



THE RESILIENCE PROJECT
WELL-BEING EXERCISES



The Resilience Project

WOFFORD COLLEGE

WELL-BEING EXERCISES

During the recent months, we have been inundated with images and stories of hardship and despair. Over hundreds of thousands of years, our brains have been designed to focus on these images and stories and imagine the worst case scenario. We can't help but be focused on the misery, fear, frustration, anger and sadness. It seems natural to focus on the unpleasant aspects, and yet you know there had to be pleasant as well.

The Resilience Project would like to offer a series of brief exercises you can do to help with your mood and perhaps increase your happiness. These exercises are based on the scientific study of happiness and well-being and are meant to provide you with some additional tools to help you be more resilient. All of these exercises were developed and tested during the Fall 2018 semester in Psychology 270 – Health Psychology. When queried at the end of the class, the students found each to be helpful. We also have included some poetry to help you see a better world. We hope that these exercises and poems are beneficial to you as well.

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EXERCISE 1

WWW: What Went Well Journal / Gratitude Journal / Three Good Things

It is sometimes hard to see the good things in your life. It is much easier to see what went wrong, how much work you have or feel unappreciated by others. Instead of only looking at the negative and stressful things in your life, positive psychology researchers have tried to study ways to focus on the good things that happen as well. These are the experiences we often take for granted or ignore. This exercise attempts to get us to stop and notice these positive events and experiences.

The What-Went-Well/Gratitude/Three Good Things Journal exercise is one of the examples of this approach. Several studies have examined the impact of writing down our experiences and their effect on psychological and physical health. We are going to focus on events in our daily lives that make us feel positive emotions (i.e. joy, relief, amusement, hope), something we are grateful for or that touched us in a good way. If you are having trouble, you may want to think of people and events that you would miss if they were no longer in your life.

The practice is very simple and straight forward (drawn from Emmons and McCullough, 2003):

Gratefulness or thankfulness is the feeling we get when something good happens to us. Many of us feel grateful for family, friends or pets. Feeling grateful also could come from a time when someone helped you. An example could be that you were having difficulty understanding your homework. You asked your older brother or sister or a parent to help you. They spent some time with you helping you to understand the assignment.

Think back over the past day and write down three things in your life for which you are grateful or thankful.

1. Write down at least three things that you were thankful for today. **YOU HAVE TO WRITE THEM DOWN. DON'T JUST THINK ABOUT THEM.** These can be single words, simple phrases or short descriptions, but you want to be specific. It is better to say that you are grateful for “your roommate cleaning up the room because you had a rough day” than to say you are grateful for “your roommate.” Each day you need to develop three new things for which you are thankful; you cannot recycle old entries.
2. Briefly explain **WHY** each of these was positive. Research shows that elaborating on a particular entry will enhance your understanding and provide more of an effect. This may seem awkward at first, but it will help you see patterns.
3. Get personal with your description. In other words, list the names of people to whom you are grateful. People are better than things.
4. It does not matter when you do it. Research shows there is no difference if this is done in the morning, afternoon, at the end of your workday or before going to bed.

EXERCISE 1

WWW: What Went Well Journal / Gratitude Journal / Three Good Things

This is a skill that needs to be developed. Like exercise, we all start out with every intention of going to do it every day. Rather, start out with the intention of doing it every day and if that proves to be problematic, do it as often as you can. Research suggests that two to three times is sufficient, and for some individuals the optimal frequency, but even once a week is better than never feeling gratitude. Take time to appreciate these feelings of gratitude and what these things mean to you. Don't just rush through the exercise because you see it as a task. If it becomes a burden, stop doing it.

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise you can look at this article:

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting Blessings Versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389.

<http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377>

Gratitude Journal for Students can be retrieved at

https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/gratitude_journal_for_students

EXERCISE 2

Gratitude Letter

We saw with the Gratitude Journal (What-Went-Well/Three Good Things) that writing about things for which you are thankful can have positive effects on your health. The task for this exercise is the Gratitude Letter. Rather than writing about three good things, this exercise will focus on one person in your life. Research shows that when we express gratitude to others, we strengthen our relationship with them and this improves our mood and health as well. There is a specific prompt below, but, essentially, you are going to think about someone in your life who did something or said something that changed your life for the better. This may be someone you did not properly thank for their influence. The letter should be concrete (full of specifics) and should be around 300 words long (around one page). Over the course of the week, spend some time each day looking over the letter and try to add specifics, recall the events or change some of the wording.

Here is the specific prompt:

Most everyone enjoys thanks for a job well done or for a favor done for a friend, and most of us remember to say “thank you” to others. Sometimes, though, our “thank you” is said so casually or quickly that it is nearly meaningless.

In this exercise, you will have the opportunity to express your gratitude in a very thoughtful manner. Call to mind someone who did something for you for which you are extremely grateful but to whom you never expressed your deep gratitude. This could be a relative, friend, teacher or colleague. Try to pick someone who is still alive and could meet you face-to-face in the next week. It may be most helpful to select a person or act that you haven’t thought about for a while – something that isn’t always on your mind.

Now, write a letter to one of these people, guided by the following steps.

1. Write as though you are addressing this person directly (“Dear _____”).
2. Don’t worry about perfect grammar or spelling at first.
3. Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person and how this person’s behavior affected your life. Try to be as concrete as possible.
4. Describe what you are doing in your life now and how you often remember his or her efforts.
5. Revise over the week to make the letter more specific or work on your writing.
6. Sign the letter.

That should be enough for now. It is not necessary to send the letter or to share it with anyone. However, if you want to take it up a notch, you may want to think about delivering the letter in person when complete. If you are interested, follow these steps:

EXERCISE 2

Gratitude Letter

1. Plan a visit with the recipient. Let that person know you'd like to see him or her and have something special to share, but don't reveal the exact purpose of the meeting.
2. When you meet, let the person know that you are grateful to them and would like to read a letter expressing your gratitude; ask that he or she refrain from interrupting until you're done.
3. Take your time reading the letter. While you read, pay attention to his or her reaction as well as your own.
4. After you have read the letter, be receptive to his or her reaction and discuss your feelings together.
5. Remember to give the letter to the person when you leave.
6. If physical distance keeps you from making a visit, you may choose to arrange a phone or video chat.

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Lyubomirsky, S., Dickerhoof, R., Boehm, J. K., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: An experimental longitudinal intervention to boost wellbeing. *Emotion*, 11(2), 391-402.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0022575>

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *The American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410-421. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.5.410>

GOOD BONES

by Maggie Smith

Life is short, though I keep this from my children.
Life is short, and I've shortened mine
in a thousand delicious, ill-advised ways,
a thousand deliciously ill-advised ways
I'll keep from my children. The world is at least
fifty percent terrible, and that's a conservative
estimate, though I keep this from my children.
For every bird there is a stone thrown at a bird.
For every loved child, a child broken, bagged,
sunk in a lake. Life is short and the world
is at least half terrible, and for every kind
stranger, there is one who would break you,
though I keep this from my children. I am trying
to sell them the world. Any decent realtor,
walking you through a real shithole, chirps on
about good bones: This place could be beautiful,
right? You could make this place beautiful.

