

"Finding" Happiness

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Everyone wants to "find" happiness ... but happiness is not really a destination or an object that can be lost or found ... it's a state of mind, or a goal for living your life (the phrase "pursuit of happiness" is prescient on the part of our Founding Fathers!). You don't simply find, or lose, happiness ... your mind has to be prepared either way.

If you only evaluate your happiness based on your possessions or achievements, or lack thereof, you may be missing some wonderful opportunities that could be waiting for you. The truth is you won't find out what makes you truly happy unless you take a risk or embark on a journey every once in a while; you need to test yourself. If you never try new things, how do you know that you are happy or not? We usually call the act of never venturing forth "being stuck in a rut."

Look for healthy and realistic activities that could benefit you in some way. Putting yourself out there it is not always easy, but finding someone who may want to join your adventure could make the process more enjoyable. This could be taking a class in something that you may have a passing interest in, or joining a group that may be involved in a mission that resonates with you.

Un-sticking From the Rut

Below is a list of things that I have shared with many of my patients who, from time to time, may feel like their lives are stuck in a rut:

1. Mind the mind and body connection: You can best enjoy life when you are relatively healthy and your body and mind are on the same page. Your mind needs to be at ease,

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uncluttered, and present in the moment. Resentment, anger, jealousy, and confusion only detract you from accessing and executing healthful goals. Staying organized, forgiving and focused on your needs instead of comparing yourself to others can help you move toward a healthier outlook.

2. Do what is enjoyable: Establish a list of things you love to do but can't find the time to do. By identifying those things that bring you joy, the closer you will come to finding happiness. For example gardening, going for a swim, cooking your favorite dish, inviting friends for dinner or listening to music with your eyes shut can bring you happiness even if it is only for a brief moment.

3. Adopt a new interest: Seeing and experiencing with new things can reboot a spiraling down attitude. It is amazing how changing your scenery and giving yourself a new experience can lead you to adopt a new perspective. Once you help build back your confidence evaluate what other things you can attempt and if you like it, try it.

4. Make your work fun: Even if your work feels like drudgery, remember it is big part of your life. No matter what your work is, find a way to hold your head up and smile. Remember work is something that you **can** change, unlike the family you were born into. Even though an economic downturn may not be the right time to seek new employment, it is could be a good idea when times are better, so be prepared by learning new skills.

5. Help others: You must have helped others in the past, think how you felt then. It is natural to feel happy to help others in need, do it more often, it helps improve your feelings of self worth.

6. Live in the present: One of the worst things you can do to yourself is live in the past by constantly rehashing old memories. **Live** in the present but **plan** for the future. Somebody said 'Life happens to you when you are planning for other things.' I have found that people who live in the present moment are happier than those who live in the past or too far in the future. Young children, the happiest of the lot, live in present, they immediately forget the fights they have had and start playing again. They make many more opportunities for fun, to learn and to grow way.

7. Commit to being happy: Find the determination to make a promise to yourself to always look for the silver lining in **every** life event. A positive attitude helps enormously.

Happier Relationships

One of the biggest reasons why people are unhappy is because they fall into unhealthy patterns in their relationships. To break loose you may need to **stop** focusing on your differences and what is **not** working. A few things you can do are to forgive, let go, and work to mend your conflicts.

For instance, when I work with couples who are unhappy, I validate for them that as long as there is still some attraction and mutual respect, they have a shot at turning things around. I also let them know that not everyone is on the same wavelength in a relationship and often putting ourselves in the other person's shoes can help us mend difference. Here are just a few ideas for improving your relationships:

