

PARENT WORKBOOK ACTIVITY 6: Appreciating Happy Experiences

“Focusing on happiness is not a frivolous pursuit; it is one of the emotions that can inform the trajectory of our lives.” – Goldie Hawn, 10 Mindful Minutes

We actually have the ability to train our brains to actively savor happy experiences in order to reap the benefits. Focusing on the positive is not just a “sentimental idea” but is actually grounded in current neuroscience. Our brains release dopamine (a feel good neurotransmitter) when we remember a happy moment in the same way as if we were actually experiencing it. Nurturing this practice overtime actually changes the way our brains are wired and impacts how we feel, think, and behave.

Savoring Happiness

Let’s make our own individual Happy Memory Mini-Movies! Together, we are going to savor a personal happy memory, and “see” it behind closed eyes like we would a movie.

- Bring all your attention to your happy experience/memory
- Start the mini-movie in your mind
- See the people involved, notice the things that make you happy. Notice your thoughts and how your body is feeling
- Picture the way your happy memory ends, and focus on how it makes you feel

MindUP™ Family Activity Ideas:

Ages 4-6: Teaching perspective taking

- “ABC Glee”- Help your child create a book where every page is filled with things that make him happy which start with the respective letter. Use pictures from magazines, take photographs, or allow him to create his own drawings.

Ages 7-10: Teaching perspective taking

- “Happy Haikus”- The Haiku is a very short form of Japanese poetry that consists of 17 syllables in three lines. Typically 5,7,5. Write Happy Haikus together, collecting them in a book.

Ice Skating with friends
Snow Gently Falls Around Us
Soon Hot Chocolate!

Ages 11-14: Teaching perspective taking

- “Top Five”- Help your child begin actively identifying what they need to do to feel good and happy. Have them identify the top five things that turn their mood around. It’s a lifelong gift for them to understand that it’s within their reach to turn the tide in regard to their feelings. Some popular choices for the top five include: drawing, running, yoga, music, talking to friends, dancing.

Parent Workbook Activity 6 :

MindUP™ For Parents

As a MindUP™ Family:

Create a Family Happy Memories book. When you have a fun or positive experience together, take a picture and paste it in the book. Take turns writing about the experience underneath the picture. Revisit the book often, looking through the pictures and captions, mindfully remembering the happy experiences together.



PARENT WORKBOOK ACTIVITY 6: Practice at Home! Performing Acts of Kindness

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Performing Acts of Kindness

The most powerful thing you can do is model kindness to yourself, your family and others. If you have moments of unkind reactions, pay attention, ask yourself what’s going on and then get back on track by making a repair. Your kids will learn from your example.

Language is powerful. Set an intention to use kind words throughout the day (especially in ear shot of your children) such as: generous, helpful, warm, loving, gentle, understanding, respectful, nurturing, friendly.

MindUP™ Family Activity Ideas:

Ages 4-6: Teaching perspective taking

- “Magic Kindness Wand”- Create a special magic wand from a stick, straw or toy, that your young child can use to spread kindness. When he touches a family member with the wand, the family member must say something kind or have a suggestion of how he could extend a kindness to someone else.

Ages 7-10: Teaching perspective taking

- “BFF PowerPoint”- If your child’s friend is sick and misses school, encourage her to put together a creative get-well card using PowerPoint. She can search for uplifting pictures and quotes and then deliver by email.

Ages 11-14: Teaching perspective taking

- “Boom Boom” - Be kind! Track it online. Use the Boom Boom app which allows your teen to upload random acts of kindness that you witness or experience. Let kindness go viral!
<http://boomboomcards.com/>

Parent Workbook Activity 6 :

MindUP™ For Parents

As a MindUP™ Parent:

Notice specific incidents where kids act in kind, pro-social ways and make comments that reinforce their kind acts as character traits. Avoid bribing your kids to do the right thing. Research has shown that extrinsic rewards actually discourage children from spontaneously acting in kind ways. Give them opportunities to feel the intrinsic pay off for being kind.



PARENT WORKBOOK ACTIVITY 6: Practice at Home! Taking Mindful Action in the World

When parents are asked what they want for their children, a common answer is “I want them to be happy and I want them to contribute to their community.” Mindful awareness, compassion, optimism and gratitude come to maturity when we integrate these qualities and take mindful action in the world. Volunteering as a family helps kids see themselves as activators and change agents. That pro-active, problem-solving posture can show up in all areas of life going forward. Service-oriented families are more compassionate, less isolated, more tolerant, less egocentric and feel more connected to their communities.