EXERCISE 3

Signature Strengths

Several assessment tools on the market can help you discover something important about yourself. Some of these assessments are meant to be fun and entertaining, such as finding out what type of car you would be if given the chance. Others are more scientific and meant to be used as a means of determining something about your personality.

In the first part of the exercise, you will need to go to the VIA Institute website and complete an online assessment survey to look at your signature strengths. This survey is based on the work of Chris Peterson, a psychologist at the University of Michigan. The top five of these strengths are going to be your “Signature Strengths,” the ones that are most likely to be essential in defining who you are. These are thought to be the ones that are at the core of your identity.

Here is the website: <https://www.viacharacter.org/www/character-strengths-survey>

Once you have completed the survey, write your signature strengths below in rank order:

- | | | |
|----|-----|-----|
| 1. | 9. | 17. |
| 2. | 10. | 18. |
| 3. | 11. | 19. |
| 4. | 12. | 20. |
| 5. | 13. | 21. |
| 6. | 14. | 22. |
| 7. | 15. | 23. |
| 8. | 16. | 24. |

Here is a list and a brief description (snapshot) of the strengths:

The Virtue of Wisdom: Creativity (originality that is useful), Curiosity (exploration/novelty seeking), Judgment (critical thinking and rationality), Love of Learning (systematic deepening of knowledge), Perspective (the wider view).

The Virtue of Courage: Bravery (facing fears, overcoming adversity), Perseverance (keep going, overcome all obstacles), Honesty (being authentic), Zest (enthusiasm for life).

EXERCISE 3

Signature Strengths

The Virtue of Humanity: Love (genuine, reciprocal warmth), Kindness (doing for others, compassion), Social Intelligence: (tune in, then savvy; insight into what makes others tick).

The Virtue of Justice: Teamwork (collaborative, participating in group effort), Fairness (equal opportunity for all), Leadership (positively influencing others).

The Virtue of Temperance: Forgiveness (letting go of the hurt, showing mercy), Humility (achievement does not elevate worth), Prudence (wise caution), Self-Regulation (selfmanagement of vices).

The Virtue of Transcendence: Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (seeing the life behind things), Gratitude (thankfulness), Hope (positive expectations/goals), Humor (offering pleasure/laughter), Spirituality (connecting with the sacred).

Looking at the results of the survey, especially the top five “Signature Strengths,” do these make sense to you? Are you surprised by them? Look at the bottom five or six. Does this make sense to you? Do you agree with the results?

The second part of the exercise is to think of ways to put these strengths into action. Think about your top five signature strengths.

1. Think about a time in your past when you were at your best. Can you identify which of the strengths were most important in that situation.
2. Looking into the future, can you think of ways that these strengths will be important in the future and how you can use these strengths to thrive?
3. Find time this week when you will create opportunities to use each one of the strengths in a new way. Write about your experience when you are done. How did that make you feel? Was it easy to do?

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Strengths of Character and Well-Being. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23(5), 603–619.
<http://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.23.5.603.50748>

Rashid, T. (2015). Positive psychotherapy: A strength-based approach. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(1), 25–40. <http://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2014.920411>

EXERCISE 4

Mindfulness Meditation

There are several myths about mindfulness meditation. Myths persist that practicing mindfulness will decrease our motivation toward achieving important goals, will make us morally ambivalent, become more isolated and inward focused and make us too mellow (Suttie, 2018). However, research is consistent in showing that these myths are far from the truth. In fact, recent research has shown that mindfulness is related to perseverance over time (Raphiphatthana, Jose, & Salmon, 2018), and those who are mindful are more compassionate, less egocentric and have higher moral reasoning skills (Pandey, Chandwani, & Navare, 2018). So why not practice more often? Because we may not know how to do it or maybe we just don't want to (Kabat-Zinn, 2017).

Mindfulness is simply being in the present and maintaining an awareness of your thoughts, feelings, behaviors and social environment. Mindfulness also involves acceptance, being nonjudgmental about these thoughts and feelings. We are quick to label thoughts and feelings as right and wrong. But there is no right or wrong way to think and feel. As you practice mindfulness, you become more aware of the present and less focused on the past and the potential future. However, it is a discipline and as such needs to be practiced (Kabat-Zinn, 2017).

There are several different ways to practice. Here are just a few drawn from the Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) at UCLA. We also have provided a link to a website with guided meditations drawn from the Koru Mindfulness Program that is available at Wofford.

Breath Awareness Meditation

The most basic way to do mindful breathing simply is to focus your attention on your breath, the inhale and exhale. You can do this while standing, but ideally, you'll be sitting or even lying in a comfortable position. If you want to practice with the audio from MARC, here is the link: https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/01_Breathing_Meditation.mp3.

1. Find a relaxed, comfortable position. You could be seated on a chair or on the floor on a cushion. Keep your back upright, but not too tight. Hands resting wherever they're comfortable. Tongue on the roof of your mouth or wherever it's comfortable.
2. Notice and relax your body. Try to notice the shape of your body, its weight. Let yourself relax and become curious about your body seated here - the sensations it experiences, the touch, the connection with the floor or the chair. Relax any areas of tightness or tension. Just breathe.
3. Tune into your breath. Feel the natural flow of breath - in, out. You don't need to do anything to your breath. Not long, not short, just natural. Notice where you feel your breath in your body. It might be in your abdomen. It may be in your chest or throat or in your nostrils. See whether you can feel the sensations of breath, one breath at a time. When one breath ends, the next breath begins.
4. As you do this, you may notice that your mind may start to wander. You may start thinking about other things. If this happens, it is not a problem. It's very natural. Just notice that your mind has wandered. You can say "thinking" or "wandering" in your head softly. Then gently redirect your attention right back to the breathing.

EXERCISE 4

Mindfulness Meditation

5. Stay here for five to seven minutes. Notice your breath, in silence. From time to time, you'll get lost in thought, then return to your breath.
6. After a few minutes, once again notice your body, your whole body, seated here. Let yourself relax even more deeply and then offer yourself some appreciation for doing this practice today.

Body Scan Meditation

This exercise is a commonly practiced meditation, especially in mindfulness. The task is to systematically focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence, from your feet to your head. The systemic examination of your muscles and the associated feelings helps to develop an awareness of your bodily sensations and to decrease tension.

The body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting or in other postures. The steps below are a guided meditation designed to be done while sitting. If you want to practice with the audio from MARC, here is the link: <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/Body-Scan-Meditation.mp3>.

