

Ask an Expert - 5 Happy Hacks for a Flourishing Life

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04/02/2018

April 2, 2018

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A growing body of research suggests that if we want to be happy and flourish in life and relationships, there are simple things we can do every day – happy hacks – that provide a boost to our brains and



bodies.

In research conducted by my colleagues and I, more than 1,500 people were surveyed across three states and found that the happiest people scored high on three character strengths: positivity, compassion and humility. It turns out that people who are open to learning and being influenced by others, who are optimistic about what lies ahead and who look for ways to help others are much more likely to flourish. Here are more research-based tips for a flourishing life:

1) Start your day in a positive way – A study reported in the Harvard Business Review showed that watching just three minutes of negative news in the morning made viewers 27 percent more likely to report having a bad day. Those who started the day with positive and inspiring stories, on the other hand, reported have a good day 88 percent of the time. Other ways to start the day off right include exercising, meditating or taking slow, deep breaths, eating a healthy breakfast, having positive thoughts, and feeling grateful for specific things or people in your life.

2) Broadcast Happiness – We are all constantly transmitting information to our families, co-workers and all those around us. The information we broadcast by our face, voice and body language sends signals that influence how others view and respond to us. Smiling, for

example, sends signals to our brain, called biofeedback, to be more positive and happy. Paying attention to what we are broadcasting can affect our mood, attitude and overall levels of happiness and well-being.

3) Grow in Gratitude – Feeling thankful and expressing gratitude are some of the quickest ways to feel positive, according to an article on gratitude and well-being in the *Clinical Psychology Review*. There are several easy ways you can make this happen. Write in a gratitude journal about two or three things you are grateful for each day, write a letter of appreciation to a loved one or someone who has influenced you for the better or send a text or email to someone to let them know you are thinking of them. Learning to savor and appreciate our past and present helps us to flourish and feel positive – not to mention the numerous physical and psychological health benefits!

4) Find Flow – This occurs when you are fully immersed and focused on an activity that brings enjoyment. Another term for flow is feeling “in the zone.” Often, flow is related to an activity that stretches our mind or body, such as putting a puzzle together or working at a challenging piano piece – when creativity and productivity work together in our minds. Being immersed in flow can be both difficult and worthwhile. Sometimes the best moments in our lives are not the relaxing passive ones, but the engaging moments when we are so immersed in what we are doing that we may even lose track of time.

5) Connect with Kindness – results from decades of research studies suggest that one of the best ways to boost your mood is to do something kind for someone else. People who flourish tend to have an outward mindset that searches for ways to make others happy. This can include random acts of kindness such as opening a door, paying for someone’s meal or simply smiling at someone.

By: David Schramm, Utah State University Extension family life specialist

See more with David Schramm explaining these happy hacks here:

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