Taking Mindful Action in the World

Brainstorm as a family ways you can make a powerful impact for good for another family, a school, your neighborhood, your community, or even across the world. In order to make your family volunteer experience successful, ask yourselves the following:

1. Who are we helping and why?
2. What tasks will we be doing?
3. How much time will we spend?
4. What will we do afterwards (family connection and reflection)?

MindUP™ Family Activity Ideas:

Ages 4-6: Teaching perspective taking

- “Walk the Block”- Walk around the neighborhood and challenge your young child to look for opportunities to be a good citizen by picking up trash, helping a lost dog, etc.

Ages 7-10: Teaching perspective taking

- “BFF PowerPoint”- If your child’s friend is sick and misses school, encourage her to put together a “It’s My Park, too!”- Help your child feel a sense of ownership of favorite public places. The next time you are at your usual park, take some supplies to pick up litter and find new ways to leave the space better than how you found it.

Ages 11-14: Teaching perspective taking

- Join the group dosomething.org. They believe in the power of teens to create social change. They have an online presence that will give your teen ideas, a platform and lots of reinforcement that doing good is COOL!

Parent Workbook Activity 6 :

MindUP™ For Parents

Parent Personal Reflection

After the workshop, take a few quiet and focused minutes to reflect and thoughtfully respond to the following:

- How do I want my child to see his role in making the world a better place? What do I need to do now to encourage him toward that vision?
- Reflect on a time you or a family member were in need and were the recipient of someone else’s kindness.
- Reflect upon what drives you to do good for others. What are some guiding beliefs? What are problematic beliefs that might complicate the good you are trying to do?



PARENT WORKBOOK ACTIVITY 6: Expressing Gratitude

Simply focusing for a minute on the experiences in our lives we're grateful for shifts our thinking to a calmer, more content perspective, which can immediately uplift and comfort us. When we make expression of gratitude as a family a regular practice, we train our brains to shift to a positive mindset more efficiently and maintain a healthier, more optimistic perspective. Sharing gratitude as a family helps to forge stronger bonds, greater trust, and increases empathy.

Expressing Gratitude

As a group, we'll all stand together in a "Gratitude Circle."

- When you receive the "gratitude stone," name one thing you are grateful for today, and then pass the stone to the next person.
- Give the speaker your full attention and listen mindfully, without commenting on what that person says.
- Our goal is to make everyone feel comfortable about sharing.
- You may choose not to share out loud, hold the stone in your hand, think your thought of gratitude, and pass the stone along.

MindUP™ Family Activity Ideas:

Ages 4-6: Teaching perspective taking

- "Gratitude Chain"- Cut strips of colorful paper and place them in a basket or baggie. Start a gratitude chain where each person in the family writes down something they are grateful for. Loop the strips together and watch your gratitude chain grow.

Ages 7-10: Teaching perspective taking

- "Gratitude Letter"- Invite your child to write a letter to an important person in his life and express gratitude for the influence and/or happiness this person brings. Encourage your child to be specific about the (non-material) gifts he sees in this person. The impact of this activity will be even greater if your child hand delivers this special letter!

Ages 11-14: Teaching perspective taking

- "Social Media Gratitude Fever"- Encourage your teen to post something on Facebook that she is grateful for everyday. Watch how her positive attitude rises above some of the more gossipy posting. See if her friends catch the gratitude fever.

Parent Workbook Activity 6 :

MindUP™ For Parents

As a MindUP™ Family:

Practice your own gratitude circles. Have each family member choose his or her own gratitude stone (maybe even decorate them together). While at dinner, pull out the gratitude stones and take time to share what each member is grateful for that day.

Parent Workbook Activity 6 :

Further Reading and Resources

Learn More . . .

In order to fully engage in our relationships, we have to be able to integrate self-awareness and empathy.

Biologically, we are social beings.

Great perspective taking and optimism books for kids
Ages 4-6

Great perspective taking and optimism books for kids
Ages 7-10

Great perspective taking and optimism books for teens
Ages 11-14

People who practice gratitude feel 25% happier and are more likely to be kind and helpful to others.

Good Books . . .

The Whole Brain Child
By Dan Siegel

Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion
By Mary Helen Immordino Yang, Andrea McColl, Hanna Damasio and Antonio Damasio

Hey Little Ant
By Phillip M. Hoose, Hannah Hoose and Debby Tilley
Little Liam Eagle - *By Nancy McGrath*

The True Story of the Three Little Pigs
By Jon Scieszka
What to Do When You Grumble Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Negativity - *By Dawn Hubener*

son Madela: No Easy Walk to Freedom
By Barry Denenberg
Who Moved My Cheese for Teens
By Spencer Johnson, M.D.

Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier - *By Robert Emmons*