

My Happy Place

Objective: Research shows that being able to notice and soak in good things that happen in our lives, no matter how small, as well as offer ourselves nurturing support, especially when life is challenging, have strong correlations to resilience and mental health.

Preparation.

- Have paper and pens or pencils handy for a writing exercise to follow formal practice.
- You'll need a timer and a bell or chime.
- Optional: Have a piece of velcro and a photo of a Teflon pan.
- Check out [Rick Hansen](#) on negativity bias

Facts

- We've evolved to have a threat detection "negativity bias" to keep us safe.
- We have to work a little harder to soak in and remember good things that happen.
- Noticing positive things doesn't mean we pretend life is perfect, rather it gives us some buffering to deal with life's downs.

Check in: (1-2 minutes)

- Has anyone used the S.T.O.P. technique or any other mindfulness practices since the last time? Was it helpful in any way? What did you notice? *Discuss...*

Discussion: (about 7-8 minutes)

- We're going to talk about how our brains have evolved again, this time looking at something called "Negativity Bias." Then, we're going to try a mindfulness practice to see if we can connect with some positive thoughts and feelings and write about them...
- Have you ever noticed how hard it is to shake off bad things that happen to us? Like, if you get a paper back from your English teacher and they write six great comments about what you did well, but there's one comment about something you need to work on - what will you remember the most? Yes! The negative one! Why is that? Or do you ever get fixated on one thing you're worried about, thinking its going to be bad?
- There are reasons in our brain biology and evolution for why this happens! Imagine what life was like for our ancestors tens of thousands of years ago? Pretty rough. Humans were always looking outdoor danger. Why? Because our survival depended on it. If we saw a stick on the ground and thought it was a snake what would we do? Run-right? And we'd be safe whether it was a stick or a snake. But if we saw a snake and assumed it was a stick, well, we might be bitten and die! So our brains evolved to assume most things are like snakes: dangerous. This helps us to be safer and more likely to survive. But what's the down side? *Allow students to respond and discuss.*
- Has anyone ever felt like sometimes a problem took over their life when it wasn't really so bad? *Share one of your own experiences if applicable,*

Discussion continued...

- A neuropsychologist named Rick Hansen said “Your brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and like Teflon for positive ones.” (*Show/ Explain velcro / Teflon*)
- His research showed that if we want to soak in good things, that we have to spend some time with the experience, even if it’s just by remembering it for a few minutes.
- Once we’ve spent some time “soaking in the good” we have those memories and good feelings to fall back on when life is challenging. This doesn’t mean that we pretend things aren’t difficult – because sometimes they really are! But we can get in touch with something that’s nurturing, supportive and helpful to lift us up when life’s getting us down. This leads me to our practice and exercise we call: “My Happy Place.”

Practice: (5 minutes) Please pass out paper and pens before starting.

- *Repeat prompts and suggestions from previous mindfulness practices to start. Ring bell.*
- Take a few deep breaths. Feel your contact points: feet on the floor and back on the chair. Try silently inviting your body and mind to relax, knowing you’re safe... Nothing else you need to do right now... take a break and just be you...
- Now I’m going to invite you to imagine or remember a special place. A place where you may have been only once, or a place you spend time regularly. It can also be a place in your imagination that exists just for you... This is a place where you feel like you can be completely yourself, where you feel safe, and where you feel deeply happy and content. A place where you feel a sense of ease, or freedom. Allow yourself to travel to this place in your mind...
- We’re going to spend some time fully immersing ourselves in this “happy place” now. So, imagining or remembering this place, notice if you’re inside or outside. Are you alone or with another person? Or a number of people? Or animals? There’s no right answer – your happy place is just as you imagine it to be, just perfect. So again, noticing: “Where am I? What do I see? Are there colors around me? Bright or dim light? Are there textures I can see? Shapes? Movement or stillness? What do I sense in my body? Warmth or coolness? Sensations of wind or sunlight or cozy blankets? What can I feel on my skin? How does my tummy feel? ... Are there any tastes or smells?” Take a moments to soak in these sensations, smells or tastes... Are there any sounds that I notice? Natural or human-made sounds? Loud or quiet? Close by or far away? Constant or intermittent? ... How do I feel in my emotions? What kinds of thoughts are coming up? ... And now taking a few more moments to soak in the good feelings...
- In another moment I’m going to ring the bell, and you can keep sitting for as long as you like until you’re ready to silently open your eyes and start writing. You’re going to go straight from the mindfulness practice into writing without talking. What you’re writing: you’re simply going to describe your Happy Place in your own words, writing as much detail as possible. Please know that you will NOT be sharing your writing. After writing a bit I’ll offer a few prompts to give you more ideas about what to write. ... *Ring bell.*

Writing Exercise: (10 minutes)

Please encourage silence until everyone is done writing. Allow the students a few moments to transition from the formal mindfulness practice to the writing... also let them get started for at least a couple of minutes before bringing in the prompts...

- Just to revisit some ideas to help you fully describe your Happy Place: (*Feel free to change the wording or order, this time...*) Are you alone or with another person? Or a number of people? Or animals? There's no right answer – your happy place is just as you imagine it to be, just perfect. So again, noticing: Where am I? What do I see? Are there colors around me? Bright or dim light? Are there textures I can see? Shapes? Movement or stillness? What do I sense in my body? Warmth or coolness? Sensations of wind or sunlight or cozy blankets? What can I feel on my skin? How does my tummy feel? ... Are there any tastes or smells? Take a moments to soak in these sensations, smells or tastes... Are there any sounds that I notice? Natural or human-made sounds? Loud or quiet? Close by or far away? Constant or intermittent? ... How do I feel in my emotions?
- OK, we're going to try to wrap up our writing now. Take another minute to finish your sentences... ... *Ring bell.*
- Take a moment, close your eyes if you wish, and just notice how you're feeling now. You can fold up this paper and keep it on your pocket, take it home or keep it in a special secret place to remind you that when times are hard, **you always have your Happy Place with you** – it's "in your pocket," whether or not you have the piece of paper. You've touched into your experience of feeling safe, feeling truly yourself, feeling free, at ease and happy, and no one can take your Happy Place away from you. It's all yours and always there when you need to reconnect with a little sweetness in life.
- OPTIONAL: Allow time for reflection and optional sharing about how they're feeling, but NO ONE has to ever read or share about their Happy Place – it's just for them!