1. Begin by bringing your attention into your body. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.
2. You can notice your body, seated, wherever you're seated. Feeling the weight of your body, on the chair, on the floor.
3. Take a few deep breaths. As you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen and livening the body. As you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
4. You can notice your feet on the floor. Notice the sensation of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.
5. You can notice your legs against the chair. Pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness. Notice your back against the chair.
6. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften.
7. Take a breath.
8. Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight? See whether you can allow them to soften.
9. Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.
10. Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft, relaxed. Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
11. Then notice your whole body present.
12. Take one more breath.
13. Be aware of your whole body, as best you can.
14. Take a breath.
15. Then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

EXERCISE 4

Mindfulness Meditation

Walking Meditation

Probably the most common reason for not doing meditation is the belief that our lives are so hectic that we simply do not have the time to do it. However, one could argue that meditation can be accomplished with any daily activity if approached with awareness and focus. For example, one of the most basic methods for cultivating mindfulness is a “walking meditation.” The exercise involves focusing mindfully on the experience of walking, paying attention to the specific components of each step and the resulting experience.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a pioneer in the integration of mindfulness in health care, provides the following steps:

1. Find a location. Find a lane that allows you to walk back and forth for 10 to 15 paces – a place that is relatively peaceful, where you won’t be disturbed or even observed (since a slow, formal walking meditation can look strange to people who are unfamiliar with it). You can practice walking meditation either indoors or outside in nature. The lane doesn’t have to be very long since the goal is not to reach a specific destination, just to practice a very intentional form of walking where you’re mostly retracing your steps.
2. Start your steps. Walk 10 to 15 steps along the lane you’ve chosen, and then pause and breathe for as long as you like. When you’re ready, turn and walk back in the opposite direction to the other end of the lane, where you can pause and breathe again. Then, when you’re ready, turn once more and continue with the walk.
3. The components of each step. Walking meditation involves very deliberately thinking about and doing a series of actions that you normally do automatically. Breaking these steps down in your mind may feel awkward, even ridiculous, but you should try to notice at least these four basic components of each step:
 - a. The lifting of one foot.
 - b. The moving of the foot a bit forward of where you’re standing.
 - c. The placing of the foot on the floor, heel first.
 - d. The shifting of the weight of the body onto the forward leg as the back-heel lifts, while the toes of that foot remain touching the floor or the ground.

Then the cycle continues, as you:

- a. Lift your back foot totally off the ground.
 - b. Observe the back foot as it swings forward and lowers.
 - c. Observe the back foot as it makes contact with the ground, heel first.
 - d. Feel the weight shift onto that foot as the body moves forward.
4. Speed. You can walk at any speed, but in Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, walking meditation is slow and involves taking small steps. Most important is that they feel natural, not exaggerated or stylized.

EXERCISE 4

Mindfulness Meditation

5. Hands and arms. You can clasp your hands behind your back or in front of you, or you can just let them hang at your side – whatever feels most comfortable and natural.
6. Focusing your attention. As you walk, try to focus your attention on one or more sensations that you would normally take for granted, such as your breath coming in and out of your body; the movement of your feet and legs, or their contact with the ground or floor; your head balanced on your neck and shoulders; sounds nearby or those caused by the movement of your body; or whatever your eyes take in as they focus on the world in front of you.
7. What to do when your mind wanders. No matter how much you try to fix your attention on any of these sensations, your mind will inevitably wander. That's ok – it's perfectly natural. When you notice your mind wandering, simply try again to focus it one of those sensations.
8. Integrating walking meditation into your daily life. For many people, slow, formal walking meditation is an acquired taste. But the more you practice, even for short periods of time, the more it is likely to grow on you. Keep in mind that you can also bring mindfulness to walking at any speed in your everyday life, and even to running, though of course, the pace of your steps and breath will change. In fact, over time, you can try to bring the same degree of awareness to any everyday activity, experiencing the sense of presence that is available to us at every moment as our lives unfold.

Gatha Meditation

Gathas are small poems designed to help us in meditation practice, whether we are sitting, walking or slicing potatoes. A gatha accomplishes several aims: It occupies our thinking; it sets a direction for our practice at that moment; and, if used correctly, it helps us to be mindful of our breathing.

To start, sit either in a chair or on a cushion on the floor, with your back upright and tall but not stiff. Set a timer for at least 10 minutes. Allow your eyes to close or direct your unfocused gaze toward the floor. Find your breath in your body and watch it as it flows in and out. Begin reciting the words of the gatha silently to yourself, linking the phrases to your breath. Go through the entire gatha, and then start again at the beginning, continuing to link the phrases to your breath, over and over.

I know I am breathing in (In)
I know I am breathing out (Out)
I calm my body and my mind (In)
I smile (Out)
I dwell in the present moment (In)
I know this is a precious moment (Out)

EXERCISE 4

Mindfulness Meditation

The college is a member of the Koru Center at Duke University. If you are interested learning more about Koru, here is the link to the site: <https://korumindfulness.org/guided-meditations/>

If you are interested in the MARC center at UCLA Health, you may want to look at this site: <https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/default.cfm>

The walking meditation also can be found at this site: <https://www.mindful.org/walkingmeditation/>

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2017). Common Obstacles to Practice. *Mindfulness*, 8(6), 1713-1715. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-017-0820-0>

Pandey, A., Chandwani, R., & Navare, A. (2018). How can mindfulness enhance moral reasoning? An examination using business school students. *Business Ethics: A European Review*, 27(1), 56-71. <http://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12171>

Raphiphatthana, B., Jose, P., & Salmon, K. (2018). Does Dispositional Mindfulness Predict the Development of Grit? *Journal of Individual Differences*, 39(2), 76-87. <http://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000252>

Suttie, J. (2018). The Myths of Mindfulness. *Greater Good Magazine*. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/the_myths_of_mindfulness

EXERCISE 5

Loving-Kindness Mindfulness Meditation

Practicing kindness is one of the most direct routes to happiness. Research suggests that kind people tend to be more satisfied with their relationships and with their lives in general. We all have a natural capacity for kindness, but sometimes we don't take steps to nurture and express this capacity as much as we could. Loving-kindness meditation is a great way to cultivate our propensity for kindness. It involves mentally sending goodwill, kindness and warmth toward others by silently repeating a series of mantras.

The exercise presented below was developed by Dr. James W. Carson and Kimberly M. Carson, MPH, and is based on the ancient Buddhist practice of metta (loving-kindness). The Carsons have been using this approach to help people decrease the intensity of their persistent pain as well as decrease the interference caused by the pain (Carson et al., 2005).

1. Come into a comfortable seated position in which you feel alert and the chances of you drifting off to sleep are minimal.
2. Once you find that position, begin by feeling yourself simply breathing. Not needing to change the breath or fix it in some way, but just sensing/feeling the breath moving through your body. You may notice it most strongly in the nose or the throat. Some people notice the breath in the chest or the belly. It is not so important, but wherever the breath is most alive for you just allow yourself to rest your awareness here.
3. If the mind wanders away from the breath, which it is prone to do, without judgment, just simply bring yourself back to the next natural inhalation or exhalation.
4. Now very gently allow your awareness to move from the breath to the heart center. Into that place right there in the middle of the chest. Not as much the physical heart but that place where we tend to feel warm emotions.
5. Now try to find a memory of a time when you felt a strong sense of loving kindness, either from someone or toward someone. It may have been the first day you met your life partner, the day a child or grandchild was born; it may have even been a particular afternoon with your favorite pet; or a time when, in your own experience, you remember feeling that sensation of loving kindness in the center of your chest.
6. For just a moment, let that feeling grow.
7. Now, in your mind's eye, gently bring into focus an image of someone you love, a person for whom you feel deep appreciation, affection and a positive connection. Or rather than an image, it may be easier for you to just hold a sense for who that person is, in your heart.
8. And now, from the feelings of loving-kindness in the center of the chest, extending warm wishes to this loved one. Using the phrases, silently to yourself:

May this person be at ease.

