



The Optimist

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What's New?

Free Wireless Hotspot Now Available In My Waiting Room. See page 5 for more details.

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<http://www.drkerley.com>

Welcome to the Premier Issue!

Welcome to the first issue of *The Optimist*, a monthly newsletter covering mental health topics for adults, children and families.

The goal of *The Optimist* is to provide you with news, information and resources to assist you in making the most of your life. I hope to enable you to successfully navigate the challenges that life brings, so that you may better recognize and enjoy the victories!

I hope you enjoy this flagship issue. I look forward to receiving your feedback. Please email comments to info@drkerley.com. I will incorporate reader feedback into future issues.

Why “The Optimist”?

The name of my newsletter is significant – optimism is a key component to improving mental health! In this issue, I will share with you the latest research on optimism and what it means to you. Most importantly, I will outline specific techniques you can use to improve your optimism skills (yes, they are skills!), and provide you with easy to understand exercises to nurture optimism in your children. Keep in mind as you are reading, optimism is a process, not a state.

Optimism Defined

So what really is optimism? Optimism is an explanatory style (how you explain things to yourself), and also an attitude (how you feel about these things). The behavioral component of optimism is a complex result of our thoughts and emotions.

Optimism, in its most simple form, means believing that positive results are likely. Optimism is most beneficial when you are faced with a life problem, challenge or setback. An optimistic attitude during these stressful periods will inspire and motivate you to adopt a problem-solving attitude to improve your chances of an acceptable outcome.

Is your glass half full or half empty? (Perhaps the glass is twice as big as it needs to be?) If your glass tends to be full, you are likely to have a generally positive life view. Is pessimism the opposite of optimism? You may think that pessimists possess a negative life view, a tendency to focus on what is bad or what they are lacking, and you would be partially correct.

Links for Fun

www.testcafe.com

www.authentichappiness.org

Test your emotional IQ and optimism levels, plus more!

These tests do not provide you with professional results, but they are a fun place to learn about yourself!

New Posts on www.drkerley.com

Typical Mistakes In Thinking

Cybertherapy Services Now Available

Rate Me on www.kudzu.com!

These seemingly diametrically opposed terms suggest qualitatively different outlooks on all aspects of life. The truth is, no individual is a 'true' optimist, but instead fall on some point of a continuum. Most optimistic people have an inclination to put a positive construction upon actions and events; to anticipate a positive outcome. In reality, you are an optimist to a degree, and this degree changes in different situations. What's more, you can actively alter the way you think to increase your optimism potential.

It is important to note the factors that reduce one do not necessarily increase the other. Antonio Gramsci famously called for "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will": the one a spur to action, the other the resilience to believe that such action will result in meaningful change. As we will discuss later, being a flexible optimist is much more effective than a Pollyanna optimist or a pessimist.

The key here is a healthy optimist views themselves as actively influencing their futures, they possess an internal locus of control...a belief in karma if you will...that their thoughts and actions determine their future.

The Benefits of Optimism

Personal optimism correlates strongly with self-esteem, psychological well being, and physical health. Pessimism tends to make you feel more anxious, depressed and hopeless. None of these feelings will help you overcome obstacles or persevere in the face of adversity. Optimism is more useful, and makes life more successful and enjoyable. The pessimist is likely to give up early.

Landmark research outlined in Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* uncovered links between your emotions and the immune system and central nervous system. "People who experienced chronic anxiety, long periods of sadness and pessimism, unremitting tension or incessant hostility, relentless cynicism or suspiciousness, were found to have double the risk of disease-inducing asthma, arthritis, headaches, peptic ulcers and heart disease." There is a myriad of research out there that indeed confirms optimism is good for your health!

Cognitive Optimism: The Power of Words and Thoughts

Optimism is a skill that can be learned! It is not just pushing negative thoughts out of your mind. It is *training* to approach each situation from a positive perspective.

Learn to identify adverse situations or events that you routinely face. Hear and record the beliefs about those events that come to your mind (the 'recordings' you play in your head). Feel the consequence of those beliefs (and write them down) in terms of emotions, energy, will to act, etc. Consider how your thoughts influence your behavior. Dispute those beliefs and distract yourself. To dispute, you can challenge the usefulness of your belief, generate other explanations, and focus on evidence that undermines the negative belief and supports a more positive interpretation. Distraction can be used to stop the loop of thoughts in your head.

Raising Optimistic Children

There is a solid and growing body of research that tells us we can help our children learn to face life's challenges, work through problems, and heal from emotional wounds that could otherwise result in a lifelong pattern of anxiety and depression. We can help our children be happy, successful, and resilient. Here's a great place to start....

"Two men looked out of prison bars. One saw mud, the other saw stars."

Anonymous

For more information on children and optimism, check out these great books:

Daniel Goleman's "Emotional Intelligence"

Martin Seligman's "Learned Optimism" and "The Optimistic Child".

Optimists are less likely to become discouraged by everyday problems than pessimists; they're even less vulnerable to depression, according to numerous studies. The hope that optimism could essentially immunize children against depression was what led Martin Seligman, Ph.D., to initiate the Penn Optimism Program. In controlled studies, participation in the program cut children's risk of depressive symptoms [moderate to severe] in half.

