

# GG101x: The Science of Happiness

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Group Learning Sessions  
Facilitator Guide



<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>



This Facilitator Guide is a resource for individuals leading group learning sessions to complement the online course GG101x: The Science of Happiness, produced by University of California, Berkeley's [Greater Good Science Center](#) and hosted on the edX.org platform.

The aim is for students to complete the online portion of the course independently, then meet once a week with fellow students to review material and engage in course-related activities—all guided by the self-appointed facilitator. This guide suggests a chronological framework for each session, listing specific topics to discuss and activities to try. Facilitators may deviate from this schedule as desired—for instance, by holding half as many group meetings that cover twice as much material, or omitting suggested segments that are not well-suited to their particular group.

In principle, anyone is free to take on the role of facilitator and use this guide to support a group of people who want to come together to have a deeper learning experience of the Science of Happiness. People may even share the role and delegate facilitator duties for each week.

For those interested in facilitating a Science of Happiness group within a professional setting, consider earning a Verified Certificate of Achievement in GG101x: The Science of Happiness on edX.org beforehand, and obtaining some experience leading workshops or facilitating group-based experiences.

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# Contributors

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## Course Co-Instructors

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**Emiliana Simon-Thomas, Ph.D.**, is the Science Director at the GGSC at UC Berkeley. She earned her doctorate in Cognition, Brain and Behavior Psychology at Berkeley, examining how emotions influence thinking. Emiliana runs scientific initiatives at the GGSC like the Expanding Gratitude project and the Research Fellowship program, and also co-instructs GG101x: The Science of Happiness. Her current work examines the biological underpinnings and overall advantages of being a more prosocial person. Looking at how connecting with others, being kind, and cooperative benefits health, well-being, social life and work, Emiliana’s work aims to fully explore the potential for – as well as the benefits of – living a more meaningful life.

## Course Producer

**Jason Marsh, M.J.**, is the Greater Good Science Center's director of programs and the founding editor-in-chief of the GGSC's award-winning online magazine, Greater Good. A graduate of Brown University and the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, Jason is also a co-editor of two anthologies of Greater Good articles: *The Compassionate Instinct* (WW Norton, 2010) and *Are We Born Racist?* (Beacon Press, 2010). What makes Jason happy is chasing fly balls, playing charades with his daughter, and reading A.O. Scott.

## GG101x Instructional Team

**Hai Hoang, B.A.**, graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with highest honors in psychology. He has been a course assistant for the Science of Happiness since the course's first launch in 2014, and his primary role is building the course contents on edX. Beside supporting GGSC's works, Hai is a data analyst fellow for the Carnegie Foundation, Stanford. In his free time, Hai enjoys doing martial arts and photography, but what makes him most happy is being with the people he loves.

**Kira Newman, B.A.**, is an editor and web producer at the Greater Good Science Center, and a former course assistant for the Science of Happiness. Offline, she is the creator of CaféHappy, a Toronto-based meetup that gathers monthly to discuss how to be happier. Kira comes to GGSC from the world of tech journalism, where she was published in outlets including *Social Media Monthly* and Tech.co. She spent four years traveling around the world and loves speaking French, swing dancing, and exploring local cafés.

**Juliana Breines, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor of social psychology at the University of Rhode Island. She received her Ph.D. in Social-Personality Psychology from the University of California, Berkeley, and her B.A. from the University of Michigan. Her research examines how social experiences shape the way people treat themselves, and how positive and negative forms of self-treatment (e.g., self-compassion, self-criticism) impact health and well-being.

**Yves Van Melckebeke, M.B.E.**, consults organizations in optimizing business strategy, innovating and managing major transformation projects. He specialized both in change management and in incorporating principles of positive psychology into the workplace culture and provided services. He is also a former assistant and community leader for the Science of Happiness online course. What makes him happy is spending time with his family and friends, helping people to develop their full potential, as well as contributing to the evolution of a more positive society.

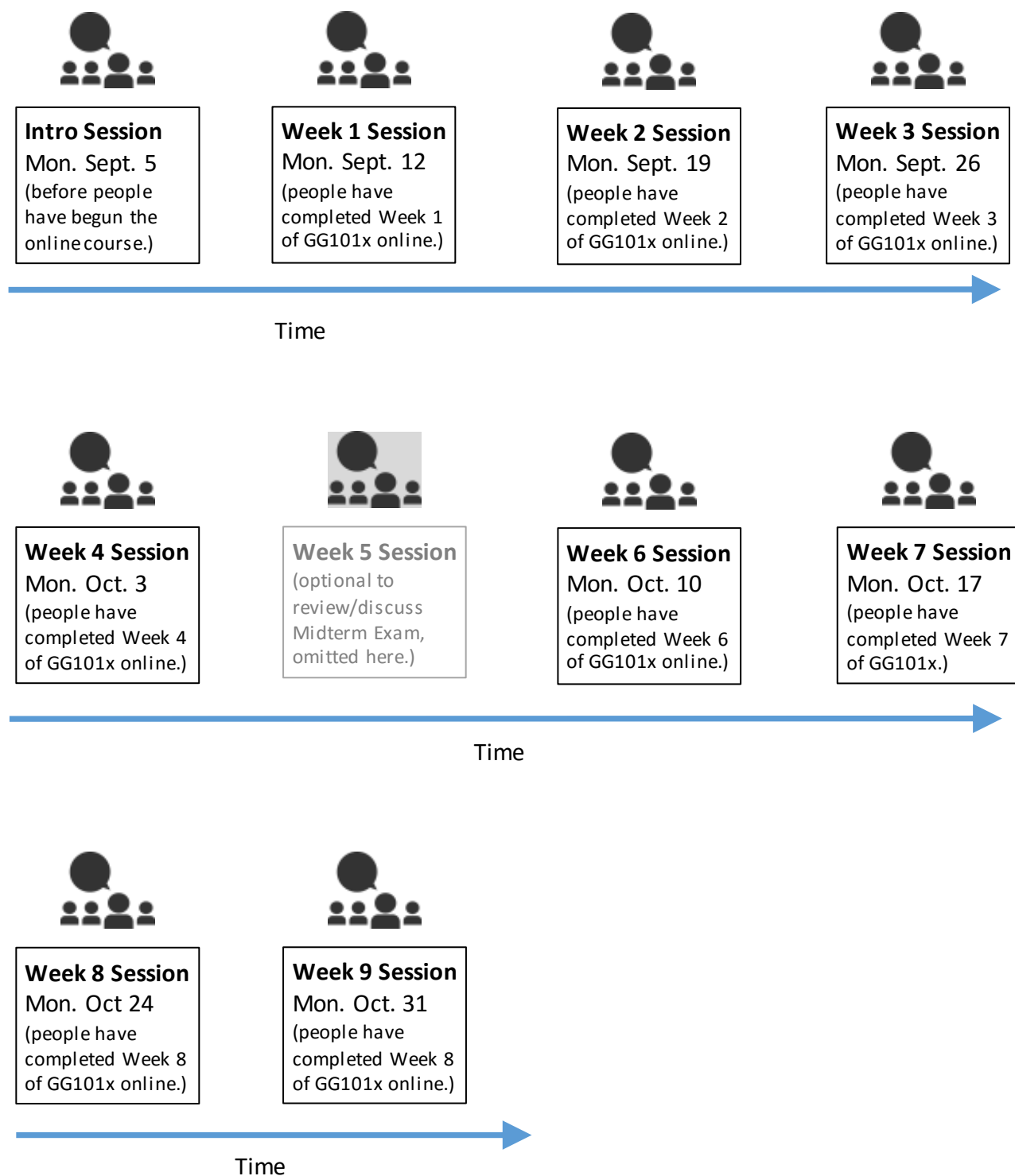


# How to Use This Guide

This Facilitator Guide provides a framework for presenting material, discussing topics, and guiding practical exercises from GG101x: The Science of Happiness within a group setting. Selected material from each week of the online course is presented within a roughly two-hour, weekly group session. Each session is divided into multiple sections which are described in detail below. This guide is not intended to be a verbatim script. Rather, people in the facilitator role are welcome to tailor or modify the presentation of material to match their personal style and the interests and needs of the group.

## Schedule:

- **Online course:** GG101x: The Science of Happiness on edX.org is offered as a 10-week course, in either a synchronous or self-paced format. The synchronous course is delivered one week at a time beginning the first Tuesday in September, and students are expected to progress through the course over a ten-week span, together. The self-paced course launches the first Tuesday in January; all course materials are offered at once and students can complete the course at their convenience any time before the course close date – usually the end of June. The first thing to do is decide whether you want to facilitate group sessions in conjunction with a fall, synchronous - or a spring, self-paced version of the online course, GG101x: The Science of Happiness.
- **Group Meetings:** Once you select the GG101x: The Science of Happiness course you intend to link your group sessions to, you should begin to reach out to potential group members. Ideally, this outreach begins 4-6 weeks prior to the date that you intend to hold your “Introductory Session” (page 9.) Your Introductory Session should occur within 1-3 days of the course open date for the synchronous course and no later than 10 weeks from the course close date for the self-paced course.