May they be content with their life.

May they be joyful.

May they feel safe and secure.

EXERCISE 5

Loving-Kindness Mindfulness Meditation

Extending warm wishes of loving kindness to this loved one:

- May they be at ease.**
- May they be content with their life.**
- May they be joyful.**
- May they feel safe and secure.**

From the source of loving kindness in your own heart, extending well wishes to this loved one that:

- May this person be at ease.**
- May they be content with their life.**
- May they be joyful.**
- May they feel safe and secure.**

9. Now gradually allow that loved one to dissolve out of the mind's eye, resting your attention back in the heart center, back in those feelings of loving-kindness.
10. Now gently bring to mind an image of yourself. It may be the way you looked when you were brushing your teeth this morning or a photograph you especially like of yourself. It may even be how you looked like a child. For some of us, it may be more of a feeling sense of ourselves rather than an image., but in some way bringing into the mind's eye yourself.
11. Again radiating from your own sweetheart warm wishes of loving-kindness toward yourself, saying silently:

- May I be at ease.**
- May I be content with my life.**
- May I be joyful.**
- May I feel safe and secure.**

12. Now allow the image of yourself to dissolve out of the mind's eye, again resting your attention back in the heart center, into those feelings of loving-kindness.
13. Now bring to mind an image of someone you don't really know, who you've at least seen once, but don't feel any connection with one way or another. It could be your postman or a supermarket clerk you've seen or someone else of that sort.
14. Again, as best you can, from your own heart extending warm wishes of loving-kindness toward this person you hardly know about, saying silently:

- May this person be at ease.**
- May they be content with their life.**
- May they be joyful.**
- May they feel safe and secure.**

EXERCISE 5

Loving-Kindness Mindfulness Meditation

15. Now gently allow that person to dissolve out of the mind's eye, resting your attention back in the heart center, in that place of loving kindness.
16. Now, identify someone you have difficulty with, maybe someone you don't like to feel sympathy for, who you feel has harmed you in some way. During the next few moments, see whether you can at least partially let go of your resentment and dislike and see that person as a whole human being, having feelings – pain, anxiety, suffering – just like yourself and everyone else and also deserving of love and kindness.
17. See whether you can purposefully let go of justifications for not extending love and kindness toward this person.
18. So now, bring to mind an image of this person or a feeling sense of them. As best you can, extend warm wishes of loving-kindness toward this difficult person, saying silently:

May this person be at ease.

May they be content with their life.

May they be joyful.

May they feel safe and secure.

19. Now gently allow that person also to dissolve out of the mind's eye, resting your attention back in the heart center, in that place of loving kindness.
20. Once you have practiced the loving-kindness meditation you may want to consider the following phrases to direct loving-kindness and forgiveness toward to other and then toward yourself:

Other:

I now see clearly the way this person, out of fear, pain, confusion or anger, has hurt me. To the extent that I am ready, I offer forgiveness to this person. I have carried this pain in my heart for too long. For this reason, to this person who has harmed me, I offer my forgiveness. I forgive you.

Self:

I now see clearly the way I, out of fear, pain, confusion or anger, have betrayed, harmed or abandoned myself through thought, word or deed, knowingly or unknowingly. For each of the ways I have hurt myself, I now extend full and heartfelt forgiveness. I forgive myself. I forgive myself.

21. Lastly, begin to direct feelings of loving-kindness toward all living beings – those in your town, your state, your country, the entire world. You can think such thoughts as:

May all beings be at ease.

May all beings be content with their lives.

May they be joyful.

May they feel safe and secure.

EXERCISE 5

Loving-Kindness Mindfulness Meditation

22. After several minutes, return your attention to your own body, your breath and focus on any feelings of warmth and generosity and love that you are feeling in your heart.
23. Focus on how you feel, how your body feels when these emotions are present. Cradle these feelings and let them amplify themselves.
24. When you are done, allow your attention to drift back into the breath, the gentle rise and fall. Let the eyes open when you are ready.

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Carson, J. W., Keefe, F. J., Lynch, T. R., Carson, K. M., Goli, V., Fras, A. M., & Thorp, S. R. (2005). Loving-Kindness Meditation for Chronic Low Back Pain. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 23(3), 287-304. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0898010105277651>

Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1045-1062. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0013262>

Hofmann, S. G., Grossman, P., & Hinton, D. E. (2011). Loving-kindness and compassion meditation: Potential for psychological interventions. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31(7), 1126-1132. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2011.07.003>

Kirby, J. N., Tellegen, C. L., & Steindl, S. R. (2017). A Meta-Analysis of Compassion-Based Interventions: Current State of Knowledge and Future Directions. *Behavior Therapy*, 48(6), 778-792. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2017.06.003>

WILD GEESE

by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

EXERCISE 6

Kindness Experiences

In Exercise 5, you thought about extending kindness and in this exercise, you will perform acts of kindness. As we already have seen, gratitude is important in happiness. The two exercises devoted to gratitude will lead you to appreciate what others are doing or have done in your life and how that contributes to your well-being. Thus, it suggests that better social relationships (people doing kind things for you and you being grateful) are a cornerstone of subjective happiness. In gratitude, you are thankful for receiving the kindness of others, and now we will develop ways for you to develop ways you can be kind toward other people (Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Fredrickson, 2006). These acts of kindness must be more than you normally would do anyway (habit). They must be something you do intentionally, and they require some effort on your part to initiate and maintain the activity (Lyubomksky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Counting Acts of Kindness

In a study conducted by Otake and colleagues (2006), the authors investigated whether kindness was related to happiness among undergraduate students. The results of the study found that happy students reported a greater number of daily experiences that made them feel happy more often than people who were unhappy. There was no difference in the number of unhappy experiences. This suggests that people who rate themselves as happier experience more daily events they rate as being happy events. When the authors looked deeper into the results they found that the most common happy experiences were social (40.3%) and romantic relationships (27.5%). In addition, these happy events usually involved acts of kindness from others. Finally, the results suggest that happy people not only desire to be kind, but they are also more attuned to the recognition of kindnesses, and more likely to behave in kind ways.

What is more important for us is an intervention they implemented to improve happiness based on acts of kindness. The counting kindnesses intervention asked participants to become more aware of their own kind behavior toward other people every day for one week. Participants were asked to keep track of every act of kindness they performed and to report the daily number of these acts. The results showed no significant difference between at baseline between the students in the intervention group (kindness counting) and the control group (no change). After one week, the intervention group showed a significant increase in their reported happiness while there was no change in happiness in the control group.

What these results suggest is that counting the number of kindness acts you perform for others is enough to increase your happiness. While the mechanisms for this change remain unclear, it does suggest that drawing attention to the acts you are doing naturally will increase happiness. Another possibility is that drawing attention to the acts will lead to more gratitude from others or encourage you to be kinder. Either way, you are happier.

