

## Building Blocks of Happiness

All actions have results. The results of our actions can be short lived, or can last for a long time. They can lead to happiness, lead to suffering or can sometimes be neutral. Things like kind words and compassion lead to happiness. Things like self-centred thinking and being judgemental lead to suffering. Sometimes people confuse happiness with feeling powerful or a temporary thrill. Happiness is a peaceful, patient and kind-hearted emotion that can't coexist with a negative state of mind.<sup>1</sup>

### Compassion

Is an awareness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.<sup>2</sup>

### Kindness

Being friendly, helpful, well meaning.

*Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

### Introspection

Is examining your own thoughts, emotions, beliefs, etc. Understanding more about what's going on in your mind and learning how to quiet mental/emotional noise gives you more self-control and flexibility – more choice about how you respond to events. If you have an awareness of what you *want* to be doing and the ability to be mindful of what you are actually *are* doing life tends to go more smoothly.<sup>3</sup>

### Peace

Freedom from mental agitation. A harmony between different social groups characterized by lack of violence, and freedom from the fear of violence. Peace also suggests sincere attempts at reconciliation, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of equality, and a working political order that serves the true interests of all.

### Resilience

Generally refers to a person's ability to cope well with adversity and persevere or adapt when things go awry. Decades of research shows that resilient people are healthier, live longer, are more successful in school and at work, are happier in relationships, and are less prone to depression. Skills that make it easier to be resilient can be learned and nine of these are below.<sup>4</sup>

### Belonging

The feeling that we are a part of something larger than ourselves (a family, a group of friends, a team, a community). When people feel they belong, they usually feel more positively about themselves and it makes it easier to participate in society and be successful.

### Emotional Regulation

Being able to express our emotions in ways that will help rather than hurt a situation. Being able to stay calm under pressure and manage stressful situations.

### Impulse Control

Being able to stop and choose to take action instead of having a reaction. Stepping back and thinking about what would actually help the situation.

### Realistic Optimism

Believing that a brighter future is possible. This is not about turning a blind eye to negative things, but about seeing things as they are and trying to create the future you want to have.

### Causal Analysis

The ability to analyze a problem and accurately decide what its cause is. Being able to take a step back and assess a particular situation objectively.

### Empathy

The ability to understand the feelings and needs of another person; to “walk in their shoes.”

### Self-Efficacy

The feeling of being effective in the world. The belief that what we do matters. When we have opportunities to make choices – and to succeed based on those choices – we are more likely to have a sense of self-efficacy.

### Reaching Out

To take advantage of opportunities that life presents, to see things as learning opportunities, to take a risk sometimes. Reaching out is also about being realistic about how much we can cope with and being able to ask for help when we need it.

### Language and Culture

Having a connection to your language and culture of choice. Being able to speak your preferred language and live according to your preferred cultural traditions is fundamental to resilience.

## Skills

When you're looking through the list below, keep in mind that you want to do it with a light touch. If you give yourself a hard time about learning skills it works against you being happy! You also don't want to take things too far. For example, compassion isn't 'idiot compassion' where you let people walk all over you. Getting caught up in feeling you aren't 'virtuous enough' misses the point too.<sup>5</sup>

### Acceptance

To consider circumstances, especially those that can not be changed, as satisfactory. Being willing to tolerate a difficult situation.

### Accountability

A willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions.

### Ambition

A strong desire to do or achieve something.

### Assertiveness

Confident or bold behaviour.

### Bravery

A quality of spirit that enables you to face danger, pain, the unknown, etc.

*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it – Nelson Mandela*

### Caring

Displaying kindness and concern for others.

### Commitment

The firm carrying out of purpose. Being dedicated to a cause, activity, etc.

### Confidence

Feeling you can rely on yourself or your circumstances. Faith in yourself.

*No one can make you feel inferior without your consent – Eleanor Roosevelt*

### Consideration

Thoughtful and sympathetic regard for the needs of others. Careful thought.

### Contentment

Feeling satisfied with one's possessions, status, or situation.

### Cooperation

To associate with others for mutual benefit or to achieve a shared goal.

### Courtesy

Polite, considerate behaviour, mindful of other people.

### Creativity

Generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between existing ideas or concepts. Using your imagination.

### Curiosity

A desire to find out and know things.

*The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled – Plutarch*

Defiance

Bold resistance.

Dependability

Reliable, worthy of trust.

Determination

Firmness of purpose.

Discernment

The ability to distinguish between things, to perceive differences that exist.

Eloquence

Powerful and effective language. Fluent, persuasive and articulate speech.

*How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of the earth is sacred to my people – Chief Sealth (Seattle)*

Enthusiasm

A feeling of excitement, overflowing with eager enjoyment or approval.

Ethical

Morally good or correct. Avoiding activities that do harm to people or the environment.

Fairness

Impartial and just behaviour without favouritism or discrimination.

Faith

Complete confidence in a person, a plan, a set of beliefs etc.

Flexibility

Adaptable, able to change to suit circumstances.

Focus

Concentrated awareness and effort.

Fortitude

Strength of mind that enables you to endure adversity with courage.

Friendliness

A tendency to be pleasant and accommodating.

Frugality

Careful to avoid waste. Being economical with resources.

Generosity

Giving without expecting anything in return, whether it's your time, money, or possessions.

*There is no exercise better for the heart than reaching down and lifting people up – John Holmes*

Gentleness

Being kind, tender, mild-mannered – not rough or severe.

*We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity. More than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness – Charlie Chaplin*

### Grace

Courteous good will. Elegance and beauty of movement or expression.

### Gratitude

Being thankful, ready to show appreciation for (and to return) kindness

### Helpfulness

Providing useful assistance.