Sample schedule for group sessions for a GG101x fall, synchronous course

## Weekly Session Sections:

- **Session Overview:** This section provides a summary introduction of the key topics for each week. Facilitators can either read these bullet points to the group or paraphrase based on their own understanding of the content area.
- **Check-In:** This section provides an opportunity for people in the group to get to know each other, and for the facilitator to learn about people's general reactions to the course. This section is not meant to elicit lengthy or detailed group discussions. If conversations do begin to deepen, facilitators should note the theme, remind the group that time is deliberately delegated for deeper discussions later in the session, encourage speakers to sum up their thoughts quickly, and move on.
- **Happiness Content:** This section provides a more in-depth review of the material presented within each week of GG101x: The Science of Happiness using multiple formats including key points, videos, and discussion prompts. The goal of this section is twofold: (1) confirm that people in the group have a strong grasp of the course material; and (2) allow time for thorough discussion of course topics. Again, facilitators may choose to read through the key points and discussion prompts as written, or they can reorganize and modify as appropriate to match the interests of the group.
- **Happiness Practice:** This section provides guidance for facilitators to support the group in trying happiness practices together and, again, includes key points, descriptions, instructions or scripts, and discussion prompts. The goal of this section is threefold: (1) review the scientific rationale and benefits of each happiness practice; (2) actively engage in the happiness practice and/or reflect upon experiences with happiness practices over the past week; and (3) discuss experiences, reactions, and responses to engaging in the happiness practices. Unlike in other sections, facilitators should closely follow instructions or scripts when guiding the happiness practices.
- **General Group Reflections:** This section provides an opportunity for group reflection and additional discussion. Facilitators may choose to read the provided discussion prompts, use this time to revisit topics brought up during

the check-in, or continue discussions of other topics that came up during the session.

- **Preparing for Next Week:** At the end of each session, facilitators are asked to orient people in the group to the coming week. This section includes a video link from GG101x: The Science of Happiness that introduces the upcoming week's material. Though not mandatory, viewing course videos together acquaints the group with the kind of learning they will be doing outside of the group sessions. This section also includes a quiz related to the next week's material. People can complete the quiz electronically during the session (if they have Internet access), and discuss their results and feedback.

### **Logistical Considerations:**

- **Handouts:** Facilitators may elect to download, print, and photocopy the course syllabus and provide it as a handout during the first meeting.
- **Use of Electronic Resources:** This guide includes several suggestions for multimedia presentation during group meetings. It is recommended that facilitators arrange to use a meeting space that has Internet access in order to collectively view online course material. Facilitators should have all of the suggested videos for each week's meeting cued up on their playing device (e.g., computer, phone) before the group assembles. Live links can be found in the PDF version of this guide.
- **Projection:** People will enjoy watching videos together more if there is a large, single display projected from a computer. Facilitators should arrange to have a projector to project video from their playing device, and a plain wall or screen to project upon and speakers to amplify audio.
- **Annotation:** A wall-mounted chalkboard or large paper on a sturdy easel is very useful for noting key ideas or providing instructions to the group during sessions. Facilitators should try to arrange to have a large surface to write on during meetings.
- **Between-Session Communication:** Facilitators are encouraged to communicate with group members between sessions via email or social media (e.g., coordinating logistics, sharing additional resources, or sending discussion

prompts) and by creating an online Happiness Team within GG101x: The Science of Happiness on the edX platform (see “Happiness Teams FAQ” and “Teams” tabs on the course landing page), and regularly posting within their team’s discussion threads. These added social interactions will add to the fun and help to enhance course learning!

- **Midterm and Final Exam Weeks:** Online, GG101x includes two designated weeks for exams: the Midterm (Week 5) and the Final Exam (Week 10). Facilitators will not have new material to present or review during exam weeks. However, if the group would like to meet during these weeks to review course material and/or continue discussions, facilitators are encouraged to schedule a meeting.



# The Science of Happiness

**Intro Session**

**Course Overview** [*Schedule before beginning the online course*]

## SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

Welcome to The Science of Happiness, [*Location or Organization or group name*]. My name is [*Your Name*]. I am [*Where are you from? What do you do outside of this? What's something funny about you?*]. I am here to guide, organize and support our Science of Happiness [*Location or Organization or group name*] gatherings over the next ten weeks. I'll be here to meet with you all each week to review, reflect upon, and discuss material from the online Science of Happiness course, and to guide us through exercises and activities that have been shown to strengthen happiness.

The goals of today's introductory session are to go over the logistics of the online course, find consensus around the parameters of our group meetings, and get to know each other as we embark upon studying the Science of Happiness together over the next ten weeks.

## INTRODUCTION VIDEO (5 MINUTES)

Before we get started, I'd like to share a brief video to introduce [The Science of Happiness Course](#) [2:14].

## GROUP INTRODUCTIONS (30 MINUTES)

As you'll soon learn, feeling connected, or like you belong socially is key to happiness, which is why we believe it's important to study the Science of Happiness together. Getting to know each other, forming our own culture of learning around the Science of Happiness, is just one aspect of feeling open and connected with others.

Let's begin with some introductions. Please go around the room and share [*write prompts on a board*]:

- 1) One good thing that happened over the course of the week

- 2) What drew you, and what are you hoping to gain from this course?
- 3) If you were a superhero/animal/piece of furniture/[other], which would you be and why?

## ONLINE COURSE INSTRUCTORS (5 MINUTES)

In addition to our meetings in person, you will all be guided through the online Science of Happiness course by two of the leading experts in the field, Dacher Keltner and Emiliana Simon-Thomas from University of California Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. I'll let them introduce themselves.

**Week 1: Introduction to the Science of Happiness > Welcome to the Course! > [Welcome from Dacher & Emiliana](#) [4:16].**

## COURSE OVERVIEW: COURSE SYLLABUS (15 MINUTES)

GG101x: The Science of Happiness is the first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to teach the groundbreaking research exploring the roots of a happy, connected, and meaningful life. Some call this field "positive psychology," but it might be better described as "pro-social" psychology. Over 300,000 people from more than 200 countries around the world have registered for GG101x. Ninety-eight percent of those who complete it say they would recommend it to others. *[Pass out course syllabus and review details with group. Make sure to discuss the key points included below.]*

- **Course Components:** The online course includes a variety of instructional components, including video lectures, readings, problem set questions, and discussion forums. There are eight weeks of material dedicated to key themes that pertain to happiness, and two weeks that offer time to review materials and complete the Midterm and Final exams. The material for each week typically takes three to five hours to complete in full, depending on each person's prior experience and expertise.
- **Weekly Happiness Practices:** Happiness Practices are research-tested activities that have been shown to boost happiness and well-being. In addition to covering the instructional content, you will be invited to try happiness



practices throughout the course. You will be encouraged to do some practices multiple times; others are suggested at a less frequent pace.

- **Ungraded Components:** The course also offers several ungraded opportunities to help integrate the Science of Happiness into daily life. You are encouraged to interact with classmates from all over the world via the discussion forms, to reflect on how you have been feeling lately through weekly Check Ins, to try Happiness Practices and gauge their impact, effectiveness and fit, and finally, to share your perspective on the Pre and Post-Course surveys.
- **Graded Components:** If you're interested in earning a Verified Certificate of Achievement from the edX platform, you will need to pay the listed fee on edX and complete the graded components of the online course, including weekly Problem Sets (30% of grade), the Midterm (30% of grade), and the Final exam (40% of grade). To pass the course, you will need to earn a total grade of at least 60%.
- **Continuing Education:** If you would like to earn continuing education credit hours for completing this course, you will need to register with our CE administering partner, R. Cassidy Seminars, and pay the associated fee. Click [HERE](#) for details about earning continuing education credits.
- **Happiness Teams:** Within GG101x on the edX platform, people can self-organize into teams—i.e., groups that have designated discussion threads online and work together much like we are doing here and now. I have set up a Happiness Team for us in GG101x on edX already, called [*Name of Team*] – please join [*Name of Team*] next time you are logged into edX so we can connect and discuss things while we are doing the course online, too.
- **Overview of the Main Themes Covered in the Course:** Now, let's watch Dacher walk us through the topics that will be covered in the online course.

**Week 1: Introduction to the Science of Happiness > Welcome to the Course! > [Course Roadmap](#) [6:43].**

- Are there any questions about the structure, parameters, or logistics of the online course?

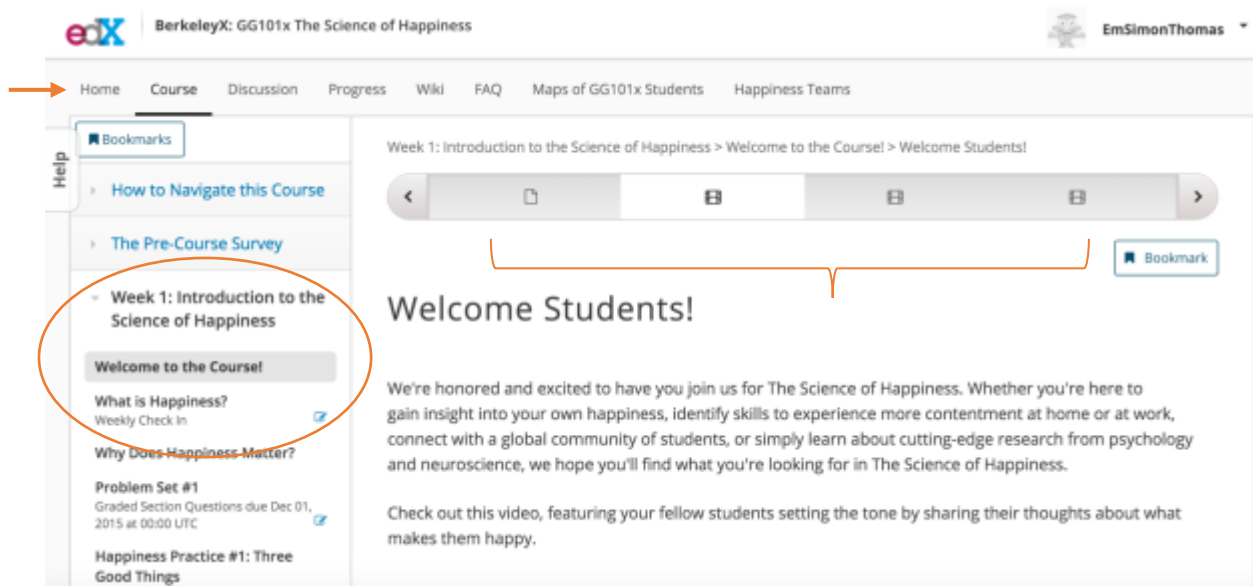
## NAVIGATING THE ONLINE COURSE (15 MINUTES)

[Walk students through the components and features of the edX course website.]

