that happy students are more likely than unhappy students to concentrate and look forward to the learning experience. As a result, students who have found or practice finding personal happiness perform better in school than those who do not. Brain research supports the importance of happiness on learning. Students who show behaviors associated with happiness have a more active hippocampus, the brain area associated with learning and memory, than those who do not.

Happiness has also been associated with improved behavior and a positive classroom climate. These two factors are crucial to the learning experience. It is difficult for instructors to focus on teaching when students are misbehaving. A positive, constructive classroom climate, Provides students with a safe space to work hard and accept learning challenges.

The goal of this module is to help students discover their personal happiness. This module will demonstrate to students how to find happiness and how to implement routines that promote happiness in their daily routine.



Feedback to Students

It is common for students to think that happiness depends on outside factors and that they cannot control it. Remind them that happiness can be found through hard work and intentionality. This module will teach them techniques that they can use to increase their overall happiness.

Helpful Tips

Some students might think that they know what happiness means. They might be reluctant to learn more about it. Explain to them that we all have a general concept of what it means to be happy. Explain to student that although they might know what being happy looks or feels like, it is important to learn about ways through which we can play a role in our own happiness.

Activity #1:

Positive Psychology and Happiness

Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of positive psychology and happiness. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #1 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.).

View Teacher Tool: Happiness Bubble Chart.

Definitions

What is positive psychology?

Positive psychology was started by Martin Seligman in 1998. Positive psychology focuses on what makes individuals want to have happy, meaningful and fulfilling lives while preventing mental illnesses. In other words, positive psychology works by minimizing the chances that a person will experience mental struggles, rather than by fixing illnesses that have already developed.

What is happiness?

Happiness is defined as the presence of positive emotions and a positive attitude. Happiness isn't something to be found or reached, but rather it is a state of being. In other words, happiness is not a 'place,' but a 'state' and it is up to each individual to each person to find happiness in what they do. What makes one person happy doesn't necessarily make another person happy.



Activity

Create a bubble chart on the white board. See the Teacher Tool: Happiness Bubble Chart for a visual. Start by writing the definition of positive psychology in one bubble. Connect that to a bubble with “happiness” written inside it. Discuss with students the relationship between positive psychology and happiness. Positive psychology focuses on what makes individuals want to have happy, meaningful and fulfilling lives; essentially, how we can practice experience happiness in our daily lives.

After doing that, ask students to mention what makes them happy. These answers can be varied, ranging from traveling to hanging out with friends to listening to music.

After students are done giving ideas, make sure to add the activities included in Lesson Plans 2-4: performing acts of kindness, forming new social connections, and self-improvement. Tell students that this bubble chart gives an overview of what they will be learning in the following lesson plans. Tell them to keep the chart in mind when participating in the upcoming activities.

Activity #2: Performing Acts of Kindness

Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of positive psychology and happiness. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #2 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.).

Prepare the materials needed, one notecard per student and a timer, and decide how you will separate students into groups of four.

Definitions

What do we mean by performing “acts of kindness”?

Kindness comes in many forms. It is important to know that even small acts of kindness can make a difference. Whereas donating large amounts to organizations or volunteering daily for great causes can be very rewarding, it is unrealistic to expect everyone to do this. The truth is that not everyone has the time or resources.

“Acts of kindness” can be as small as complimenting someone, helping a classmate understand an assignment, or offering to drive someone to school or work.



How can performing acts of kindness contribute to our happiness?

Researchers conducted a meta-analysis involving over 400 studies investigating the relationship between acts of kindness and happiness. They concluded that we do find satisfaction and increase our happiness by helping others.

Satisfaction is a crucial component of happiness. Performing acts of kindness also creates an atmosphere of generosity in schools, at home, and at any social environment. It is important to belong to a positive environment if we want to improve our happiness.



Activity

Split students into groups of four. Distribute one notecard to each student (if notecards are unavailable, ask students to get out two pieces of notebook paper and tear them in half).

Share with students the importance of kindness and some examples of how we can perform acts of kindness.

Explain to students that they will have 20 seconds to write down (on their notecard or piece of paper) a simple act of kindness. If students are having trouble coming up with ideas, give them some examples to start their brainstorming, such as, complimenting a stranger, helping someone study, helping a person cross the street, sitting with someone during lunch, etc.



Once the 20 seconds are over, instruct students to pass the notecard within their groups to the person on their left. Set the timer for another 20 seconds and ask students to come up with a different act of kindness, one that is different than what is written on the card. Repeat this until the notecards have circled around each group twice. If students were separated into groups of 4 and you rotated the cards around twice, there should be 8 acts of kindness on each notecard.

Once the last set of 20 seconds is up, ask students to share within their groups the acts of kindness written on their notecard. Tell each student to pick two more acts of kindness shared by other group members and to write them down. Each student should have a total of ten acts of kindness.