### Honesty

Truthful, sincere, free of deceit.

### Honour

Knowing and doing what is morally right. Honesty, fairness, or integrity in one's beliefs and actions.

### Hope

A feeling that some desire will be fulfilled. An optimistic state of mind based on an expectation of positive outcomes.

*However long the night, the dawn will break* – African proverb (Hausa Tribe)

### Humility

Modest, not arrogant or boastful. Not considering yourself more important than others.

### Humour

The ability to perceive, enjoy, or express what is amusing, comical, incongruous, or absurd.

### Joyful

Finding enjoyment in the world around you. Feeling, expressing, or causing great pleasure and happiness.

### Justice

Being fair and reasonable, giving a deserved response.

*Beyond the rightness or wrongness of things there is a field, I'll meet you there* – Rumi

### Knowledge

Is a familiarity, awareness, or understanding of something (e.g. facts, information, descriptions, skills) gained through perceiving, discovering or learning.

### Magnanimity

Being great of mind and heart. A refusal to be petty.

### Mercy

Compassion or forbearance shown toward a person.

### Moderation

Avoiding extremes in your actions or opinions.

### Openness

Being ok with change, ready to try new things. A lack of restriction, secrecy or concealment. Ready and willing to talk candidly.

### Patience

The ability to endure hardship without being overcome by annoyance or anxiety. Persevering in the face of obstacles. Not returning harm. Being able to navigate your emotions when criticized or attacked.

*Patience. Learn, you must – Yoda*

### Perseverance

Being persistent, refusing to give up despite failures, delays and difficulties.

### Resoluteness

Being firm in purpose.

### Resourcefulness

The ability to act effectively or imaginatively, especially in difficult situations and with unusual problems.

### Restitution

Restoring something to its original state. Returning something lost or stolen to its proper owner.<sup>6</sup>

Compensation for injury or loss.

### Reverence

Profound awe and respect.

### Selflessness

Unselfish concern for the welfare of others.

### Service

An act of assistance. Helping or doing work for someone.

### Simplicity

Straightforward, not complex or complicated.

*Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated – Confucius*

### Sincerity

Saying what you genuinely feel or believe. Not concealing or misrepresenting the truth.

### Spontaneity

Natural, not planned.

### Tact

Being thoughtful and skilful with others. Being sensitive to not giving offense.

### Tolerance

To allow something you dislike or disagree with to exist or happen. Being willing to permit, allow or accept something.

### Tranquility

Serenely quiet and peaceful. Undisturbed.

### Understanding

Sympathetic awareness or tolerance. Knowing how something works.

### Wisdom

Having experience, knowledge and good judgement. Being sensible. Blending knowledge and experience with common sense and insight. Blending rational and emotional intelligence.

Wonder

A feeling of amazement and admiration caused by something remarkable or surprising.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Happiness is  
Peaceful  
Patient  
Content  
Tolerant

Happiness isn't  
Feeling powerful  
Feeling important  
Getting even  
Feeling smug  
Satisfying an urge

Actions that lead toward happiness  
Kind words  
Honesty  
Being present focussed and mindful  
Wanting others to be happy

Actions that lead away from happiness  
Harsh speech/Gossip/Lying  
Being judgemental  
Self-centred thinking  
Jealousy

Confusion about how to be happy is one of the reasons there is suffering in the world. If we don't really understand what happiness is, it's easy to do things that lead to suffering instead. For example, sometimes people find it appealing to feel powerful or to say judgemental things in order to feel superior to others. That's not the same as being happy. Happiness can't coexist with a negative state of mind.

Every single action we do has a result. The results can be short lived or they can last for a long time. It's important to know what actions lead to happiness and what don't. Being aware of what we're doing in the present moment and mindful of how we want to act is the first step. Even if we have good intentions we won't accomplish much if we don't pay attention to what we're actually doing.

Dwelling on the past or worrying a lot about the future isn't productive. The past is finished – like something written on water. Sure there are ripples, but if we stay out of the water the ripples get smaller with time. And while we need to prepare for things in the future, obsessing about what might happen is pointless – it's more productive to focus on what we can do in the present.

<sup>2</sup>Some people see life as a scramble for a share of limited resources, or as the survival of the fittest. Really, it's always been about cooperation and caring about the well-being of others. Societies where people cooperate with each other work well, societies that don't tend to fall apart. Even if we're just talking about our own neighbourhood, where there's cooperation there's more happiness.

<sup>3</sup>Introspection is also be called contemplation, mindfulness or self-reflection. One reason for practicing it is we all have a cognitive-emotional template that we filter our perceptions of ourselves and the world through. The template is shaped by our experiences, biology and the disposition we were born with. If you've ever gone into a dark room and been startled by a shape that turned out to be a chair or a lamp then you know what it's like when your template doesn't match reality. If you take action based on the misperception (throwing something, screaming) it leads to suffering. Practicing introspection helps us make a template that reflects reality more accurately – we can root out ideas and beliefs about ourselves and the world that are inaccurate or unhelpful – and that makes the odds better we can choose constructive actions.

<sup>4</sup>For more detailed info and teaching activities see the R Life curriculum at [www.rlifeproject.ca](http://www.rlifeproject.ca).

<sup>5</sup> The cautions are in part to address scrupulosity – which means feeling obsessive guilt about moral issues. It can be debilitating for people who get caught up in it.

<sup>6</sup> Feeling ashamed if we've done something wrong is a good thing – it's how we should feel and means we have the seeds of being a decent human being. What we can do next is make restitution. If it's not possible to make it right with the other person, we can do acts of kindness or charity to 'pay off' our debt. You'll often know when you've done enough because you will feel a release, like a weight is lifted.