Children can learn optimism skills and develop positive attitudes very early in life. Infants react to their parents from day one. According to Terry Brazleton, M.D., a baby's basic outlook on life can be determined by performing a simple block test. Those babies who have gotten a healthy amount of encouragement and approval will continue to play with the blocks. They *expect* to succeed. By contrast, babies who come from homes too bleak, chaotic, or neglectful go about the same small task in a way that signals they already expect to fail. Such children are likely to go through life with a defeatist outlook, expecting no encouragement or interest from teachers, finding school joyless, perhaps eventually dropping out.

The difference between the two outlooks – children who are confident and optimistic vs. those who expect to fail – starts to take shape in the first few years of life. Brazelton concludes "Parents need to understand how their actions can help generate the confidence, curiosity, the pleasure in learning and the understanding of limits" to help children succeed in life.

The emotional abilities children acquire later in life build on those earliest years. These abilities form the foundation for learning. School success is not predicted by a child's knowledge of facts or ability to read so much as by emotional and social measures. Being self-assured, knowing what kind of behavior is expected, being able to wait, to follow directions, and knowing how to turn to teachers for help are all better indicators of success and happiness.

When dealing with failure in school, optimists tend to continue trying, defeat is seen as temporary and achievement assured. Pessimists are often defined by their personal failures. Children are natural optimists – we often assure failure in school by such tactics as grading on a curve. We define relative success as failure. Educators report 'losing' students as they enter the later middle school years, which is approximately the same time the natural optimism of childhood wanes. What a great opportunity! Take the steps now to help prepare your children for school and life!

樂觀主義

optimism

A tendency to expect the best possible outcome or dwell on the most hopeful aspects of a situation.

Positive Parenting Points

- Be an available and focused listener
- Provide constructive criticism, share your own learned lessons
- Teach children to recognize automatic negative thoughts
- Question those thoughts- "that may not be true"
- Be encouraging and supportive
- Role play possible outcomes to build social problem solving skills
- Brainstorm and discuss the likelihood of each scenario
- Build a chain of optimism, taking one link (or situation) at a time
- Spend family time on significant matters...what happened today?
- Celebrate the successes
- Diffuse the discouragements with optimism
- Help your child build immunity to setbacks

13 Steps to Increasing Optimism

Adapted from *The Power of Optimism*. McGinnis, A. L. (1990).
San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers.

1. Face reality, expect bad times, and become a problem-solver
2. Look for the good in bad situations, perhaps there will be a partial solution there
3. Cultivate a faith in your self-control
4. Seek ways to renew your spirit, your energy, and your devotion to a cause
5. Challenge your negative and irrational thoughts
6. Learn to "smell the roses" and appreciate life
7. Use your fantasy to rehearse for future challenges
8. Smile, laugh, and find something to celebrate – even in the hard times
9. Believe in the awesome power of humans – and you in particular – to solve problems
10. Love many things passionately – nature, art, play, but above all, love people
11. Vent your anger but temper it with empathy and tolerance
12. Don't complain. Instead, share your good news with others
13. Accept what can't be changed

Book Review: Feeling Good

By Susan Becker, Guest Reviewer

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy (1980, revised, 1999)

"Feeling Good" is a 4 million-copy bestseller written by Dr. David Burns, and is the book most frequently "prescribed" for depressed patients by psychiatrists and psychologists in the United States and Canada. Surveys indicate that American mental health professionals rate *Feeling Good* as the #1 book on depression. The book claims to show you how to "Overcome Depression, Conquer Anxiety, and Enjoy Greater Intimacy". Now, who couldn't use that?

I dove into the book, hoping to find new ways to improve my life. I wasn't disappointed. I'm not new to the concept of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and you probably aren't either. We've all heard of the mistakes in

Free Wireless Hotspot

To make your wait more comfortable, I have set up a free wireless hotspot for my clients and those who are waiting for them. This free service will allow you to access the internet and check email on your laptop (equipped with a wireless network card). This service will also work with portable video game systems and PDA's equipped with wireless networking cards. To use this service, please see the instructions posted on the sign in the waiting room.

thinking that can create negative emotions, moods and behaviors. Dr. Burns does an excellent job of outlining various cognitive techniques that are both easy to understand and easy to do, and provides plenty of self-practice opportunities.

This book is perfect for those suffering from mild to moderate anxiety and/or depression. Perhaps most importantly, this book is both easy and enjoyable to read.

I love how Dr. Burns anticipates reactions, and addresses those objections. I am very proficient at reading something, and saying to myself, "Yes, but what about...". I'll give you an example. I lost my father to cancer a year ago; he was only 58 and died within three months of being diagnosed. As a result, I experienced some degree of sadness, anxiety, even a bit of depression. However, I had no error in thinking, it truly was a sad event. Dr. Burns poignantly addresses even this life changing circumstance by emphasizing that when bad things happen, you are going to experience difficult emotions. He points out that the key to understanding the mistakes in thinking that precede anxieties and depression result from an *inappropriate* response. In my example, sadness is an appropriate and healthy response. He then goes on to illustrate at what point these thoughts and emotions become unhealthy.

The book also contains a significant section devoted entirely to the usefulness of antidepressant medications in treating forms of depression, among other psychiatric illnesses. If you are currently taking or considering the use of medication to aid in your recovery, this section is an excellent resource to review the different types of medications, how they operate, and their relative success rates.

Feeling Good is an excellent adjunct to psychotherapy. It is great to fill in those "tough" spots between therapy sessions, and provides much food for thought. It is encouraging and motivating, while entertaining at the same time. I personally feel it should be required reading for everyone, not just those suffering from depression, anxiety and other mood disorders.