Encourage students to perform at least one act of kindness each day for the next ten days. One way to do this is by asking them to write down what act they did each day on a piece of paper, or even check off the ideas on their notecards. Ask them to share this when the ten days have passed. Students are free to use the ideas on their notecards for inspiration, but should not be limited to them.

After ten days, revisit this activity with students. Ask them to share how performing a daily act of kindness affected their happiness in regards to their mood, behavior, and attitude.

Activity #3: Forming Positive Social Connections

Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of positive psychology. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #3 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc).

Prepare the materials needed, a timer, and decide how you will separate students into groups of four or five.

Definitions



Why is social interaction important?

Psychologists agree that humans are social creatures. Isolation leads to feelings associated with depression, such as sadness and worthlessness. People who interact with others on a regular basis show higher levels of happiness than those who do not. Healthy social interactions allow us to express our feelings and receive the help we need and deserve.



What kinds of relationships should we be a part of?

Although social interaction is important to achieve happiness, we must differentiate between positive and negative relationships. Positive relationships are those where care and love is mutual. In other words, it comes from both sides of the relationship. A true friend or partner should never expect you to do something you do not want to do, or make you feel sad most of the time. It is difficult to differentiate between negative and positive relationships. Here are some characteristics of negative relationships that can help identify them: obsessive behavior such as stalking, excessive jealousy and overprotectiveness, physical or sexual abuse, constant insulting and demeaning of a partner's qualities, and many others.

Helpful Tips

- Talking about relationships can be difficult. Some students might be in negative relationships at the moment. Be patient with them. Do not force any student to speak if he does not feel comfortable doing so.
- Talking about relationships can trigger difficult emotions in some students. Remind students that there are resources to help them, such as teachers and counselors.

Activity

Split students into groups of four or five. Tell students that they will be taking part in an activity to establish social connections with their peers. Explain to them the importance of social connections and the difference between positive and negative relationships. Use the information in the previous Teachers Instructions to do this.

Set a timer for five minutes. Tell students that they will have five minutes to talk within their groups and to come up with something they all love. This can be anything from a specific sport to a movie. This should not be school-related things like “we all have homework” or “we all go to school.” Start the timer.

After the five minutes are over, ask each group to share what they came up with. Write each of these answers on the board.

Brainstorm with the students what they can do to build their positive relationships and social connections, either by meeting new people or improving current positive relationships. Use the interests written on the board as guidance. If students are struggling with this portion of the activity, share some of the suggestions below.

- Joining or starting a club
- Introducing yourself to a classmate
- Send a text message to a friend you haven’t spoken to in awhile
- Plan a movie night with a group of friends
- Volunteer at an animal shelter
- Form a study group for an upcoming math test
- Start a workout routine with a friend



Activity #4: Happiness Through Self-Improvement

Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of positive psychology and happiness. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #4 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.).

Prepare the materials needed, a timer, and decide how you will separate students into groups of four.

Definitions

What is self-improvement? How can we exercise it?

On a general basis, self-improvement refers to our conscious effort to grow. Self-improvement can be applied to various aspects of life, such as knowledge and attitude. Interestingly, being well-rounded and being active in our society improves both our knowledge and our attitude. This can have a positive effect on our personal happiness.



To exercise self-improvement, it is important to find activities and events you are excited about. Our hobbies can give us a sense of purpose and motivation, which again, may have an effect on our happiness.



Activity

Discuss with students the definition of self-improvement. Explain that they can practice self-improvement by participating in personally meaningful activities, such as clubs, sports, or volunteering. Use the information from above for guidance.

Tell students to get out a piece of notebook paper. Tell students that they will have five minutes to write down as many hobbies or interests as they can think of. Give them some examples, such as drawing, writing, running, etc.

Explain to students that some pastimes can be related to the previous activities in this module. For example, a student might enjoy volunteering at a homeless shelter. This relates to both this lesson plan and to "Activity 2: Performing Acts of Kindness." Joining a sports team relates to both this lesson plan and to "Activity 3: Forming Positive Social Connections." Explain that finding these connections can be useful during busy school weeks.

Set a timer for five minutes and allow students to list their hobbies and interests.

After five minutes are over, ask students to get out their planners or cellphones with a calendar. Ask students to find a block of time during the week in which they can set aside for their hobby or interest. Tell them to schedule that time as "Self-improvement." This block of time will be used to participate in any activities they love. If a student does not have a specific hobby in mind, tell him to use that time each week to explore different hobbies.



