



Positive Psychology

“Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best within us”

- Martin Seligman

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive psychology is the scientific study of human optimal functioning, and what enables individuals and communities to thrive (Compton & Hoffman, 2013). It focuses on the promotion of wellbeing and the creation of a satisfying life filled with meaning, pleasure, engagement, positive relationships and accomplishment.

There are three broad areas of human experience that positive psychology is interested in researching:

Positive subjective states	Positive individual traits	Positive institutions
• Happiness	• Strengths of character	• Families
• Love	• Talents	• Schools
• Fulfillment	• Interests	• Businesses
• Hope	• Values	• Communities

Positive psychology is not about putting on a happy face all the time and dismissing the negative aspects of life. Life can be hard with lots of challenges. However, scientific research has shown that there are some positive psychology strategies and skills that allow people to navigate the challenges of life more effectively.

What is the PERMA model?

The PERMA model is a widely used model in Positive Psychology. The founder of Positive Psychology Martin Seligman proposed this model to help explain and define wellbeing in greater depth (Seligman, 2011).

P	Positive emotion	Noticing and experiencing positive emotions is very important for our quality of life and for us to cope with day-to-day life. For example, joy, pleasure, comfort and hopeful.
E	Engagement	Doing an activity that you are fully absorbed and immersed in. This is sometimes referred to as a “flow” state.
R	Relationships	Having deep, meaningful connections with others is vital to our wellbeing. These connections lead to greater positive emotions, enabling us to feel important and supported.
M	Meaning	A sense of meaning and purpose can be derived from belonging to and serving something bigger than the self. Eg. family, science, politics, work, social causes and community.
A	Accomplishment	Setting realistic goals can provide a sense of growth, a sense of progress towards the life we want to create for ourselves, and increase confidence.



How can you use Positive Psychology with young people?

Here are some ways you can apply some positive psychology interventions with young people or as a family.

Personal strengths	Write a list of strengths together. Remind them of these when they display them at home or explain to them how they can use them during tough times.
Positive emotions	Complete a daily mood chart and chat with them about why they may have selected a particular emotion. Helping them identify what they are feeling can help them with increased coping and helps to teach them to express them as well.
Gratitude	Use a gratitude jar as a family. For children they may wish to write down three good things that happened in their day.
Kindness	Encourage an act of kindness for someone else. Talk about how doing nice things for others made them feel.
Savour the moment	Help savour a positive experience by allowing them to feel excited and visualise what they are looking forward to before it happens and then ask them afterwards about their favourite parts so they can reminisce.
Relationships	Spend quality time together and engage in activities that bring you both happiness and joy. Consider doing self-care activities together as well to help build healthy habits.

How can Positive Psychology help young people?

Research has demonstrated that when children and adolescents practice these strategies, they experience significant benefits, including reduced mental health issues such as symptoms of distress, anxiety and depression, minimised behavioural problems and greater satisfaction with their lives.

Useful websites

Positive Psychology Institute

<https://www.positivepsychologyinstitute.com.au/>

Authentic Happiness

<https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

References

- Compton, W. C., & Hoffman, E. (2013). Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Flourishing (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Seligman, M. (2011). Flourish. New York, NY: Free Press