

# Exploring Leadership

## ADAPTABILITY: OPTIMISM

Optimism is a mindset that allows you to be hopeful and to consider the positive aspects of life rather than the negative ones. The word *optimism* comes from the Latin word 'optimum,' meaning 'the best.' It is a personality pattern that displays resilience and personal strength. If someone has ever told you to "look on the bright side," they were suggesting that you be more optimistic even in the face of problems or struggles. Optimism is all about how we perceive things. Life is full of disappointments, but if you learn to overcome negative thoughts, you will become a self-reliant, hopeful individual.

### CONVERSATION STARTERS:

Display a clear glass filled to the halfway point with water.

- How would you describe the glass?
- Is it half-empty or half-full? And is the way you see the glass also the way you look at things in your life? Are you an optimist?

Optimism has many advantages for young people: better physical and mental health, better academic and extracurricular performance, resilience and strength to weather tough times, and higher self-esteem.

## EXPLORATION ACTIVITY:

Have participants get in groups of 4-6 and give each group a roll of toilet paper.

Give this instruction: "Take as much as you think you will need." (Do not specify what they need it for until after everyone has taken some.)

For each square of toilet paper they have taken, participants must think of a negative thought or experience they have had and replace it with a more optimistic one.

(Examples: Failing a test can act as a reminder to study next time. Breaking up with someone is an opportunity to meet someone better. The reason your parents expect so much of you is because they care about you and want you to succeed. When bad things happen, we often find out who our greatest helpers and supporters are.)

### FACILITATOR TIP:

- This might be familiar to you as a variation on a popular bridal shower game. Have fun with it.

Then they pull off each square of toilet paper as they share *only the positive part*, not the negative one that preceded it. (I'll study next time. I'm going to meet someone better. My parents care about me. I have a lot of support.)

Those who took a lot of toilet paper have more things to share, but (look on the bright side!) they are all positive!

"When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." That's what we're doing here. We are "looking on the bright side," "finding the silver lining in the dark clouds," and "making the best of a bad situation". In other words, we are practicing optimism. Even when "life is in the toilet," we can choose to be optimistic.

### KEY OBJECTIVES:

- Use positive self-talk to develop an optimistic mindset.
- Practice replacing negative thoughts with optimistic ones.

### WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- A few rolls of toilet paper



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Ask the below open ended questions to your group to engage in a discussion about what happened during the activity.

- Were there any negative thoughts you could not overcome with positive self-talk? If so, why do you think that was? If not, what does that tell you about self-talk?
- What are the obstacles to optimism? Why is it sometimes hard to see the bright side?
- Are you generally an optimistic person, or are you more of a pessimist? Why?

## APPLICATION DISCUSSION:

- Besides the benefits already listed above, what are some specific, practical advantages of being an optimistic person?
- Why are optimistic leaders more effective?



## CONCLUSION:

Problems are temporary. Setbacks don't point to how good or bad life is. Bad experiences and outcomes (like failing a test) might reflect on your behavior but not on your character. In other words, problems can be fixed and you are never powerless. You can always choose to be optimistic.

Embracing optimism doesn't make you immune to stress and worries. It teaches us how to see what is going wrong and still be hopeful that it can be turned right.

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## REFERENCES

- <https://positivepsychology.com/optimism-tools-exercises-examples/>
- <https://schools.au.reachout.com/resilience/optimism>