To learn more about how to use edX.org, click on the [How to Navigate This Course](#) section at the beginning of the course – it will be worth your while!

As we progress through the weeks, the material within each week is organized under different headings and subheadings, which can be seen by clicking on each week in the left navigation menu (circled in image below) under the Course tab.

Once you are within a particular week, you can click on any one of the subheadings to see all of the material organized within that subsection, then progress through that material by clicking on the units within the progress bar toward the top of the screen (see bracket in image below).



- **Home:** The Home tab takes you to a page with course updates, news, and archived course-wide emails (see arrow above pointing to tab menu) as well as downloadable pdf's of the course syllabus and bibliography on the right side of the screen.
- **Course:** The Course tab contains all of the material available for each week. For “synchronous” offerings of the Science of Happiness in the fall, the material for

each week is made available on sequential Tuesday mornings. For “self-paced” offerings in the spring, the material for the entire course is available for the duration of the course term.

- **Discussion:** The Discussion tab allows you to post questions, ideas or responses to course content, and respond to fellow students’ posts. Discussion forums provide another option to connect with classmates, albeit virtually, as you explore the Science of Happiness.
- **Progress:** The Progress tab shows you to see your own scores for course learning components from each week of the course. Please note that edX counts any problem sets or exams that you haven’t done as a “0,” so your total grade will be low in the beginning of the course.
- **Happiness Teams:** Once again, I have set up a Happiness Team for us in GG101x on edX called [*Name of Team*] – please join [*Name of Team*] next time you are logged into edX so we can connect and discuss things while we are doing the course online.
- Any questions about how to use the course website?

### OUR HAPPINESS GROUP COMMUNITY (15 MINUTES)

- Our in-person meetings are meant to complement your experience with the online course by providing opportunities to discuss course materials, try happiness practices, and interact with other students in person. Our meetings are not designed to serve as a personal support or therapy group, but rather as a time to deepen your understanding about the ideas within and share your reactions to the course. If you are seeking a mental health support or therapy group, please contact your health care provider for recommendations.
- To get the most out of our meetings together, we will all expect each other to complete the online portion of each week of the course **prior** to meeting. For example, for next week’s meeting, which will be held every [*day of the week*] at [*time*] in [*location*], we should all have completed Week 1: Introduction to the Science of Happiness. You are welcome to partner up and go through the online course together if you prefer.

- **Attendance:** If you are unable to join a meeting, please let me know by contacting [*number to call or text, email, other preferred contact*] at least two hours before meeting time. To get the most out of this experience, it's ideal for as many of us as possible to attend each meeting – each person's ideas, thoughts, and feelings about this material are very valuable to the learning experience and overall impact of the course. If you miss more than three of our meetings, I encourage you to join another group at another time so that you can get the most out of your experience. Finally, if your plans change or you foresee the need to discontinue attending group sessions, please let me know right away so that I can plan accordingly.
- **Confidentiality:** Our meetings together will involve sharing personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Please be sure to respect the group by not discussing the personal details of what is shared within this group with people outside of this group.
- **Mutual Respect:** In order to truly benefit from each other, it will be important to create an open, supportive, respectful, and nonjudgmental environment, where people feel safe and welcome to voice their feelings and share the floor with others. Please do not interrupt, monopolize discussions, or speak in a hostile way in this group.
- Anything you would like to add to our discussion of group expectations? Can we all agree to uphold these expectations?

### **HAPPINESS PRACTICE: CAPITALIZATION (20 MINUTES)**

Before we wrap up today's session, let's try a Happiness Practice called "capitalization," which is not actually in the online course (perk of our group sessions!) – and has been shown to boost feelings of empathy and connection.

The capitalization practice involves having a quick conversation with someone else in this room, but in a special way. Break off into pairs and decide which one of you will share about a good thing that happened today (we will switch roles after five minutes). As your partner shares, try engaging in the followings behaviors [*write prompts on a board*]:

Make good eye contact, showing that you are interested in and engaged in what they have to say.

Express positive emotion by smiling, nodding, or even cheering (if appropriate!).

Make enthusiastic comments—e.g., “That sounds great,” “You must be so excited,” or “Your hard work is definitely paying off.”

Ask constructive questions to find out more about the positive aspects of the event. For example, if the person tells you about receiving recognition at work for a project, you could ask for more details about the project, what aspects of the project he or she feels especially proud of, and how it felt to receive recognition for it.

Comment on the positive implications and potential benefits of the event. For example, “I bet this means you have a better chance of getting a promotion this year.”

*[Ask the dyads to switch roles after five minutes.]*

**Discussion:** What was that experience like for you? What emotions did you experience? Did you feel more or less connected to your partner?

### **PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (10 MINUTES)**

- Next week’s theme, the first week of the course, is: **Introduction to the Science of Happiness**. In the online course you will explore prevailing scientific and cultural views of happiness, explore how happiness is defined and measured, and learn about the benefits of living a happier life.
- Here’s a sneak peak of what to expect during next week’s course:

**Week 1: Introduction to the Science of Happiness > Why Does Happiness Matter? > [Why We Need the Science of Happiness Today](#) [4:25].**



# The Science of Happiness

## Week 1

## Introduction to the Science of Happiness

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 1 was to introduce you to The Science of Happiness. We reviewed historical, philosophical, and cultural views of happiness, explored how scientists define and measure happiness, and learned about the benefits of living a happier life.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back! Thanks for joining us.
- Since we're still getting to know each other, let's please go around the room and share our names again, and add one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about the online course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: WHAT IS HAPPINESS? (30 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - Sonja Lyubomirsky defines happiness as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”
  - Scientists often focus on several aspects of happiness: life satisfaction, positive emotional states, and “subjective well-being.”

- Happiness doesn't mean never experiencing negative emotional states (e.g., pain, sadness, anger). Negative emotions are important and don't detract from your ability to experience happiness. Happy people experience negative emotional states, but handle and recover from them more gracefully.
- Here are some assumptions and habits that get in the way of happiness:

**Week 1: Introduction to the Science of Happiness > Pessimism, Myths, and Misconceptions about Happiness > [Psychological Tendencies that Get in the Way of Happiness](#) [8:24].**

- **Discussion:**
  - What is your personal definition of happiness?
  - Does your definition stem from firsthand experience of what makes you happy or from general observations about what you think constitutes happiness for most people?
  - Have any of the ideas or materials from the course you've encountered thus far made you think differently about happiness?
  - Can you identify mental habits or ideas that get in the way of happiness? Where do you think these ideas come from?
  - Any questions about Problem Sets #1 or #2?

**HAPPINESS PRACTICE: THREE GOOD THINGS (20 MINUTES)**

- **Key Points:**
  - Happiness is associated with many benefits: longevity, better health, decreased chronic pain, increased immune activity, better cardiovascular health, decreased likelihood of disease, better social relationships, and feeling more loved and fulfilled.
  - *[Engage group in the Three Good Things practice.]*



### **Happiness Practice #1: Three Good Things**

Write down three things that went well for you today, and provide an explanation for why they went well.

1. Give the event a title.
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how this event made you feel later (including now, as you remember it).
4. Explain what you think caused this event—why it came to pass.
5. Use whatever writing style you please, and do not worry about perfect grammar and spelling. Use as much detail as you'd like.
6. If you find yourself focusing on negative feelings, refocus your mind on the good event and the positive feelings that came with it. This can take effort but gets easier with practice and can make a real difference in how you feel.

#### **○ Discussion:**

- What was your experience with trying the Three Good Things practice?
- What changes, if any, did you notice in your thoughts, feelings, or behavior?
- Was there anything challenging about engaging in Three Good Things, particularly as a daily exercise?
- Given what you've learned about happiness, do you plan to continue practicing Three Good Things?

### **GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (30 MINUTES)**

- How do you think your life might change if you could be a few degrees happier than you think you are now?
- Could you imagine restructuring your daily routines to devote more time to the experiences that, as science suggests, are most likely to boost your happiness? How?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

### **PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (20 MINUTES)**

- Next week we will discuss The Power of Social Connection.
- Roadmap for next week:

**Week 2: The Power of Social Connection > Happiness and Social Connection > [Introduction to Week 2: The Power of Social Connection](#) [2:03].**

- **Social Capital Quiz:** Research suggests that social connections are important to happiness. Here's a survey you can take that will answer the question, "[How strong are my social connections?](#)"

# The Science of Happiness

## Week 2

## The Power of Social Connection

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 2 was to explore the science behind social connection and happiness. We reviewed why evolution has favored social connection, explored the biological and behavioral underpinnings associated with social connection, and learned strategies for feeling more close, trusting, and connected with others.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Please go around the room, remind us of your name again, and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: SOCIAL CONNECTION (30 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - Our interpersonal connections with other people are instrumental to our happiness.
  - This propensity to affiliate, connect, and collaborate is likely essential to the survival of our species.

- The bonds we form with caregivers early in life (i.e., attachment style) affect the trajectory of our social life through adulthood—and, in turn, our happiness.
- Researchers have identified some causes and consequences of attachment styles:

**The Power of Social Connection > Why Do Social Connections Foster Happiness? > [Early Life Attachment and Social Connection](#) [6:31].**

- **Discussion:**
  - Do you think social connections are a “necessary” (if not sufficient) condition for happiness? Do you feel different during periods of time when you are more versus less socially connected?
  - What benefits stemming from our relationships might foster happiness?
  - Many people wonder whether this research on social connection means that introverts have worse prospects for happiness than extroverts. What do you think?
  - Do you think that your own attachment style influences the ways in which you connect with others? How?
  - Any questions about Problem Sets #3 or #4?

