

RESILIENCY & MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS QUICK TIPS #3

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Resiliency & Mental Health Wellness Quick Tips #3

Each week, we will present an article here that will discuss a key component of resiliency, positive psychology, and mental health wellness!

The articles will briefly present a new topic, provide a skill and/or exercise to try, and will often include other available resources.

We hope that you find this material helpful and work to apply these concepts in your life.



COMBATTING THE BRAIN'S NEGATIVITY BIAS

- Why do we (humans) tend to focus on the negative?
 - Turns out, our brains are sort-of programmed this way. We have a negativity bias!
 - Our brains are wired to respond more to negative experiences and thoughts than positive ones.
 - Why, you rhetorically ask? Well, in the early days of human existence, negativity served to protect us! Experiencing something negative (e.g., a fierce animal about to pounce on you and make you dinner) caused fight-or-flight reactions.
- Fast forward to modern day, our brains are still programmed this way, and it may not be an animal going to eat us, but it could be anything that threatens our existence (e.g., bad news, criticism, a failure, the coronavirus).
- You can see this bias in our language development - there are more words describing negative emotions and traits than positive emotions and traits.
- Awareness of this negativity bias is a key step in understanding how your brain works and how to change your perspective.

One Key to Combatting the Negativity Bias = Generate Positive Emotions

- ✓ Now that you are aware, you can actively work to generate positive emotions to combat the negativity bias.
- ✓ The key phrase is "actively work". You must work at being more positive, but that work will pay off in many ways, including a better mood, less reactivity to stress, and a greater ability to bounce back from negative experiences.

EXERCISES TO TRY

1. WHAT WENT WELL?

- Try focusing on what went well each day instead of what went poorly. At the end of each day, reflect on something that went well during the day and why it went well. Discuss this with a family member or friend and have them do the same thing.
- This exercise is discussed in the book *Flourish* by Dr. Martin Seligman, a great book and resource if you are interested in learning more about positive psychology concepts.

2. ACTS OF KINDNESS

- Try engaging in random acts of kindness to others each day. Does not have to be dramatic, can be small. This can be easier when we are not social distancing and staying out of public places, but be creative.
- Research discussed in Lyubomirsky's (2007) book, *The How of Happiness*, found that individuals who engaged in 5 such acts reported being happier and the feeling lasting for several days after engaging in such an exercise!

RESOURCES/REFERENCES

Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. Penguin.

Seligman, M. E. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Simon and Schuster.

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“If we move through our day with an open awareness of the many good things around us we correct our brain’s negativity bias.”

– Dr. Rick Hanson