

OPTIMISM AND SAVOURING HAPPINESS FOR A BRIGHTER LIFE

Optimism is all about approaching the world with hope, having the will to make the best of different experiences, good and bad. It's a willingness to try new things, to plan for the best outcome, knowing that both success and failure are valuable and are key to our development. It isn't wishful thinking and believing that everything is wonderful.

Research has shown that optimists have better physical and mental health, greater success, more satisfying relationships and even live longer than pessimists. Psychologist and author Martin Seligman says that the key to optimism and pessimism lies in our 'explanatory styles' – how we explain life events (good and bad) to ourselves. Often the stories that we tell ourselves aren't factual and can be a product of inaccurate and often negative thoughts.

Whilst we all have a predisposition to a certain level of optimism, we can shift our thinking to a more optimistic outlook and importantly we can help our children develop optimistic thinking habits. Learning to think optimistically is a skill that we can develop.



Check out these 3 simple steps to help us establish optimistic thinking habits:

Thoughts: Catch them, Check them, Change them.

1. Catch your thoughts:

Notice your thinking.

2. Check and Challenge your thoughts:

Are they accurate or distorted?

Look out for patterns of language.

e.g. I'm always the last to know. They never ask my opinion.

Are you sure? Are you fortune-telling?

e.g. I think it'll be impossible for me to do that. How do you know? Are you mind-reading?

e.g. They think that I've got the magic solution to everything!

Do they really? Are you labelling?

e.g. I'm just so useless.

Are you really?

When we are not mindful of our thoughts, we don't notice these automatic negative thought patterns. These thought patterns can become problematic. When we are mindful of our thoughts we have the opportunity to check them for accuracy and change them if appropriate.

3. Change your thoughts:

Re-frame: Is there a different way of looking at this? Ask yourself how a friend would deal with the situation.

We can also practise training our brains to savour happy experiences so that we can prolong the great feeling that we have when the brain releases dopamine (a feel-good neurotransmitter).

Goldie Hawn, in her book '10 Mindful Minutes', writes that "Focusing on happiness is not a frivolous pursuit; it is one of the emotions that can inform the trajectory of our lives."

If we want a happy child, **we** need to be happy, attuned parents. When we wake up each day, do we make a choice to be happy? Much of our happiness is in our control. Instead of searching for happiness can we find it right where we are?