**HAPPINESS PRACTICE: ACTIVE LISTENING (20 MINUTES)**

- **Key Points:**
  - Social communication occurs within a variety of contexts: verbal and non-verbal communication, touch, non-verbal sounds, etc.
  - Connecting with people who are different from us plays an important role in happiness and health.
  - Active Listening is just one of several activities that scientists have discovered that can boost empathy and connection.

### **Happiness Practice #2: Active Listening**

Often we'll listen to a conversation partner without really hearing him or her—in the process, we miss opportunities to connect with that person. This exercise helps you express active interest in what the other person has to say and makes him or her feel heard—a way to foster empathy and connection.

Find a quiet place where you can talk with your partner without interruption or distraction. Invite him or her to share what's on his or her mind. As he or she does so, try to follow the steps below. You don't need to cover every step, but the more you do cover, the more effective this practice is likely to be.

1. **Paraphrase** – Restate what the other person is saying to show you understand.
2. **Ask Questions** – Ask the other person to elaborate on his or her thoughts or feelings.
3. **Express Empathy** – Validate the experience of negative feelings.
4. **Use Engaged Body Language** – Show that you are engaged.
5. **Avoid Judgment** – Understand and accept the other person's perspective.
6. **Avoid Giving Advice** – Problem-solving is likely to be more effective.
7. **Take Turns** – Ask if it's okay to share your perspective.

- *[Break into groups of two or three people and engage in the Active Listening practice.]*

#### ○ **Discussion**

- What do you think of the Active Listening practice?
- Did you feel more attuned to your conversation partner? Did you notice any changes in your conversation partner's behavior?
- Was there anything challenging about Active Listening?
- Given what you know about the science of social communication, do you plan to continue trying active listening?

### **GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (30 MINUTES)**

- There are two types of empathy: "affective empathy," which refers to the sensations and feelings we have in response to other people's expressions, and "cognitive empathy," which refers to how we label and understand other

peoples' emotions. Do you feel more skilled on one or the other of these forms of empathy?

- Do you think empathy leads to more success in cooperative endeavors, particularly for leaders?
- Are you satisfied with the quality, authenticity, or depth of your social connections? If so, what have you done to strengthen these relationships? If not, what gets in the way of forming strong relationships?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

### **PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (20 MINUTES)**

- Next week we will discuss Compassion and Kindness.
- Roadmap for next week:

**Week 3: Compassion and Kindness > Compassion, Kindness, and Happiness > [Introduction to Week 3: Compassion and Kindness](#) [3:05].**

- **Compassion Quiz:** To get some insights about your own compassionate nature, take the GGSC [Compassionate Love Quiz](#).

# The Science of Happiness

## Week 3

## Compassion and Kindness

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 3 was to build upon the previous week's theme of social connection by exploring particular ways that we connect: through compassion and kindness. We reviewed the science behind pro-social behavior, explored the evolutionary and biological reasons why compassion and kindness might be linked to happiness, and learned strategies for increasing compassion and kindness.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Please go around the room and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: WHAT IS COMPASSION? (30 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - **Compassion:** The feeling you have when you witness someone else who is suffering or in need and you feel motivated to help that person, or to do something to relieve his or her suffering.
  - **The Stages of Compassion:**
    1. Empathy – which is linked to being more socially adept.

2. The urge or motivation to caregive or nurture – compassion can help to reduce distress by heightening caregiving behaviors that are good for health and well-being.
3. Kindness is inherently pleasurable and at national levels, more kindness is associated with greater well-being.

**Week 3: Compassion and Kindness > The Kindness-Happiness Loop > [The Kindness-Happiness Loop](#) [6:11].**

○ **Discussion:**

- Do you consider compassion to be a positive emotion? Why or why not? What kinds of judgments about yourself or other people, or thoughts about the situation influence whether or not you feel compassion?
- Given what you've learned so far—not just in this week but in previous weeks as well—what do you think accounts for the connection between kindness and happiness?
- When we are generous, what might change for us—psychologically and socially—that could help explain why performing kind acts makes people feel happier?
- Any questions about Problem Sets #5 or #6?

**HAPPINESS PRACTICE (20 MINUTES)**

○ **Key Points:**

- Five ways giving is good for you: (1) It makes us feel happy; (2) it's good for our health; (3) it promotes cooperation and social connection; (4) it evokes gratitude; and (5) it's contagious!
- *[Break into groups of two or three people and take turns describing kind acts already performed, or proposing new ones to try. As a further kindness, people can complement each another's acts, or ideas for acts of kindness.]*



### **Happiness Practice #3: Random Acts of Kindness**

We all perform acts of kindness at one time or another. These acts may be large or small, and their beneficiaries may not even be aware of them. Yet their effects can be profound—not only for the recipient but for the giver as well.

#### **Instructions**

One day this week, perform five acts of kindness—all five in one day. It doesn't matter if the acts are big or small, but it is more effective if you perform a variety of acts.

The acts do not need to be for the same person—the person doesn't even have to be aware of them. Examples include feeding a stranger's parking meter, donating blood, helping a friend with a chore, or providing a meal to a person in need.

After each act, write down what you did in at least one or two sentences; for more of a happiness boost, also write down how it made you feel.

#### ○ **Discussion**

- What do you think of the Random Acts of Kindness practice?
- Where you able to perform five acts of kindness all in one day? What were they? Did you practice more or less and why?
- Did you notice any new feelings or insights from this practice?
- Was there anything challenging about this practice?
- Given what you know about the science of kindness, do you plan to continue practicing random acts of kindness?

### **GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (30 MINUTES)**

**Week 3: Compassion and Kindness > Skeptics and Champions of Compassion and Kindness > [Skeptics of Kindness and Compassion](#) [5:23].**

- Can you think of a time when your actions were influenced by factors that decreased your compassion or kindness? Almost all of us can. Can you recall what thoughts ran through your mind—and sensory experiences affected your body—when you didn't actually act on an opportunity for compassion or kindness? What do you think held you back?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

## PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (20 MINUTES)

- Next week we will discuss Cooperation and Reconciliation.
- Roadmap for next week:

**Week 4: Cooperation and Reconciliation > Cooperation & Happiness >**

**[Introduction to Week 4](#) [2:26].**

- **Forgiveness Quiz:** To reflect on your own tendency to forgive, take the GGSC [Forgiveness Quiz](#).

# The Science of Happiness

## Week 4

## Cooperation and Reconciliation

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 4 was to explore cooperation, and how pro-social behaviors serve our happiness in the face of conflict. We reviewed the science behind apologizing, forgiving, and building trust, and learned how these behaviors help to maintain relationships, reduce stress, and sustain happiness.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Please go around the room and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: COOPERATION & RECONCILIATION (20 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - We are an ultra-social species, evolved to cooperate. Cooperation is more innate than competition, and instrumentally adaptive for humans.
  - It's common for humans to experience conflict, but we possess a strong drive to reconcile in the wake of conflict and benefit from doing so.
  - Delivering, and being the recipient of, an apology is key to reconciliation, which leads to greater health and happiness than escalating conflict.

- Forgiveness does not mean forgetting about or endorsing the actions of the person who hurt you, or even reconciling. Instead, it means changing your own attitude toward this original hurt so that it doesn't continue to wound you. Forgiving others is healthier and more conducive of happiness than holding a grudge.
- Trust is central to what makes human relationships work. Understanding what is needed and wanted by a particular person helps to build trust. Think of the acronym ATTUNE:
  - Awareness of your partner's emotion;
  - Turning toward the emotion;
  - Tolerance of two different viewpoints;
  - trying to Understand your partner;
  - Non-defensive responses to your partner;
  - and responding with Empathy

**Week 4: Cooperation and Reconciliation > Peacemaking & Reconciliation > [Introduction to Apology](#) [5:56].**

- **Discussion:**
  - How has cooperation helped to increase happiness in your life?
  - In light of the research you've learned about thus far, and drawing upon your own life experience, what do you think accounts for breakdowns in cooperation? What are the social factors that seem to undermine cooperation, and what factors seem to support it?
  - Many people struggle with forgiveness, assuming it is an endorsement of someone else's harmful behavior. How do Luskin's and Worthington's perspectives on forgiveness address this issue?
  - Do the conflicts that you face in your own close relationships, romantic and otherwise, often boil down to issues of trust?

- Any questions about Problem Sets #7 or #8?

## **HAPPINESS PRACTICE: EIGHT ESSENTIALS WHEN FORGIVING (30 MINUTES)**

- **Key Points:**

- Forgiveness can be an effective way to respond to conflict because it helps to reduce stress and is associated with increased satisfaction with life, more positive emotions, less negative emotions, and fewer symptoms of physical illness. Indeed, forgiving on one day is linked to higher happiness on the next day!
- Forgiveness, however, can be complex, especially when it comes to serious harm or offense. You should not feel pressure to forgive.
- *[Review Eight Essentials When Forgiving and lead a discussion on experiences with this practice.]*

### **Happiness Practice #4: Eight Essentials When Forgiving**

Each person will forgive at his or her own pace. We suggest that you move through the steps below based on what works for you.