1. **Share:** Your partner can't read your mind. Always express your feelings, desires, needs and the things that you long to do together. If you feel you don't have his attention, then try writing him letters and encourage him to give you a written. Writing is a powerful tool back to intimacy.
2. **Speak your truth:** Mind games are a waste of time. Your partner can't read between the lines if you say "nothing" or "I'm fine." If you are fuming inside be honest with him but, don't act it out. The more honest you are with each other, the more true happiness you find together.
3. **Trust each other:** The way toward rebuilding closeness is through trust. Without it, your relationship will self-destruct. With it, your intimacy and desire for each other will grow.
4. **Spend quality time:** People change and so do their likes and dislikes. Knowing each other's preferences and basic concerns means making time as a couple. Going on dates without friends or family tagging along can reboot the intimacy in your relationship. Take a romantic excursion. Pick a romantic spot and go but, don't go with any expectations. Plan for only fun and de-stressing; outlaw arguments during this special time. Let things just evolve so the thick walls that were built up slowly come down.
5. **Be flexible:** Compromise and negotiation is part of every relationship. Plan to do things that your partner enjoys and you don't, and vice versa. Remember mutual giving, taking and compatibility are key parts of loving and intimate relationship.

Conclusion

Whether you are single or not the key to happiness is accepting what you are experiencing now and knowing that it will eventually change. Wishing something

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away doesn't do much without following up with focused action. When you step back and start observing what is going wrong, you can better accept what is going on than resist it. So, if you are frustrated, ponder your frustration. In order to observe your frustration you need to just stay in the moment and look at your reactions, emotions, thoughts, circumstances and all events that your frustration entailed. Once you do so, you can accept it as it is and move on. Resistance just causes you to stay locked up, acceptance helps you detach, become more objective about it and handle it with ease. Just saying to yourself "It is what it is and I can still do something about for myself," will help you with acceptance.

We often get stuck in our problems because we don't take time to consider what we really feel, have or need. Depression, passivity and resentment can feel like we're going through downward spiral especially if you are not getting results. If you can't accept that life is not fair and results don't always come when we want them, you will probably end up feeling stuck in a rut. In order to stop spinning your wheels it is important to consider the following:

- 1. Dispute with your inner critic:** Every time you want to make an excuse for yourself, give way to your irrational feelings or say "I can't", you need to stand up to that inner negative voice. You need to argue with your weaker self and point out reasons for why doing X,Y, Z is better than not doing anything.
- 2. Wear your brainstorm artillery:** Reserve time each day to write down your options no matter how weird, silly or frivolous. Then, when your negative voice comes up again, you'll be able to rattle off ideas from your brainstorm ammunition belt.

3. **Do a little each day:** Make your goals reasonable and attainable. Chip away at these goals one at a time. Instead of cleaning your whole house try to spend a few minutes just picking up one room.
4. **Change it up:** Instead of doing the "same 'ole same 'ole" take a plunge. This can be as easy as trying something new like eating a foreign dish, taking an interesting class, or making a plan with an old friend. Just breaking out of a routine, can give you a sense of renewed hope.
5. **Know what's in your way:** What are your road blocks? Write them down and see what which ones are imagined, workable or just not in your control. The later can lead to feeling depleted and depressed. Envisioning what you need and focusing your energies in a direction where you can see positive change can infuse rather than rob energy.
6. **Schedule time just for you:** It only takes a few minutes to take time for yourself and feel refreshed. Do you need time to window shop, go to the gym, read a book, mediate or get a massage? What are you waiting for, you can make it happen. Know what you need and then create a plan to get it. The more you go with what you need, the more happiness will come your way.
7. **Use the world around you:** Everyone gets into emotional funks but your environment can help to inspire you. Even if you can't afford to take a cruise, or a trip, just open your blinds, go to your public library or check out the local museum. There are wonderful things to see if you open your eyes!

Please remember that "Rome was not built in a day." Worrying about what you did or didn't do the day before is a true waste of time. Taking things in little increments and giving yourself some slack is definitely in order. Also, don't forget to reward yourself for moving **toward** happiness. Verbal reinforcement works just as it did when you were a child. Pats on your back work best when they are from yourself. Feel good about your accomplishments, however small. Remember that no one is immune to the pitfalls of life, but if you have faith in yourself, you can, at least, find peace of mind.

As Dr. Seuss said, "...don't cry because it is over. Smile because it happened."

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