

Tips to Improve Your Optimism

Be Realistic

Optimism does not mean that we find something good about **everything**. It does not mean that we are blind to reality. Optimism does not mean that we try to see everything in our lives as perfect. The goal is to aim for “flexible optimism.” Not all situations call for a cheery disposition, just as not all circumstances call for a catastrophic disposition. Sometimes optimism is the healthy way to go, and sometimes pessimism is the healthier option. Use your realistic judgement and your sense of values.

Some pessimistic people say they “are just being realistic.” When thinking is usually on the negative side, that is often an indicator that thought distortions are occurring. Thought distortions prevent us from seeing the reality in a situation and need to be challenged. For instance, thoughts such as, “I am a total failure,” “No one will ever love me again,” “I’ll never pass the test,” are all distorted views of reality. We don’t want to live in the land of thought distortions, nor do we want to view life through rose-colored glasses all the time. Realistic positivity can improve our lives tremendously.

Remember that optimism is not a magic cure for depression or other mental health concerns. Keep optimism in perspective.

Remember Past Successes

Sometimes our current distress can cause us to forget the successes of the past. What obstacles have you overcome in the past? What goals have you achieved?

Write about your successes when you are in a good frame of mind. Create a library of recollections of positive events. This will serve as a helpful resource for you when you are experiencing a setback or difficult experience.

Notice the Positives in Your Day

We can be so focused on one or two negative events in our day that we disregard all the positive things that happen. Try to notice the positive encounters and experiences that occur throughout your day. Recording these events can help shift your thought patterns towards more optimism.

Increase Your Positive Influences

We underestimate the impact that of the negativity that can bombard our minds each day. People and circumstances influence us. Pay attention to those in your life who tend to be pessimistic. What other pessimistic or negative input do you encounter during your day – News broadcasts? Radio stations? Articles?

We can make a choice instead to fill our minds with influences such as positive Ted Talks, audio books, traditional books, or inspirational and motivational You-Tube videos and channels.

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Watch Your Language

How is your self-talk? Self-talk reveals whether we are optimistic or pessimistic. Pay attention to how you talk to yourself about the setbacks or problems in your life. When you are feeling frustrated or feel like giving up, try to notice your self-talk in that moment. By becoming more aware of our thought patterns, we can begin to change. Try to switch the way you are talking to yourself to a more realistic and encouraging approach.

Create New Habits

Optimism is a learned skill. It takes practice and willingness to do the work. Find ways to incorporate some of the practices into your daily or weekly routine. Find ways to make them ongoing practices in order to change your thinking patterns.

Resources:

Paquette, Johan, Psy.D. 2015. Real happiness: proven paths for contentment, peace & well-being.

Seligman, Martin, Ph.D. 2006. Learned optimism: how to change your mind and your life. Random House: New York.

“Optimists perform better across nearly all areas of life, including mental health, physical health, and relationships. Then tend to do better in school, perform better at work, and even live substantially longer lives on average.”

Dr. Johan Paquette in “Real Happiness: proven paths for contentment, peace & well being.”