#### **Instructions**

1. Make a list of people who have hurt you deeply enough to warrant the effort to forgive. You can do this by asking yourself on a 1-to-10 scale, "How much pain do I have regarding the way this person treated me?"
2. Consider one offense by the first person on your list. Ask yourself: "How has this person's offense negatively impacted my life?"
3. When you're ready, make a decision to forgive.
4. Start with cognitive exercises. Ask yourself these questions about the person who has hurt you: What was life like for this person while growing up? What wounds did he or she suffer from others that could have made him or her more likely to hurt you? What kinds of extra pressures or stresses were in this person's life at the time he or she offended you?
5. Be aware of any little movement of your heart through which you begin to feel even slight compassion for the person who offended you.
6. Try to consciously bear the pain that he or she caused you so that you do not end up throwing that pain back onto the one who offended you, or even toward unsuspecting others, such as loved ones who were not the ones who wounded you in the first place.
7. Think of a gift of some kind that you can offer to the person you are trying to forgive.
8. Finally, try to find meaning and purpose in what you have experienced.

## ○ Discussion

- What do you think of the Eight Essentials When Forgiving practice?
- Did you notice any new feelings or insights from it?
- Can you think of someone you could fairly easily forgive? Who are they, and for what? Are you willing to designate a time to start this process?
- Think of someone you've had trouble forgiving. In light of the videos and readings in this subsection, why do you think you've had such trouble—what have been your barriers to forgiveness? Do you think you could overcome these barriers?

## GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (30 MINUTES)

- In what areas of life do you experience or observe frequent conflict? What are some subtle (or not-so-subtle) ways that you see these conflicts get effectively resolved? Do you think that you, and the people around you, possess effective strategies for resolving conflicts?
- What do you think of Dr. Lazare's criteria for an effective apology? Is there anything else you think an apology needs to do for it to be effective? Try to draw on a time you gave or received an especially effective or ineffective apology, and consider why it worked or didn't work.
- How do you define trust? What changes have you noticed in your relationships when trust is broken? How have you effectively increased trust after a relationship conflict?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

## PREPARING FOR THE NEXT TWO WEEKS (20 MINUTES)

- The next topic in the course, listed under Week 6, is Mindfulness.
- Next week (Week 5), the online course has a Midterm Exam. The Midterm Exam has 30 multiple-choice questions that are styled very much like the Problem Set questions, but you will not have more than one chance to answer the questions on the Midterm Exam. If you are planning to earn a certificate for this course, you need to complete the Midterm Exam.

- **Optional Meeting:** We will not have new content to review next week because of the Midterm Exam. However, if the group would like to meet to review course material, we can schedule an informal, optional meeting. You can also find review materials on the course website. [*Poll the group and agree on a plan for next week: review session or skip a week.*]
- Roadmap for Week 6:

**Week 6: Mindfulness > Mindful Awareness & Happiness > [Roadmap for Week 6](#) [2:36].**

- **Mindfulness Quiz:** If you want a glimpse at where you fall on a mindfulness quiz, check out the GGSC [Mindfulness Quiz](#)!





# The Science of Happiness

## Week 6

## Mindfulness

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 6 was to explore how paying attention to or being fully aware of what's happening in the present moment, in a non-judgmental way, can make us feel happier. We explored the science-based benefits of mindfulness, a practice that aims to hone present-moment awareness. Then, we learned three different kinds of mindfulness practice that we could use in everyday life.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Check in about the Midterm Exam (if a sufficient number of people are interested).
- Please go around the room and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: WHAT IS MINDFULNESS? (30 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - Mindfulness refers to a moment-by-moment, non-judgmental awareness of your thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.
  - Mindfulness practice can take many forms, including a non-judgmental awareness of, or paying attention to the present moment rather than

rehashing the past or thinking about the future, formal meditation that involves training the mind to achieve a particular state of consciousness, and mindfulness-based stress reduction.

- Defining mindfulness:

**Week 6: Mindfulness > What is Mindfulness? > [Defining Mindfulness](#) [2:42].**

- **Discussion:**

- Do you have direct experience with any of the mindfulness techniques mentioned in this course?
- Even if you have never intentionally practiced "mindfulness" per se, do you have other physical or mental habits that essentially seem to serve as mindfulness practices for you (e.g., contemplation, prayer, yoga)?
- Do Dr. Killingsworth's and Dr. Hasenkamp's findings ring true for you – do you find that you are happier when your mind is attending to what you are doing or experiencing in the present moment?
- Do you think mind-wandering is always detrimental to your happiness? Is mind-wandering the same as daydreaming?
- Any questions about Problem Sets #9 or #10?

**HAPPINESS PRACTICE: MINDFULNESS (30 MINUTES)**

- **Key Points:**

- Over the past week, you were asked to engage in three different mindfulness practices: Mindful Breathing, Body Scan Meditation, and Loving Kindness Meditation.
- Let's engage in these practices together as a group [*you can either read the script (found in Appendix 1) or use the audio (found in the link below or on the course website)*].

**Happiness Practice # 5: Mindful Breathing**

**Week 6: Mindfulness > Happiness Practice #5: Mindfulness > [Mindful Breathing: Try It Now](#)**

**Happiness Practice # 5b: Body Scan Meditation**

**Week 6: Mindfulness > Happiness Practice #5: Mindfulness > [Body Scan Meditation: Try It Now](#)**

**Happiness Practice # 5c: Loving Kindness Meditation**

**Week 6: Mindfulness > Happiness Practice #5: Mindfulness > [Loving Kindness Meditation: Try It Now](#)**

Alternatively, you can find and download all three of the above practices from [MARC's website](#).

○ **Discussion**

- After trying Mindful Breathing, Body Scan Meditation, and Loving Kindness Meditation—and in light of the previous reading—which mindfulness practice did you prefer, and why? Did you notice any differences in the thoughts, feelings, or bodily sensations they brought up for you?
- Was it easy or difficult to set aside time to engage in mindfulness practice each day? What made it easier or more challenging?
- Did you try any other forms of mindfulness practice? What did you notice?
- Given what you know about the science of mindfulness, do you plan to continue mindfulness practice?

**GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (20 MINUTES)**

- Let's dive deeper into the many real-world applications of mindfulness research.

**Week 6: Mindfulness > Real-World Applications of Mindfulness > [Applications of Mindfulness Research](#) [6:26].**

- **I** Can you think of any other areas where mindfulness "interventions" might be particularly relevant and effective? In light of what you have learned about mindfulness this week, why do those areas come to mind?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

## PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (20 MINUTES)

- Next week we will discuss Mental Habits of Happiness.
- Roadmap for next week:

**Week 7: Mental Habits of Happiness > Mental Habits of Happiness > [Introduction to Week 7](#) [1:48].**

- **Self-Compassion Quiz:** If you want to explore how compassionate you are towards your own self, see how you do on the GGSC [Self-Compassion Quiz](#).

# The Science of Happiness

## Week 7

## Mental Habits of Happiness

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 7 was to explore some common habits that influence how people think and feel - that research links to happiness. We reviewed the science behind training the mind for happiness; explored the benefits of self-compassion, finding flow, and goal setting; and identified practices that can, over time, build up those habits of mind that foster happiness.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Please go around the room and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: MENTAL HABITS (20 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - When it comes to happiness, sometimes it can feel like we're our own worst enemies, slipping into long-held patterns of feeling and thinking that bring us anguish, anxiety, and aloofness - but are difficult to avoid.
  - These "toxic" patterns of thought—including perfectionism, materialism, social comparisons, and "maximizing"—act as barriers to happiness.

**Week 7: Mental Habits of Happiness > Mental Habits of Happiness >**

**[Misconceptions about “Training the Mind” \[4:45\].](#)**

- **Discussion:**

- Are you prone to any particular "toxic" thought pattern? Can you think of times when you've experienced any or all of them? What makes you more susceptible to them, and what might help you overcome them?
- Have you found yourself feeling skeptical about any of this week's material? What are you skeptical about, and why? What might it take to allay your skepticism?
- Does optimism mean you should deny evidence that counters good possible outcomes? [*No.*] Does avoiding perfectionism mean ignoring or dismissing important details? [*Again, no.*]
- Any questions about Problem Sets #11 or #12?

## **HAPPINESS PRACTICE: SELF-COMPASSION (20 MINUTES)**

- **Key Points:**

- Self-compassion involves calming our inner critic and replacing it with a voice of support and understanding towards ourselves—in other words, treating ourselves with the same kindness and compassion that we show to others in difficult moments. Mindfulness and a strong sense of common humanity are also key dimensions of self-compassion.
- Self-compassionate people enjoy better psychological health, lower levels of anxiety and depression, and decreased stress hormone levels. They are better able to self-soothe, ruminate less, are less perfectionistic, cope more successfully with stress, and are more willing to acknowledge their negative experiences as valid and important.
- [*Review the Self-Compassion Letter Exercise and lead a discussion on experiences with this practice*].

### **Happiness Practice # 6: Self-Compassionate Letter**

First, identify something about yourself that makes you feel ashamed, insecure, or not good enough. It could be something related to your personality, behavior, abilities, relationships, or any other part of your life.

Once you identify something, write it down and describe how it makes you feel. Sad? Embarrassed? Angry? Try to be as honest as possible, keeping in mind that no one but you will see what you write.

The next step is to write a letter to yourself expressing compassion, understanding, and acceptance for the part of yourself that you dislike.

#### ○ **Discussion**

- Did you write a self-compassionate letter? If so, did you notice any changes in your feelings about that “something” that makes you feel bad about yourself?
- Did you notice any “toxic thoughts” as you were trying to write your letter?
- Do you find it easier to be compassionate to others than to yourself? Why might that be? Are there practices that you’ve learned in this course that may help to increase your capacity for self-compassion?
- Given what you know about the science of self-compassion, do you plan to continue self-compassion practice?

### **HAPPINESS PRACTICE: BEST POSSIBLE SELF (20 MINUTES)**

#### ○ **Key Points:**

- The Best Possible Self practice encourages you to envision a future where everything has gone "as well as it possibly could." This exercise encourages you to reflect upon and identify important life goals, and can help you feel more agency or influence over your own life trajectory.
- *[Engage in Best Possible Self Exercise as a group and discuss.]*

### **Happiness Practice # 7: Best Possible Self**

Take a moment to imagine your life in the future. What is the best possible life you can imagine? Consider all of the relevant areas of your life, such as your career, academic work, relationships, hobbies, and/or health. What would happen in these areas of your life in your best possible future?