Student Instructions

Activity #1

Positive Psychology and Happiness

Define

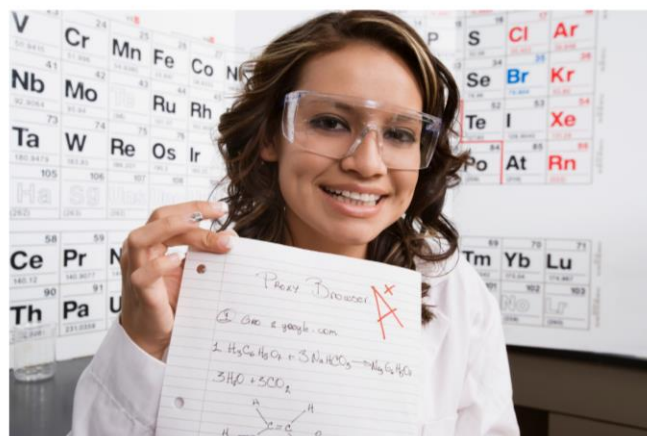
What is positive psychology?

Positive psychology is a fairly new branch of psychology that focuses on what makes individuals want to have happy, meaningful and fulfilling lives. Positive psychology works in ways that minimize and prevent mental illnesses.

What is happiness?

Happiness is defined as the presence of positive emotions and a positive attitude. Happiness isn't something to be found or reached, but rather it is a state of being. In other words, happiness is not a 'place,' but a 'state' and it is up to each individual to each person to find happiness in what they do.

What makes one person happy doesn't necessarily make another person happy.



Discuss

What is the relationship between positive psychology and happiness?

Share

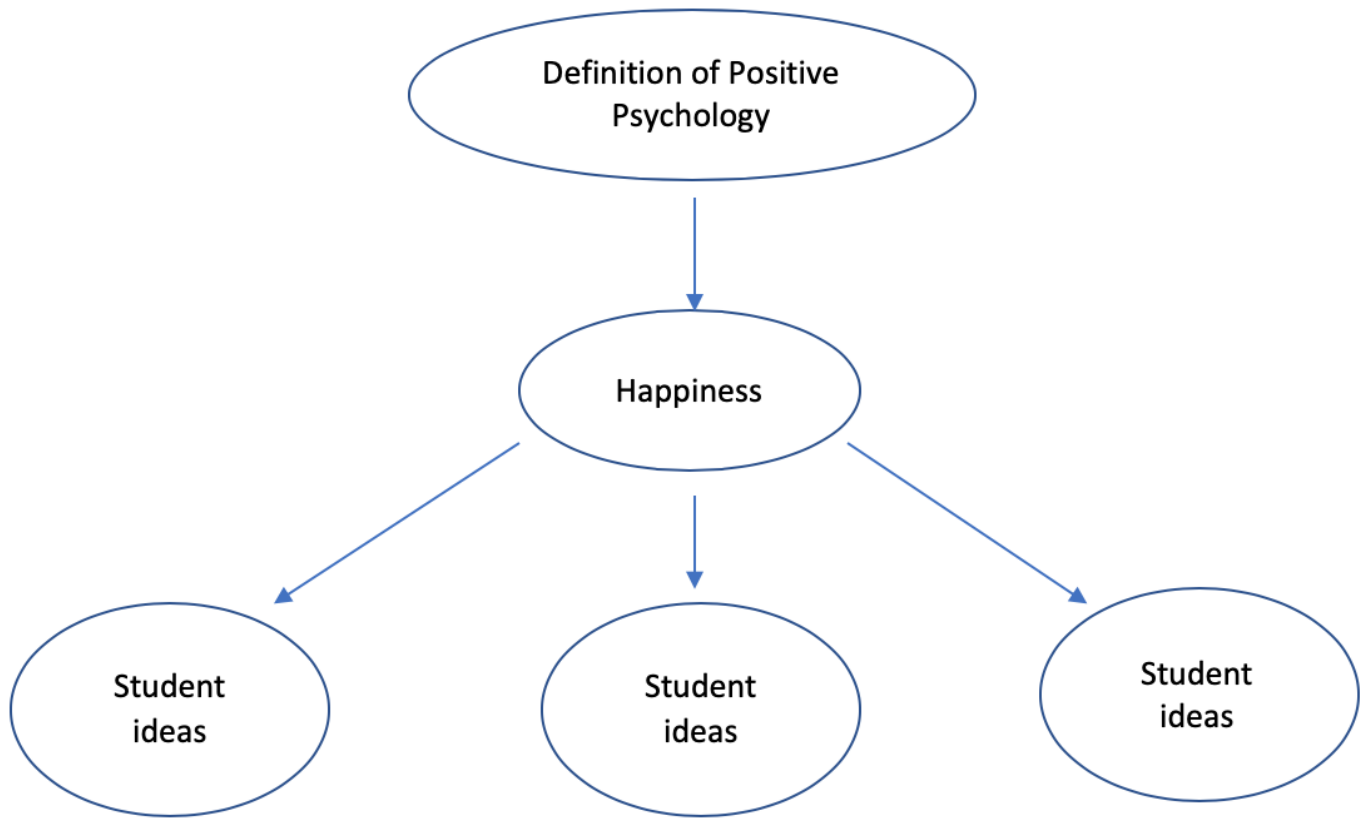
What makes you happy?