EXERCISE 6

Kindness Experiences

Prosocial Spending

You have been told from a young age that money cannot buy happiness (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2014). This is true to some degree, but we also know that people with money are happier than people who do not have any money or very little money. However, research by Dunn, Aknin, and Norton (2008) has shown that it is not money per se that makes you happy, but how you spend it that is important for your happiness. Correlational and experimental studies have shown that people who spend money on others report more happiness. In their research, they found that spending on yourself (paying bills and gifts for yourself) was unrelated to happiness, and that prosocial spending (gifts for others and giving to charity) were related to higher levels of happiness. In another study, the authors looked at changes in happiness and how employees in a company spent an unexpected bonus. Again, they found that those who showed greater prosocial spending was related to a significant increase in happiness. Finally, in another study, the authors randomly assigned students to receive either \$5 or \$20. They were instructed to spend it by 5 p.m. that day. The students also were assigned randomly to either spend it on themselves or on others. As you would expect by now, the amount was not important, but those in the prosocial spending were significantly happier. Taken together, these results suggest that spending on others is a more direct route to happiness, regardless of the amount you can spend.

This week, set aside some money that you normally would spend on yourself and spend it on someone else. Take a friend for lunch or coffee. Give someone a small gift. Do many acts of kindness and keep track of them and see how this influences your happiness.

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness. *Science*, 319(5870), 1687-1688. <http://doi.org/10.1126/science.1150952>

Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2014). Prosocial Spending and Happiness. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(1), 41-47. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413512503>

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131. <http://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111>

Otake, K., Shimai, S., Tanaka-Matsumi, J., Otsui, K., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2006). Happy People Become Happier through Kindness: A Counting Kindnesses Intervention. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7(3), 361-375. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-005-3650-z>

EXERCISE 7

Positive Communications

People who do not have stable and meaningful relationships with others are more likely to have physical and psychological illnesses and are more likely to die sooner (Pietromonaco, Uchino, & Dunkel Schetter, 2013). It also has been found that social negativity in a relationship (conflict and insensitivity) predicts negative health outcomes even after controlling for the absence of support (Brooks & Dunkel Schetter, 2011). Thus, positive communication skills are important in maintaining relationships to provide social support and to maintain physical and psychological health.

In this exercise, you will learn two techniques that have been found to be effective in developing and maintaining positive communications within a relationship. While the focus on much of the research is on dyads (i.e. couples, roommates) this research also is being applied to families, business and other organizations.

Avoiding the four horsemen in communications

For the past 30 years, John and Julie Gottman have been conducting research looking at why some couples stayed together in marriage and others did not (Fowler & Dillow, 2011). The basis for their research is not only to understand why some couples persist but also to develop therapeutic approaches to help couples in trouble. They wanted their therapeutic methods to be based on the reality of how effective couples communicate rather than on what good relationships should look like. Over the course of their extensive research, they have identified what they call relationship masters and relationship disasters. Those that are “masters” avoid types of conflict behaviors. These behaviors are so toxic for a relationship that Gottman refers to them as the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). These are:

1. Criticism - a form of complaining that attacks someone’s personality or character - rather than a specific behavior, usually with blame. Criticism and being critical of each other does not doom a relationship, in fact, there is some research that suggests that some conflict is important. However, unchecked criticism can lead to other horsemen.
2. Contempt - which is marked by the goal of causing a partner psychological pain through expressions of disgust. It may be conveyed verbally (e.g., via insults, name-calling or mockery) or nonverbally (e.g., by rolling one’s eyes). Driving these behaviors is a lack of respect or admiration for the partner. Criticism attack’s a partner’s character but contempt assumes a higher moral ground. This is the single most important predictor of divorce.

EXERCISE 7

Positive Communications

3. Defensiveness – self-protective response to a partner’s actions that may appear in the guise of denials of responsibility, making excuses, making (and responding to) negative assumptions about what a partner is feeling, engaging in counter-attacks or whining. It is often in response to criticism. Defensiveness is an attempt to play the victim to make your partner back off. This rarely works as the partner quickly will recognize that you are not listening or don’t care. Defensiveness will only escalate the conflict if the critical spouse does not back down or apologize. This is because defensiveness is really a way of blaming your partner, and it won’t allow for healthy conflict management.
4. Stonewalling – which entails creating psychological or physical distance from a partner by being unresponsive to efforts to communicate, responding in grunts or withdrawing from the interaction. This is usually a response to contempt. Rather than confronting the issues with their partner, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

Healthy and Constructive Alternatives provided by the Greater Good Science Center (“Avoiding The ‘Four Horsemen’ in Relationships” n.d.):

1. Instead of Criticism – There’s nothing wrong with voicing concerns and complaints in a relationship, but try to do so in a way that focuses on your own feelings (and how your partner’s behavior affects you) – for instance, by making “I” statements, such as “I feel lonely when you come home late for dinner” – and mentions specific negative behaviors rather than making global attacks on his or her entire personality (“I feel neglected when you make plans without me” rather than “You are so inconsiderate!”). Gottman and colleagues (1998) found that active listening was an important way to overcome this horseman.
2. Instead of Contempt – Instead of keeping score of all your partner’s flaws, consider their positive qualities and the things you appreciate most about them. In fact, it may help to write a list of these qualities and return to it when you need a reminder.
3. Instead of Defensiveness – Take the time to hear your partner out and take responsibility when appropriate. A simple, genuine apology can go a long way.
4. Instead of Stonewalling – If you need a time out to take a few deep breaths and collect your thoughts, let your partner know, and then return to the conversation when you’re ready. This way, your partner will understand that you are taking care of yourself not trying to reject him or her.

This exercise is meant to be a way to avoid the “four horsemen” in relationships.

1. Read the descriptions of the “four horsemen” and consider whether you and/or your partner ever engage in any of these behaviors during conflicts.
2. Read the descriptions of the constructive alternatives that can be used in place of the “four horsemen” and consider how you might put these behaviors into practice if you have not already.

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Positive Communications

The next time you find yourself in a conflict with your partner, make an active effort to avoid the “four horsemen” and engage in more constructive behaviors instead. Don’t be too hard on yourself if you slip up – it can be challenging to stay focused during the heat of an argument, and these habits can take time to change.

Losada Ratios in Communications

There is another line of research that attempts to improve our communications with others. In a series of studies, Fredrickson and Losada (2005) propose that we need more positive affective experiences to counterbalance negative affective experiences. In other words, those who flourish and show good well-being often show a mild positivity bias; we need more positive things to outnumber the negative things. Their research discovered that in order to flourish individuals or groups must surpass a positivity ratio of 2.9:1 (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). This means that to flourish, people need at least three positive utterances, such as speakers showing support, encouragement or appreciation, for every negative utterance, such as when speakers showed disapproval, sarcasm or cynicism. In separate research, Gottman (1993) found that a positivity ratio of around 5:1 was needed to maintain a stable couple. Research also shows that the reverse of 1:3 or worse, 1:5, leads to catastrophe (think of the “four horsemen”). The Losada ratio is now a common reference when looking at functional and dysfunctional companies, couples and teams.

We often think that a 1:1 ratio of positive and negative statements is fair. We give one good thing for every bad thing. But, given this research, this is low and only contributes to negative affect. The exercise is to consciously try to actively provide a partner or a friend a 3:1 Losada ratio in terms of your comments. Start the conversation with praise, affection, interest, humor or something positive before even bringing up something negative.