For the next 15 minutes, write continuously about what you imagine this best possible future to be. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process.

1. It may be easy for this exercise to lead you to examine how your current life may not match this best possible future. You may be tempted to think about ways in which accomplishing goals has been difficult for you in the past, or about financial/time/social barriers to being able to make these accomplishments happen. For the purpose of this exercise, however, we encourage you to focus on the future—imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make this best possible life happen.
2. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about having a partner or new friend, describe how they interact with you, what you might do together, and so on. If you imagine a better relationship with a person currently in your life, imagine exactly what would be different. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you'll get out of it.
3. Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don't worry about grammar and spelling.

#### ○ **Discussion**

- Did you notice any new feelings or insights from the Best Possible Self exercise? Was there anything challenging about it?
- Did you identify important life goals that may influence the way you approach your life today? If so, how?

### **GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (20 MINUTES)**

- Flow is an optimal state, when you truly feel like you're "in the zone"; time passes; you're fully immersed and productive – and fulfilled. Can you think of a time when you felt "flow?" How did it feel for you? Are there situations where you're more likely to feel "frazzle" than "flow?" How might you create opportunities to experience more "flow" in your life?



- Setting goals for ourselves, and progressing toward those goals, can foster well-being.

**Week 7: Mental Habits of Happiness > Finding "Flow" and Setting Goals > [How Goals Foster Happiness](#) [2:59].**

- Research distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Have you noticed a difference in positive emotions or life satisfaction after achieving intrinsic (because you love it) compared to extrinsic (solely for reward) goals?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

**PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (20 MINUTES)**

- Next week we will discuss Gratitude.
- Roadmap for next week:

**Week 8: Gratitude > Scaling Gratitude > [Cultivating Gratitude](#) [2:49].**

- **Gratitude Quiz:** Ever wondered how grateful you are? Take the GGSC [Gratitude Quiz](#) to get a glimpse.



# The Science of Happiness

## Week 8

## Gratitude

### SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of Week 8 was to explore the integral role of gratitude in happiness. We reviewed the science of gratitude and how it relates to social connection and mindfulness, explored the benefits of gratitude, and learned skills for building gratitude at home, at work, in schools, and elsewhere.

### CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Please go around the room and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course thus far.
- I'll write these on the board, and if we don't already cover these topics during today's session, we'll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

### HAPPINESS CONTENT: GRATITUDE (20 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - According to Robert Emmons, gratitude is “the feeling of reverence for things that are given.” “It stems from the perception of a positive personal outcome, not necessarily deserved or earned, that is due to the actions of another person.”
  - Gratitude is seen as a moral emotion that promotes virtuous and cooperative behavior, and signals strength in relationships.
  - A grateful disposition is associated with greater happiness, life satisfaction, optimism, pro-social leadership, relationship satisfaction, cooperation, and

generous behavior; and lower levels of envy, possessiveness, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress.

## **Week 8: Gratitude > Gratitude, the Body, and Relationships > [Physical and Social Benefits of Gratitude](#) [5:42].**

### ○ **Discussion:**

- Based on the gratitude definitions and measurements that Dacher cites, do you consider yourself to be a grateful person? In what ways do you feel like you possess a grateful mindset, or how might you sometimes take the "gifts" in your life for granted instead?
- According to the way Dr. Emmons defines gratitude, do you think it's possible to be a grateful person and not be happy?
- In light of what you have learned about gratitude so far, how does gratitude seem related to other concepts we have already covered in the course, particularly the skill of mindfulness?
- Have you faced either or both of the types of "challenges" to gratitude that Dacher identifies? Has gratitude been hard to express for you or someone close to you? Have you held or shared some of these reservations about gratitude? What could you do to be more grateful?
- Any questions about Problem Sets #13 or #14?

## **HAPPINESS PRACTICES: GRATITUDE JOURNAL AND GRATITUDE LETTER & VISIT (30 MINUTES)**

### ○ **Key Points:**

- The gratitude journal is one of the most widely tested happiness practices we cover in this course and has been linked to benefits ranging from greater happiness to better sleep quality.
- Some evidence suggests that of all the practices tested by positive psychology research, including those covered in this course, the Gratitude Letter might provide the single greatest happiness boost, particularly when it is delivered and read in person.

- *[Review Gratitude Journal and Gratitude Letter/Visit exercises and lead a discussion on experiences with these practices.]*

#### **Happiness Practice # 8: Gratitude Journal**

Write down up to five things for which you feel grateful. The physical record is important—don't just do this exercise in your head. The things you list can be relatively small in importance ("The tasty sandwich I had for lunch today") or relatively large ("My sister gave birth to a healthy baby boy"). The goal of the exercise is to remember a good event, experience, person, or thing in your life—then enjoy the good emotions that come with it.

1. Be as specific as possible – specificity is key to fostering gratitude.
2. Go for depth over breadth.
3. Get personal.
4. Try subtraction, not just addition.
5. See good things as "gifts."
6. Savor surprises.
7. Revise if you repeat.
8. Write regularly.
9. Don't overdo it.

#### **Happiness Practice # 9: Gratitude Letter & Visit**

There are two parts to this practice: (1) writing a letter to someone to whom you are deeply grateful (but whom you have never properly thanked) and (2) reading the letter to them, ideally in person (sometimes called a Gratitude Visit).

For this exercise, 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. Write a letter to one of these people and try if at all possible to deliver your letter in person.

- **Discussion:**

- What do you think of the Gratitude Journal and Gratitude Letter exercises? Did you notice any new feelings or insights from these practices?
- Was there anything challenging about doing these practices? Was one practice easier to engage in than the other? Why might that be?
- Given what you know about the science of gratitude, do you plan to continue practicing gratitude?

### **GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (30 MINUTES)**

- How many of the gratitude practices we discussed in this course do you already do? Does it feel feasible for you to cultivate more gratitude in your life?
- What are some regular challenges or conflicts in your relationship that might be alleviated through more feelings and expressions of gratitude?
- Dacher described two “Challenges to Gratitude”:
  1. Individualism/narcissism: feelings of entitlement, materialism, overscheduling.
  2. Skepticism/myths about gratitude: that gratitude is superficial and not important, not possible amidst suffering, or leads to complacency and over-accommodating of others.
- Have you held or shared some of these reservations about gratitude? Has gratitude been hard to practice for you or someone close to you?
- Can you think of a situation in your life where gratitude might not be an appropriate or productive response?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

### **PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK (20 MINUTES)**

- Next week is our final session, where we will discuss promising and emerging new frontiers in the science of happiness, as well as the concept of “fit.”
- Roadmap for next week:

**Week 9: New Frontiers and Happiness "Fit" > The Cutting Edge: Awe, Wonder, and Beauty > [Intro to Week 9](#) [5:27].**

- Are there any topics about the science of happiness that you would like to discuss from our last session?





# The Science of Happiness

Week 9

New Frontiers and Happiness “Fit”

## SESSION OVERVIEW (5 MINUTES)

The goal of the final week of this course was to explore “new frontiers,” that is, emerging research in the science of happiness, and also to explore the idea of “fit.” Through a very practical lens, “fit” explores how to match Happiness Practices to different people’s lives and personalities. We reviewed the cutting-edge science behind positive experiences such as awe, laughter, play, and creating a happiness narrative, and tried a Happiness “Fit” test. Finally, we reviewed key lessons from The Science of Happiness course and their practical implications as we incorporate happiness practice into our lives.

## CHECK-IN (15 MINUTES)

- Welcome back!
- Please go around the room and share one thing you found interesting, surprising, or confusing about anything from the course.
- I’ll write these on the board, and if we don’t already cover these topics during today’s session, we’ll have time to discuss your thoughts at the end of our meeting. *[If people begin discussing these topics during the check-in, remind them that this is a brief check-in and they will have time to discuss the course content later in this session.]*

## HAPPINESS CONTENT: AWE, LAUGHTER, & PLAY (20 MINUTES)

- **Key Points:**
  - Awe is defined as "the feeling of being in the presence of something vast and greater than the self, that exceeds current knowledge structures."

- Laughter emerges like a reflex very early in life. It's a behavioral response to contradictory pieces of information, relieving tension and motivating us to learn and put things into perspective.
- Bursts of laughter decrease blood pressure, enhance immune function, reduce chronic pain, and improve depression and sleep quality in elderly populations. Laughing makes you breathe more deeply, calms the cardiovascular system, and alters your stress profile.
- With more laughter, relationship partners are happier and strangers feel closer, contributing to a greater sense of social connection and happiness.
- Play has many functions, teaching us important boundaries, helping us to learn skills, form identity, increase knowledge about the world, and develop empathy and compassion.
- There are several factors that influence how likely a person is to do a given Happiness Practice, as well as its potential impact. A simple self-rating test can shed light on what might work best.
- **Discussion:**
  - Why do you think we laugh? It may feel good to do—and it usually happens spontaneously—but what might be the deeper social and evolutionary functions of laughter?
  - According to the criteria Dacher outlines for what scientists consider "play," how often would you say that you truly play in your life? Once a day? A week? A month? How do these experiences of play feel different from the rest of your life? How could you play more?
  - Did the results of your "Fit" test match your expectations?
  - Any questions about Problem Sets #15 or #16?