*"Happy people build their inner world.
Unhappy people blame their outer world." - Buddha*

Happiness Bubble Chart

(Example)



Student Instructions

Activity #2:

Exercising Gratitude

Define

What does it mean to perform an act of kindness?

Discuss

How can performing acts of kindness contribute to your own happiness?

Pass the Card

Write down one act of kindness on your card. As the cards are passed to the left, read what has been written, and add a different act of kindness to that card.

Apply

For the next ten days, perform one act of kindness each day. Use the ideas on your notecard for inspiration!

Revisit and Share

After the ten days have passed, think about how performing one act of kindness per change affected your happiness?

How has your mood changed? Your behavior? Your attitude?

Fascinating Details

Research has shown that giving to others contributes more to happiness than spending on ourselves. Researchers at Harvard Business School and the University of British Columbia found that people scored higher on a satisfaction survey when they remembered a time they spent money on someone else than when they remembered a time they spent money on themselves!



Student Instructions

Activity #3:

Forming Positive Social Connections

Discuss

Why is social interaction important to our happiness?

What does a healthy and positive relationship look like?

What are some characteristics of unhealthy and negative relationships?

Find Common Ground

In your group of four or five, talk to each other and find something that everyone enjoys.

Share

Tell the rest of the class what your group has in common.

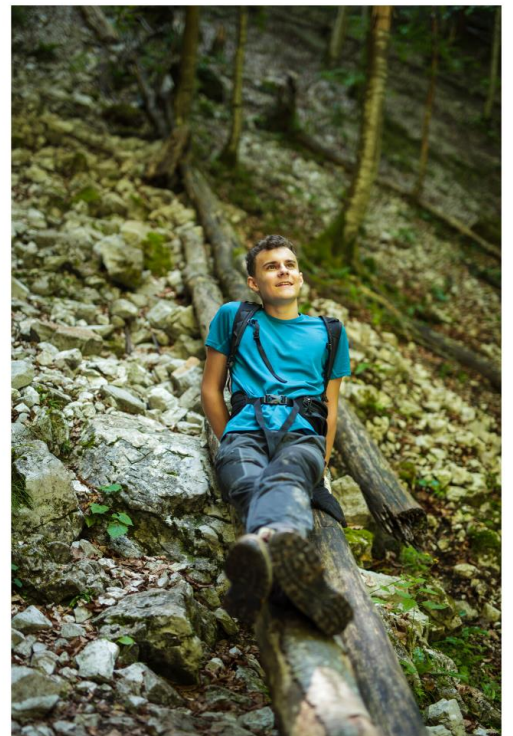
Brainstorm

What else can you do to form new healthy and positive relationships?

What can you do to maintain your current healthy relationships?

Fascinating Details

Greater social interaction is associated not only with improved mental health, but also with improved physical health! Research has shown that a positive social network aids in recovery from life-threatening illnesses like cancer. Research has also seen an association between socializing and a more active immune system!



Student Instructions

Activity #4:

Happiness Through Self-Improvement

Define

What is self-improvement?

How can self-improvement help increase our happiness?

Make a list

Write down your hobbies and interests. Think about something you might want to learn, like how to play guitar, or something you want to improve, such as a recipe for chili.

Plan

Look at your weekly schedule. Set aside a block of time each week for you to use as Self-Improvement time.

Brainstorm

What else can you do to form new healthy and positive relationships?

What can you do to maintain your current healthy relationships?



*“Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life,
the whole aim and the end of human existence” – Aristotle*

Quick Quiz

1. Which of the following is true about happiness?

- a. It removes all negative emotions from our lives.
- b. It can be found through everyday activities.
- c. It cannot be improved through constant effort.
- d. It comes naturally to every student.

2. How can performing acts of kindness for others contribute to our own happiness?

- a. It creates a feeling of satisfaction.
- b. It creates a feeling of competition.
- c. It creates a feeling of relaxation.
- d. It creates a feeling of inferiority.

3. Which of the following is a characteristic of a positive social relationship?

- a. Obsessive behavior and jealousy.
- b. Excessive overprotectiveness.
- c. Consistent insulting and demeaning.
- d. Mutual affection and respect.

4. What is self-improvement?

- a. Our conscious effort to grow.
- b. Our ability to be happy with life.
- c. Our decision to help others.
- d. Our refusal to engage in activities.

Quiz Key:

1) B 2) A 3) D 4) A

Teacher Feedback

Please provide insights on any adjustments made regarding the actual use of the content above.
Feel free to share your thoughts, suggestions, constructive criticism.

Email your feedback to: info@mylearningtools.org