EXERCISE 7

Positive Communications

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Avoiding The “Four Horsemen” in Relationships | Practice | GGIA. (n.d.). Retrieved November 2, 2018, from https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/avoiding_the_four_horsemen_in_relationships#

Brooks, K. P., & Dunkel Schetter, C. (2011). Social Negativity and Health: Conceptual and Measurement Issues. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 5(11), 904–918. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00395.x>

Fowler, C., & Dillow, M. R. (2011). Attachment Dimensions and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. *Communication Research Reports*, 28(1), 16–26. <http://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2010.518910>

Fredrickson, B. L., & Losada, M. F. (2005). Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing. *American Psychologist*, 60(7), 678–686. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.7.678>

Gottman, J. M. (1993). The roles of conflict engagement, escalation, and avoidance in marital interaction: a longitudinal view of five types of couples. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(1), 6–15. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.61.1.6>

Gottman, J. M., Coan, J., Carrere, S., & Swanson, C. (1998). Predicting Marital Happiness and Stability from Newlywed Interactions. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60(1), 5. <http://doi.org/10.2307/353438>

Pietromonaco, P. R., Uchino, B., & Dunkel Schetter, C. (2013). Close relationship processes and health: Implications of attachment theory for health and disease. *Health Psychology*, 32(5), 499–513. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0029349>

EXERCISE 8

Positive Growth and Praise

There has been a long-standing debate in psychology about whether something is a fixed trait that cannot be changed or a malleable state that can change. The assumption is that these constructs are stable over time. On the other hand, we have stated. These are thought to be unstable and dependent on the environment and can be changed. In terms of interventions, people believe that states are more likely to respond to treatment while traits are less likely to respond to treatment.

Over the past 30 years, Carol Dweck and her colleagues have been researching motivation and especially how people respond to failure. What her research has demonstrated is that what we call genius grows out of the ability to sustain intense commitment for long periods of time even in the face of obstacles (what others have called grit). She has developed two mindsets that are believed to form the basis for what motivates students and how they view achievement. In the fixed mindset, there is a belief that your qualities (intelligence, personality, abilities) are set from birth and are relatively stable, like traits. For these individuals, they are motivated by proving themselves to others and to confirm their special skills to others and themselves (Dweck, 2016). For these individuals, their goals are often to look smart even if sacrificing learning, and failure and expending effort on a task means low intelligence (Dweck, 2002). In the growth mindset, there is a belief that basic qualities are things that can be developed and changed over time through your efforts, your strategies and from help from others, like states (Dweck, 2016). These individuals are motivated to learn new things even if this involves risk of failure, failure means low effort and poor strategy, and effort unlocks intelligence (Dweck, 2002). In this mindset, it is believed that anyone can become a master at a skill or can learn almost anything if given enough time and perseverance. What is also exciting is that you can change people's mindset and thus change their motivation and achievement.

Which mindset do you have? Answer these questions and decide whether you mostly agree or disagree with each one.

1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.
2. You can learn new things, but you can't really change your intelligence.
3. No matter how much intelligence you have, you always can change it quite a bit.
4. You always can change substantially how intelligent you are.

If you found yourself agreeing more with statements 1 and 2 you have a fixed mindset. If you found yourself agreeing more with statements 3 and 4 you have a growth mindset.

One of the most interesting aspects of Dweck's research is the effects of these mindsets on students when they are successful and when they fail. When successful, you do not see a difference between the two mindsets. For those with a fixed mindset, the success simply reflects their abilities and for those in the growth mindset, it shows that their effort was worth it. However, when a failure occurs, those in the fixed mindset start to show a decrease in self esteem and start to show less effort not more to overcome difficulties. The event of failure becomes incorporated into their identity as a failure. For students in the growth mindset, they may be upset with the failure, but they respond with more effort and they see it as a challenge to be solved and an opportunity to learn.

EXERCISE 8

Positive Growth and Praise

Positive and Effective Praise

We live in a culture that believes that we need to praise people on their intelligence and generally good character whenever they are successful. The belief is centered on the view that this will increase self-esteem and buffer the individual against difficulties later on (Kamins & Dweck, 1999). As was described above, this may be beneficial when they are successful but might not be effective when they are not successful.

Mueller and Dweck (1998) conducted a series of studies in which students were asked to complete a series of puzzles. The first puzzle was within their abilities. After successfully completing the puzzle, a third of the children received praise focused on their intelligence (“Wow, you are really smart!”), a third received praise focused on their effort (“Wow, you must have worked really hard on that!”) and a third received no praise for either intelligence or effort (“Wow, you did really well!”). After receiving their praise, the students were asked to complete a puzzle that was more difficult and was not successful. When asked to explain their failure to solve the problem, those that were praised for their intelligence (fixed mindset) agreed with statements that reflected that they were not good enough to solve the problems and that they were not smart enough. Thus, the intelligence praise that raised them up on the first puzzle also pulled them down on the second puzzle. Also, over several puzzles, their performances decreased even when the puzzles were easier. The students praised for their effort (growth mindset) hardly blamed their abilities and instead agreed with statements about needing to work harder on future problems, something that could easily be remedied. By the way, the students who received praise for their effort showed continued improvement and they became better at solving the puzzles.

Dweck and her colleagues also have found this phenomenon in terms of “trait” praise, like the goodness of character (Kamins & Dweck, 1999). They found the same results as with intelligence. Those children given trait praise showed happiness and contentment when successful but showed setbacks when not successful. Telling children, based on their performance, that they were good or smart or that you were proud of them made them highly vulnerable. They now reported that they did not feel they were good, smart, and worthy of pride and they thought that badness was a more fixed quality. Those praised with effort still felt smart and good and persisted at tasks longer showing greater creativity.

The exercise is for you to become more aware of how you praise others and yourself. While you want to be supportive and encouraging, you also want to help the individual in the future to be more resilient. Stop giving fixed mindset feedback. This should be for both positive situations (i.e. good grades, athletic success) and negative situations (i.e. disappointments). But process praise after failure is not simply telling the other person to try harder, for without showing them how effort feedback can sometimes be unhelpful. This means that growth praise places a bigger responsibility on the educator both to give students the right mindset and to help them gain the skills they may need to implement it successfully.

EXERCISE 8

Positive Growth and Praise

Changing Mindsets

What Carol Dweck and others have found is that knowing about the mindsets may be enough to help you change. You may start to think of moments when you are thinking of a fixed mindset and change it to a growth mindset (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

If you need more help, here is a more detailed process described by Dweck (2016):

Step 1: The first thing to do is recognize that we are all a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets. We have fixed mindsets about some things and growth about others. The first step is thus to accept that we are like everyone else. But, we now must start to recognize when the fixed mindset gets in the way and how it makes us feel and how it interrupts your educational achievement.

Step 2: The second step is to start to recognize the triggers that elicit a fixed mindset. This may be when you are afraid of taking on new challenges or when you become frustrated. Failures? Criticism? Deadlines? Disagreements? You start thinking that maybe it's too hard and better to give up or take an easier path and be successful. It also may be when others are mean or judgmental and you believe that there is nothing that will make them change their minds.