## **HAPPINESS PRACTICE: AWE WALK (20 MINUTES)**

- **Key Points:**
  - Taking time out for experiences of awe can break up our routines and inspire us to think in new ways. Evoking feelings of awe may be especially

helpful when people are feeling bogged down by day-to-day concerns. Research suggests that awe has a way of lifting people outside of their usual preoccupations and connecting them with something greater and more meaningful. This sense of broader connectedness and purpose can relieve negative moods and improve happiness.

### **Happiness Practice # 11: Awe Walk**

Taking an awe-inspiring walk. With the right attitude, awe can be found almost anywhere, but it is most likely to occur in places that involve two key features: vastness and novelty. These could include natural settings, like a trail lined with tall trees, or urban settings, like the top of a skyscraper.

Turn off your cell phone. Cell phones can be distracting and draw your attention away from what's happening around you. Even better, don't bring your phone with you at all so that you won't be tempted to check it. Tap into your child-like sense of wonder. Young children are in an almost constant state of awe since everything is so new to them. During your walk, try to approach what you see with fresh eyes, imagining that you're seeing it for the first time. Go somewhere new. Each week (or month, or whatever frequency works for you), try to choose a new location. You're more likely to feel awe in a novel environment where the sights and sounds are unexpected. That said, some places never seem to get old, so there's nothing wrong with revisiting your favorite spots if you find that they consistently fill you with awe.

- [Review Awe Walk exercise and lead a discussion on experiences with this practice.]
- **Discussion**
  - What do you think of the Awe Walk exercise? Did you notice any new feelings or insights from this practice?
  - What experiences, landscapes, or objects give you awe? Can you also think of a person who has triggered awe in you? Can you describe how this experience of awe made you feel—not just physically but also emotionally? Did it inspire you to do anything different or differently?
  - Did anyone try any of the additional awe practices (e.g., Awe Narrative, Awe Video, Awe Story)? If so, what were your experiences with these practices? Did any of these practices help to increase happiness more than others?

- Given what you know about the science of Awe, do you plan to continue this practice?

### GENERAL GROUP REFLECTIONS (30 MINUTES)

- There are many different exercises people can do to hone their happiness. Identifying the practices that are most fitting for you can help you get the biggest boost out of the effort you put in.
- Finding your fit: Based on the factors Lyubomirsky and Layous identify (motivation/effort, efficacy beliefs, baseline affective state, social support, demographics, dosage of the activity, variety of the activity, focus of activity as social/interpersonal vs. reflective/introspective), and based on your results from the Person-Activity Fit Diagnostic Test, which happiness practices from this course seem like the best fit for you?
- Lyubomirsky and Layous's criteria for a good "fit" give weight to the practices that come more naturally to a person. Do you think that Happiness Practices that score low in fit for you – that stand to be more challenging on several levels - have the potential to be more transformative?
- Are there any other criteria that feel important in determining whether a practice is a good fit for you, beyond the criteria that Lyubomirsky and Layous have identified?
- How has the material you have learned about in this course made you reflect on your life's narrative? Has it made you more conscious of any themes or patterns that were previously less apparent to you? How might the material from this course inspire you to modify your narrative moving forward?
- **If time allows, discuss other topics provided in the group check-in.**

### MAINTAINING HAPPINESS (30 MINUTES)

**Week 9: New Frontiers and Happiness "Fit" > Synthesis and Farewell > [Key Lessons & Final Reflections](#) [6:43].**

- After nine weeks of The Science of Happiness, here are the key lessons that Dacher Keltner and Emiliania Simon-Thomas hope you'll take away:

- **Kindness and compassion** are in our biology and instrumental to happiness.
- **Negative emotions** are part of life, and what matters is how we deal with and recover from them.
- **Our attention** is limited, and we are happiest when we're focused on (mindful of) whatever we're doing.
- **Change** can be challenging, but it is definitely within reach.
- What topics, ideas, and scientific findings most engaged you? What are the ideas that you will take away from this course and apply to your own life? How have you already started to apply these ideas to your life, or how might you continue to do so in the future?
- Which happiness practices can you envision continuing? Can you make a plan to continue these practices, using small, achievable goals that you can share with others?
- How can you spread happiness in your community?

**Week 9: New Frontiers and Happiness "Fit" > Finding Your "Fit" > [Sonja Lyubomirsky: Happiness Takes Work](#) [2:13].**

- **Keep Learning:** Even though the course is over, you still have access to all course material on edX indefinitely. You are encouraged to review the happiness practices and think about which ones you might want to incorporate into your daily life.
- **Get involved.** Explore the [Greater Good Science Center](#) (GGSC) website, [sign up](#) to start receiving the GGSC's free "Greater Good" e-newsletter, and explore the [resources](#) page.
- **Get social.** Continue Science of Happiness conversations by joining the [GG101x group on Facebook](#).
- **Get skillful.** Continue to engage in and try new happiness practices with our [Greater Good in Action](#) platform.
- Any additional parting thoughts or course feedback?



# The Science of Happiness

## Appendix A

## Mindfulness Scripts

### **Mindful Breathing Practice**

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, soften.
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 if you can feel the sensations of breath, one breath at a time. When one breath ends the next breath begins.
4. Now as you do this you might notice that your mind may start to wander. You may start thinking about other things. If this happens, this 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. And then gently redirect your attention right back to the breathing.
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**

1. Begin by bringing your attention into your body. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you. You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.
2. Take a few deep breaths, and as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen, enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.
3. Notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat. Notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness. Notice your back against the chair.
4. Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.
5. Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight? See if you can allow them to soften. Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.

6. Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax. Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.
7. Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath. Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

### **Loving Kindness Meditation**

Begin by closing your eyes. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Relax your whole body. Keep your eyes closed throughout the whole visualization and bring your awareness inward. Without straining or concentrating, just relax and gently follow the instructions.

1. *Receiving Loving-Kindness*: Keeping your eyes closed, think of a person close to you who loves you very much. It could be someone from the past or the present; someone still in life or who has passed; it could be a spiritual teacher or guide. Imagine that person standing on your right side, sending you their love. That person is sending you wishes for your safety, for your well-being and happiness. Now bring to mind the same person or another person who cherishes you deeply. Imagine that person standing on your left side, sending you wishes for your wellness, for your health and happiness. Feel the kindness and warmth coming to you from that person. Now imagine that you are surrounded on all sides by all the people who love you and have loved you. Picture all of your friends and loved ones surrounding you. They are standing sending you wishes for your happiness, well-being, and health. Bask in the warm wishes and love coming from all sides. You are filled, and overflowing with warmth and love.

2. *Sending Loving-Kindness to Loved Ones*: Now bring your awareness back to that first person you imagined standing on your right side. Begin to send the love that you feel back to that person. You and this person are similar. Just like you, this person wishes to be happy. Send all your love and warm wishes to that person. Repeat the following phrases, silently:

*May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.*

*May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.*

*May you live with ease, may you be happy, may you be free from pain.*

Now focus your awareness on the person standing on your left side. Begin to direct the love within you to that person. Send all your love and warmth to that person. That person and you are alike. Just like you, that person wishes to have a good life. Repeat the following phrases, silently:

*Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you be safe, may you be healthy, may you live with ease and happiness.*

Now picture another person that you love, perhaps a relative or a friend. This person, like you, wishes to have a happy life. Send warm wishes to that person. Repeat the following phrases, silently:

*May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.*

*May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.*



*May your life be filled with happiness, health, and well-being.*

3. *Sending Loving-Kindness to Neutral People:* Now think of an acquaintance, someone you don't know very well and toward whom you do not have any particular feeling. You and this person are alike in your wish to have a good life. Send all your wishes for well-being to that person, repeating the following phrases, silently:

*Just as I wish to, may you also live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you also live with ease and happiness.*

*Just as I wish to, may you also live with ease and happiness.*

Now bring to mind another acquaintance toward whom you feel neutral. It could be a neighbor, or a colleague, or someone else that you see around but do not know very well. Like you, this person wishes to experience joy and well-being in his or her life. Send all your good wishes to that person, repeating the following phrases, silently:

*May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.*

*May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.*

*May you be happy, may you be healthy, may you be free from all pain.*

4. *Sending Loving-Kindness to All Living Beings:* Now expand your awareness and picture the whole globe in front of you as a little ball. Send warm wishes to all living beings on the globe, who, like you, want to be happy:

*Just as I wish to, may you live with ease, happiness, and good health.*

*Just as I wish to, may you live with ease, happiness, and good health.*

*Just as I wish to, may you live with ease, happiness, and good health.*

Take a deep breath in. And breathe out. And another deep breath in and let it go. Notice the state of your mind and how you feel after this meditation.

When you're ready you may open your eyes.



# The Science of Happiness

## Appendix B

## Terms of Happiness

**Affective forecasting:** The process of making predictions about how you will feel in the future. According to Daniel Gilbert, who coined the term "affective forecasting" with his colleague Timothy Wilson, affective forecasting is simply "the process by which people look into their future and make predictions about what they'll like and what they won't like." However, we are often poor judges in the present of what will bring us happiness in the future, causing us to look for happiness in the wrong places.

**Altruism:** Altruism is when we act to promote someone else's welfare, even at a risk or cost to ourselves. Many debate whether and why true (or "pure") altruism actually exists. Evolutionary scientists speculate that altruism has deep roots in human nature because helping and cooperation promote the survival of our species. Indeed, Darwin himself argued that altruism, which he called "sympathy" or "benevolence," is "an essential part of the social instincts." Some evolutionary biologists argue that organisms may sometimes put themselves at risk in order to help another because they expect that the other organism will return the favor down the line, a concept known as reciprocal altruism.

**Attention:** According to psychologist and philosopher William James, attention "is the taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what may seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thoughts...It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others." Many compare attention to a spotlight, which makes certain information from the inside or outside world more available to conscious awareness, while filtering out less useful information. Attention is limited, in that it can only hold a finite quantity of information in mind for a limited period of time, and selective, in that it orients to information that is deemed important in a given moment.

