

Happiness Principles

The University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Research & Extension have organized a list of principles as a blueprint for happiness. At the start of a new year, these principles can help us build a more happy and positive year.

Happiness Principle #1: Notice and Appreciate the Good in Each Day. The first foundational way to be happy is to look for the good in every single day. People who look for the good in their daily lives are happier and accomplish more. Many people believe that their circumstances determine how they feel. If the events of the day are frustrating, disappointing or stressful, they assume it is inevitable to experience negative emotions—to not feel happy with life. But research has shown that the happiest people aren't happier because they have better life circumstances than others; they are happier because they have learned to look for and appreciate what is good about each day.

Happiness Principle #2: Focus on the Positives in Your Past. Everyone chooses memories to construct a unique life story. This story can be happy or sad depending on how they choose to think about these memories. Positive memories are those that make you the happiest and can have long-lasting effects in shaping your identity. Close your eyes and relive some of the memories you have identified as your best. Notice that when you relive positive memories, positive emotions naturally fill your mind.

Happiness Principle #3: Look Forward to Tomorrow. Many people invest a great deal of time and energy worrying about things that are unlikely to happen or are beyond their control. When you begin worrying about something that might happen in the future, ask yourself: “What is the chance that this will actually happen? Is this something I can do anything about?” Depending upon your answers to those questions, choose from these options—have courage to face challenges, accept what you cannot change, manage what is in your control, and/or manage your way of thinking.

Happiness Principle #4: Know and Use Your Strengths. Each of us has personal strengths—positive characteristics that come naturally to us. Research has shown we will be more likely to thrive in life if we identify our unique strengths and design our lives to use them. We will feel encouraged and energized.

Happiness Principle #5: Choose to Serve. Some people choose to serve by participating in community or religious organizations. But service doesn't have to be limited to formal roles in organizations. Service can also be offered informally as we reach out to neighbors, people in the community, or family members. It might involve a service project, but it could also take the form of a personal visit, a written note, or a phone call.