Step 3: Now name your fixed mindset with a name. Who is this person when you have a fixed mindset? When you start thinking with a fixed mindset you can claim that this is not you, but _____, whatever name you come up with. This name can be someone you know, a character for a movie, or, better yet, a name you do not like to remind you that you do not want to be that person.

Step 4: Now that you are aware of the triggers and you have a name for your alternative persona, it's time to confront the mindset. Rather than banish it, remember that people develop these mindsets over time. It is still around because it has worked for you in the past. Now it is becoming a problem. You need to educate it. Thank your fixed mindset for its input but decide to adopt an alternative. Slowly, you will start to adopt a growth mindset instead of a fixed mindset.

Step 5: Now you need to help others. Show them the problems with a fixed mindset and how to change.

EXERCISE 8

Positive Communications

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Dweck, C. S. (2002). Messages that motivate: How praise molds students' beliefs, motivation, and performance (in surprising ways). In J. Aronson (Ed.), *Improving academic achievement Impact of psychological factors on education* (pp. 61-87). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012064455-1/50006-3>

Dweck, C. S. (2016). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Ballantine Books.

Kamins, M. L., & Dweck, C. S. (1999). Person versus process praise and criticism: Implications for contingent self-worth and coping. *Developmental Psychology*, 35(3), 835-847. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.35.3.835>

Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(4), 302-314. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.722805>

EXERCISE 9

Forgiveness

Not all injuries are physical. It is often the case that sticks and stones can hurt us, but so can words or a betrayal of trust or being bullied. The initial response to many of these events is to be resentful, hold a grudge or plot your revenge. Anger, hate and pain swell, and we want to retaliate. Sometimes we are so affected by these events that our internal world is in chaos and it can be disruptive as we hold on to the hurt. When people suggest that you should forgive the other, you may feel you don't want to give up this righteous anger or maybe you don't think you can forgive. Pride and a need for power may lead you to feel entitled and you may want to hold on to the anger and resentment as a noble cause that others should recognize. We want sympathy and compassion from others, even if we are unwilling to offer it to others.

Forgiveness emerged in the 1990s as a new area of clinical interventions (Harris et al., 2006). What attracted therapists was the interpersonal nature of forgiveness and its association with anger, depression, anxiety and hostility (Baskin & Enright, 2004). Forgiveness has been defined as the decision or process of letting go of resentment in response to a real or perceived injustice and to develop positive thoughts and behaviors toward the offender even though they are not worthy of this beneficence (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Forgiveness has two components, a cognitive component where the person decides to forgive and an emotional component where negative emotions (i.e. anger) are replaced with more positive emotions (i.e. empathy) (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Note that the definition includes two important characteristics of forgiveness. First, the act of forgiveness is a willful act on your part. This is a decision to forgive that is taken willingly and it initiates a process from being resentful to letting the resentment go so it no longer interferes with your life. This process takes energy and is not easy. You still may feel aggrieved, but you have chosen not to let that resentment dominate your life. The second important characteristic of the definition is that it says nothing of the perpetrator of the offense. Forgiveness has nothing to do with the offender, it is all about changes in the victim. Forgiveness is something you extend to another person because this is the best response for you and your happiness (Enright, 2018). Forgiveness is for you and no one else.

A meta-analysis of studies looking at forgiveness interventions (Baskin & Enright, 2004) has shown that these forms of treatment are efficacious. The results also suggest that these treatments are more efficacious with more sessions. While this may simply reflect more attention paid to the clients, it also may reflect that forgiveness takes time and effort that may need more than a single decision, or a short period of time.

EXERCISE 9

Forgiveness

The exercise for this week is to practice forgiveness. Here are eight steps proposed by Robert Enright (2018), who has studied forgiveness for 30 years, and Robert Luskin (Harris et al., 2006), who runs the Stanford Forgiveness Projects:

- 1. Know what forgiveness is and why it matters:** Forgiveness is about goodness, about extending mercy to those who've harmed us, even if they don't "deserve" it. It is not about finding excuses for the offending person's behavior or pretending it didn't happen. It can reverse the lies that we often tell ourselves when someone has hurt us deeply – lies such as "I am defeated" or "I'm not worthy." Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciling with the person who upset you or condoning his or her actions. In forgiveness, you seek peace and understanding that come from blaming people less after they offend you and taking those offenses less personally.
- 2. Becoming forgivingly fit:** Forgiveness is a process and it requires energy and motivation to maintain the effort. Thus, it requires development over time, what Enright (2018) calls the forgiving heart muscle. You can start becoming more fit by making a commitment to do no harm. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." You can develop forgiveness through small acts, such as smiling at a harried grocery cashier or extending care when someone harms you in everyday life.
- 3. Address your inner pain:** Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts and physical upset you are suffering now, not from what hurt you in the past. It is important to identify and to acknowledge the inner pain. The more hurt you have incurred, the more important it is to forgive for the purpose of experiencing emotional healing.
- 4. Develop a forgiving mind through empathy:** Research has shown that when people successfully imagine forgiving someone (in a hypothetical situation), they show increased activity in the neural circuits responsible for empathy (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Thus, empathy is an important factor in forgiveness. One way to start is to consider that the person who harmed you may have been harmed by others as well. Recognize that we all carry wounds and need forgiveness.
- 5. Find meaning in your suffering:** When we suffer a great deal, it is important that we find meaning in what we have endured. Without seeing the meaning, a person can lose a sense of purpose, which can lead to hopelessness and a despairing conclusion that there is no meaning to life itself. Try to see how your suffering has changed you in a positive way. To find meaning is not to diminish your pain. You always must take care to address the woundedness in yourself and to recognize the injustice of the experience, or forgiveness will be shallow.
- 6. When forgiveness is hard, call upon your other strengths:** Forgiveness is hard and takes effort. If you are struggling with forgiveness, that does not mean you are a failure at forgiveness. Forgiveness is a process that takes time, patience, and determination. Try not to be harsh on yourself but be gentle and foster a sense of quiet within, an inner acceptance of yourself. Try to respond to yourself as you would to someone whom you love deeply.

EXERCISE 9

Forgiveness

7. **Forgive yourself:** Most of us tend to be harder on ourselves than we are on others and we struggle to love ourselves. If someone we love makes a mistake we are quick to comfort them, but we will not extend the same comfort to ourselves. If you are not feeling lovable because of your actions, you may need to work on self-forgiveness and offer to yourself what you offer to others who have hurt you: a sense of inherent worth, despite your actions. There are no gods among us; we are all imperfect and make mistakes. The concern with not forgiving ourselves is that we are at risk of self-loathing. When this happens, you may not take good care of yourself, you may overeat or oversleep or engage in other forms of “self-punishment.” You need to recognize this and move toward self-compassion.
8. **Develop a forgiving heart:** When we overcome suffering, we gain a more mature understanding of what it means to be humble, courageous and loving in the world. With this knowledge create an atmosphere of forgiveness in our homes and workplaces, to help others who’ve been harmed overcome their suffering or to protect our communities from a cycle of hatred and violence.