**Awareness:** Self-awareness points to the ability to attain insight into one's own attitudes, motives, reactions, strengths and vulnerabilities.

**Compassion:** Literally means "to suffer together." Among emotion researchers, it is defined as the feeling that arises when you witness another's suffering and feel motivated to help relieve that suffering. Compassion is not the same as empathy or altruism, though the concepts are related. While empathy refers more generally to our ability to sense the emotions--and/or take the perspective--of another person, compassion is when those feelings and thoughts include the desire to help. While altruism is often prompted by compassion, one can feel compassion without acting on it, and altruism isn't always motivated by compassion.

**Empathy:** The term "empathy" is used to describe a wide range of experiences. Emotion researchers generally define empathy as the ability to sense other people's emotions (affective

empathy), coupled with the ability to imagine what someone else might be thinking or feeling (cognitive empathy). Studies suggest that empathy is often a vital first step toward altruistic behavior, but it does not always lead to altruism, and altruistic acts can be motivated by factors other than empathy. More specifically, research by Daniel Batson and others suggests that empathy is much more likely to lead to altruism when it elicits the specific feeling of empathic concern, which is when we observe someone in need and truly "feel for" that person--a state similar to compassion--rather than wanting to escape the situation or feeling overwhelmed by distress.

**Extrinsic goals:** Focus on attaining rewards and/or praise from others--they are a means to an end, not inherently rewarding in and of themselves. Examples include financial wealth, fame, or popularity. People often pursue extrinsic goals under the assumption that these goals will bring them happiness, but evidence suggests otherwise. Researchers speculate that intrinsic goals lead to greater happiness because, in the pursuit of these goals, people have positive experiences along the way that support their happiness.

**Flow:** A concept developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi that refers to "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it," as he writes in his 1990 book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. According to Csikszentmihalyi, when people experience flow, their "concentration is so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant or to worry about problems. Self-consciousness disappears, and the sense of time becomes distorted." More specifically, he has identified four factors that are essential to flow: 1) performing a task or activity where the degree of challenge is properly balanced with one's ability to complete it; 2) one's goal is clear; 3) there's constant and immediate feedback about how close one is to achieving that goal; and 4) one is able to devote complete concentration to the task at hand.

**Happiness:** This is a big one. Most of us probably don't believe we need a formal definition of happiness--we know it when we feel it, and we often use the term to describe a range of positive emotions, including joy, pride, contentment, and gratitude. But to understand the causes and effects of happiness, researchers first need to define it. Many of them use the term interchangeably with subjective well-being, which they measure by simply asking people to report how satisfied they feel with their own lives and how much positive and negative emotion they're experiencing. In her 2007 book *The How of Happiness*, positive psychology researcher Sonja Lyubomirsky elaborates, describing happiness as "the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile." That definition resonates with the focus of this course and the approach the Greater Good Science Center takes toward happiness: It captures the fleeting positive emotions that come with happiness, along with a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life—and suggests how these properties of happiness complement each other.

**Hedonic adaptation (aka the "hedonic treadmill"):** Our ability to adapt to changes in our life circumstances or sensory experiences. Research suggests many of us have a remarkable ability

to get used to things that might initially bring us pleasure, such as getting married or winning the lottery, and even to eventually return to our happiness set point after a traumatic accident. Some researchers, such as Ed Diener at the University of Illinois, however, have argued that the truth about hedonic adaptation and set points is more nuanced: Some people might be more prone than others to adapt to events, and a person's set point may not be stable over time. Throughout this class, we will explore research--and research-based methods--that suggest how we might counteract our tendency for hedonic adaptation and develop more lasting happiness.

**Impact bias:** The tendency to overestimate how an event or experience in the future will affect our emotional well-being, for better or worse. For instance, we often underestimate our ability to recover from difficult experiences, an ability that Daniel Gilbert calls our "psychological immune system." He documented this bias in a study that found people generally overestimate how various defeats or rejections--such as a romantic breakup or being turned down for a job--will impact their happiness. Impact bias is a major cause of mistakes in affective forecasting. It can lead us to avoid certain decisions or activities out of an inflated fear that they will harm our happiness or to covet certain outcomes (such as winning the lottery) that don't actually boost our happiness as much as we think they will.

**Intrinsic goals:** According to positive psychologist Tim Kasser and colleagues, intrinsic goals "are those that are inherently satisfying to pursue because they are likely to satisfy innate psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, competence, and growth"; they depend on satisfying one's own basic psychological needs rather than relying upon the judgments or approval of others. Examples of these goals include self-acceptance, forming social connections, and physical fitness.

**Kindness:** A general, everyday term describing behaviors that involve being friendly, generous, or considerate.

**Life satisfaction:** A general assessment that, as a whole, one's life is good and worth living. Researchers usually measure life satisfaction by using the Satisfaction with Life Scale, developed by University of Illinois professor Ed Diener and colleagues.

**Maximizers:** A term popularized by psychologist Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College to refer to people who try to squeeze the greatest amount of benefit and pleasure out of every choice or opportunity.

**Meditation:** Though mindfulness and meditation are closely related, they are not synonymous. As Jon Kabat-Zinn describes in his video, one can practice mindfulness while not doing a formal meditation practice, and there are many different kinds of meditation that go beyond mindfulness meditation. The term "meditation" refers to a wide range of practices that simply involve training the mind to achieve a particular state of consciousness, especially for relaxation. That said, mindfulness meditation, based on a technique adapted from Buddhist Vipassana meditation, is a basic and commonly practiced form of meditation.

**Mindfulness:** Though exact definitions vary, Jon Kabat-Zinn and others generally define "mindfulness" as a non-judgmental, moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future. The "non-judgmental" part of the definition refers to the idea that mindfulness involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them--without believing, for instance, that there's a "right" or "wrong" way to think or feel in a given moment.

**Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):** Though it has its roots in Buddhist meditation, a secular practice of mindfulness has entered the mainstream in recent years largely through the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and his Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, which he launched at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979. The MBSR program usually has students meet for two to three hours per week for eight weeks, practicing at home between classes. They learn practices such as the "body scan," in which they focus their attention along each part of the body, trying to be aware and accepting of whatever they sense in these body parts, and the "raisin meditation," where they slowly use all of their senses, one after another, to observe a raisin in great detail, from the way it feels in their hand to the way its taste bursts on the tongue. Over the past 35 years, thousands of studies have documented the physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness in general and MBSR in particular, inspiring countless programs to adapt the MBSR model for schools, prisons, hospitals, veterans centers, and beyond.

**Optimism:** Within the field of positive psychology, particularly informed by the work of the late researcher Christopher Peterson of the University of Michigan, optimism is defined as the expectation that the future will be socially desirable, good, and pleasurable. Research suggests that optimistic people enjoy concrete, long-term benefits to their health and happiness. However, Peterson has identified some downsides to optimism, if taken to extremes. "Optimism in the form of wishful thinking," he writes, "can distract people from making concrete plans about how to attain goals." And "unrelenting optimism" can prevent people from proceeding with the kind of caution that might often be necessary in the wake of a challenge.

**Pity:** Feeling sorry for the suffering or misfortune of someone else. Pity is similar to compassion, but it suggests a power imbalance, whereby the observer occupies a place of superiority and looks down upon the person who is suffering.

**Positive affect:** A technical term to describe the experience of feeling a positive emotion, such as joy, love, or amusement. As Dr. Lyubomirsky notes, positive affect is an important ingredient to happiness and is sometimes used synonymously with happiness, though it generally refers to a fleeting emotional state rather than an enduring way of being. It is often measured using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS).

**Prioritizing positivity:** Deliberately organizing your day-to-day life so that it contains situations that naturally give rise to positive emotional experiences. Laura Catalino, Sara Algoe and Barbara Fredrickson's study compares pursuing happiness to prioritizing positivity, and their results suggest that prioritizing positivity is a more promising approach to boosting happiness.

**Pro-social:** A term favored by scientists to refer to kind, helpful behaviors or states, but it is also quite broad.

**Satisficers:** A term popularized by psychologist Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College to refer to people who feel content with choices as long as they pass a basic threshold of acceptability. Schwartz and colleagues have found that maximizers report low happiness and optimism and higher levels of depression than people who have a greater tendency to satisfice.

**Self-compassion:** Kristin Neff, who pioneered the scientific study of self-compassion, generally defines it as quieting one's inner critic and replacing it with a voice of support, understanding, and care for one's self--in other words, treating yourself with the same kind of compassion that you show to other people. By Neff's account, there are three core components of self-compassion: 1) self-kindness, meaning that we are gentle and understanding with ourselves rather than harshly critical and judgmental; 2) recognizing our common humanity, meaning that we feel connected to others in the experience of life rather than feeling isolated and alienated by our suffering; and 3) mindfulness, meaning that we are aware of our pain or suffering but keep that observation in perspective, rather than ignoring our pain or exaggerating it.

**Set point theory:** The theory that we each have a relatively stable level of happiness that is largely determined by our genes and personality. Though we might experience some fluctuations in happiness due to events big and small, this theory holds that we eventually return to our basic set point of happiness.

**Subjective well-being:** Researchers often use this term interchangeably with happiness, perhaps because it sounds more precise and scientific. It refers to the way people evaluate their lives, in terms of both their global life satisfaction and emotional states--i.e., it is often assessed by measuring life satisfaction and positive affect. It is strongly tied to positive health.

**Sympathy:** Sympathy, which means "to feel together," is sometimes used synonymously with compassion. However, while sympathy does refer to feelings of sorrow or sadness about another person's suffering, it does not typically involve the urge or motivation to help, or do anything about the situation. In other words, a person may feel sympathetic towards another person's difficulties, but not feel inclined to help.





## Notes