George Herbert, an English poet, and orator in the 1600s, once commented that a life welllived is the best revenge. By holding on to resentment and inner pain you are allowing the person who hurt you to continue to hurt you. Forgiveness is something you do to help your well-being and happiness.

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Baskin, T. W., & Enright, R. D. (2004). Intervention Studies on Forgiveness: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82(1), 79–90. <http://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2004.tb00288.x>

Enright, R. (2018). Eight Keys to Forgiveness. *Greater Good Magazine*, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_keys_to_forgiveness

Harris, A. H. S., Luskin, F., Norman, S. B., Standard, S., Bruning, J., Evans, S., & Thoresen, C. E. (2006). Effects of a group forgiveness intervention on forgiveness, perceived stress, and trait-anger. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(6), 715–733. <http://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20264>

Worthington, E. L., & Scherer, M. (2004). Forgiveness is an emotion-focused coping strategy that can reduce health risks and promote health resilience: theory, review, and hypotheses. *Psychology & Health*, 19(3), 385–405. <http://doi.org/10.1080/0887044042000196674>

EXERCISE 10

Grit

There always has been a question about human potential. Why do some people excel in some situations where they are often seen as mediocre in terms of talent? For instance, “geniuses” often start off life as average in abilities, with little evidence to announce their future success (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Yet, there are others who demonstrated a great deal of talent that simply fail to meet what others believed to be their potential. In business, we see people seek “talent” and believe that the most talented individuals will be the most successful in their jobs, be creative and, of course, make money.

This is, of course, highly salient in academics. William James, considered the father of American psychology, was very interested in identifying people’s abilities and then finding ways to maximize these abilities (Duckworth et al., 2007). Colleges and universities spend large sums of money to identify and attract “the best” students, the ones with the highest intellectual and academic abilities. Yet, every year colleges and universities are concerned about their retention rate, their graduation rate and making sure that students get through in a reasonable amount of time. This does not seem odd to us, yet all students who were admitted to the colleges and universities were accepted under the same criteria. Before we question the admission standards, others have suggested that we look at the personal characteristics of those who are successful versus those who struggle. The research shows that some of the most important factors in success is not cognitive ability (i.e. intelligence, memory) but noncognitive variables (study habits, conscientiousness, emotional intelligence, and test anxiety) (Credé, Tynan, & Harms, 2017).

One of the leading researchers in this area is Angela Duckworth. She has spent nearly 20 years looking at the reasons why some people persist while others decide to withdraw from certain situations. Of interest, given the same intelligence and academic accomplishments, why do some individuals accomplish more than others? While Duckworth will admit that some situations require certain traits (i.e. extraversion in sales), there are some characteristics that may be more important across situations. One of these is grit. Duckworth and colleagues (2007) define grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Thus, grit leads to people working consistently and with sustained effort in the face of adversity, failures and boredom. There are research studies looking at the talent that continue to show that in several different areas, ability or talent is not sufficient to explain success. Rather, in arts, business, sciences and sport, the differential factor is not raw talent that determines success but the degree to which the individual engages in deliberate and sustained practice (Duckworth et al., 2007). Thus, what seems to be the most important factor in success is not talent, but rather the passion you have for a topic which fuels your desire to continue in the face of adversity or stagnation.

In a study looking at grit and GPA, Duckworth and colleagues (2007) found that grit was correlated with GPA ($r = .25, p < .01$) and this relationship were made stronger when SAT was held constant ($r = .34, p < .001$). The sample for the study was 350 psychology majors at the University of Pennsylvania and we can assume that there were no drastic differences between the students. It also was found that grit was negatively associated with SAT scores, suggesting

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that students with higher “talent” measured by the SAT were not as “gritty” compared to their less talented peers. It is suggested that those who are told that they are not as talented may be more motivated to work harder and for longer periods of time. In a recent meta-analysis (Credé et al., 2017) showed that grit was not related to cognitive abilities.

Across six studies, Duckworth and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that individual differences in grit accounted for more variance in success than IQ, SAT and other measures of stable traits, such as personality. Across these studies, they found that self-control and the ability to provide sustained effort was an important key to success. It was not the amount of energy demonstrated at a given point that was important, but the sustained effort to accomplish long-term goals that were important. In a study looking at college admissions, the most important factor when looking at success, SAT or high school rank was not nearly as important as follow-through ratings. Students who were involved in two different activities for several years showed better success than those who were involved in multiple extracurricular activities.

One of the conclusions that people draw from the research is that self-control is synonymous with grit. It is well known that those with better self-control show better academic success (i.e. higher grades) (Duckworth & Gross, 2014). This makes sense. How else would you be able to show the degree of stamina in achieving a distant goal without self-control? In the meta-analysis, it was shown that grit showed a strong relationship to self-control and conscientiousness (Credé et al., 2017). However, Duckworth and Gross (2014) make it clear that grit is related but not the same as self-control. The difference comes down to goals and how we hope to achieve these goals. Goals are believed to be organized in a hierarchy where more immediate goals (eat when hungry) may be at a lower level and more long-term goals (proper diet) are at a more abstract, higher level in the hierarchy. Self-control may be more relevant to immediate goals and to decide on competing goals (eat salad versus fries). Grit on the other hand is responsible for more superordinate goal achievement and success over time.

How do we increase grit?

Here are some suggestions based on research (Zakrzewski, 2014) and what we already have presented in previous exercises.

- 1. Learn how thoughts and beliefs impact our ability to succeed.** Recall that in our discussion on Mindsets, Carol Dweck and others have focused on how our beliefs about the stability of our abilities play into how well we receive success and failure. So, one way to increase grit is to focus on a growth mindset and avoid the pitfalls of believing that minor setbacks signal that we will always fail.
- 2. Do not suppress negative emotions.** One of the personality factors that appears to be positively correlated with grit is emotional stability (Duckworth et al., 2007). This means that people low on grit may be more prone to experience anxiety and other negative emotions.

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Become aware of when your emotions get out of control. We often find that we need to deal with emotions first and then focus on beliefs and behaviors. Once you recognize your emotional status, use the mindfulness and other techniques we have discussed in previous exercises to help get these under control. The goal is to manage these emotions and not simply to cover them over and suppress them.

- 3. Foster positive emotions.** We often find that people higher on grit use positive emotions to increase their ability to deal with negative outcomes or a lack of progress towards goals. Good-spirited humor not only fosters positive emotions, but it also connects us to others, thereby helping us to maintain strong and positive social support networks, which we all need when going for those long-term goals. Sharing positive events with each other can also give us a boost in positive emotions. If you dwell on a positive event, called “savoring” by scientists, then they are more likely to call upon that event, and hence the positive emotions generated by that event, in difficult times. Savoring has been found to not only give us a boost in well-being but also to broaden our thinking, thus making us better problem-solvers.

If you are interested in the science behind this exercise, you may want to read:

Credé, M., Tynan, M. C., & Harms, P. D. (2017). Much ado about grit: A meta-analytic synthesis of the grit literature. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 113(3), 492–511. <http://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000102>

Duckworth, A. L., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Self-Control and Grit. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 319–325. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414541462>

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087–1101. <http://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087>

Zakrzewski, V. (2014). Two ways to foster grit. *Greater Good Magazine*. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/two_ways_to_foster_grit