

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Brief No. 3

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This is the third brief related to the series, Emotional Well-Being: The Science and Practice of Feeling Well. In this brief, we explore how we can create positive emotions in our everyday lives, and how those can impact overall emotional well-being.

Module 3 Objectives

By the end of Module 3, you will be able to:

1. Describe the connection between positive emotions and emotional well-being.
2. Recognize how emotional goals can vary by culture and life stage.
3. Identify opportunities to experience positive emotions.

As a reminder, we define emotional well-being as:

Emotional well-being has many parts that capture how positive an individual feels generally, and about their life overall. It includes:

- **Experiential features:** emotional quality of everyday experiences
- **Reflective features:** life satisfaction, sense of meaning, and goal pursuit

These features occur in the context of culture, life circumstances, resources, and age.¹

Role of Positive Emotions

Emotions come in many forms. An easy way to think about our emotions is using the weather. We can think of our feelings as falling into three categories:

1. Heavy, stormy feelings
2. Mild, cloudy feelings
3. Light, sunny feelings

This comparison helps us to understand our different emotions and the roles they play in our lives. You can see an overview of this “feelings forecast” below².



If you're having heavy and stormy feelings, you might feel sad, angry, worried, or frustrated. It's normal to experience these feelings. If we want to move away from our heavy and stormy feelings, we can try a strategy such as deep breathing or helping others to shift towards feeling mild and cloudy or even light and sunny.



If you're having mild, cloudy feelings, you might feel calm, focused, grateful, or bored. These feelings allow us to be productive and creative but also rest and recharge. We should aim to spend most of our time in this area so our bodies and minds can feel balanced.



If you're having light and sunny feelings, you might feel happy, excited, proud, or confident. It's important to find light and sunny moments every day to increase our positive emotions. However, light and sunny emotions can feel intense at times, and you may want to practice a strategy to release some energy and feel calmer.

It's ideal to spend most of our time in the mild, cloudy and light, sunny areas. Yet, humans often spend a lot of time in the heavy, stormy area. This is because we are able to imagine and worry about bad things that might happen to us and be tough on ourselves for the past. However, embracing positive emotions can help us feel more light and sunny for three reasons³:

1. Maintaining physical health – when we experience positive emotions, our body is able to repair and protect itself. This can help us to maintain physical health and promotes a long life.
2. Motivating us – positive emotions help us focus on what is going right (instead of focusing on what is wrong) and how we can maintain those positive feelings.
3. Bringing us together – we can be joined by positive emotions such as *excitement* when our favorite sports team wins or *love* when we spend time with family and friends.

Positive Emotions Through Culture and Age

Culture influences everyone's view of positive emotions in a unique way. Some cultures view emotions as experiences within one person while other cultures view them as experiences between people. The same emotion can also be viewed differently in different cultures. As

mentioned in Module 1, some cultures value *independence* and others value *interdependence*. For example, cultures that value independence view shame as a negative emotion, while cultures that value interdependence view it as a positive emotion. Culture impacts many aspects of emotions, including how we categorize them and how we regulate them⁴.

Aging is an important part of development in which our new experiences are often shaped by our previous ones. Many of us want to know how to successfully age. Jeffrey Nevid, PhD developed a concept known as the Four Cs of aging we can practice to age well⁵.

CHALLENGE

Life can challenge and push us. In life we can be presented with challenges such as a new career, family changes, or retirement. Additionally, it's important to challenge ourselves in small ways. For example, trying a class for a new hobby or volunteering at a new organization.

CONNECTION

Throughout all stages of life it's important to feel connected. Social isolation can lead to negative emotions and harmful effects on our bodies. Making an effort to maintain connections with family, friends, and community members can pay off and help us feel more connected.

COMPENSATION

Throughout life, our abilities and priorities change. We must compensate and understand that we may need to modify the activities we used to do. For example, as a new parent, you may not have as much free time to go out with friends, so instead of seeing friends once a week you see them every other week.

CONTROL

Understanding what's in our control can give us a sense of power. For example, we can control how we fuel our bodies, how we spend free time, and how we connect with others. For example, hobbies and volunteering. Letting go of things we cannot control can give us power.

Your Turn!

We should strive to embrace positive emotions every day. Positive experiences not only help us to feel good, but also help our brains rest and repair. Engaging in positive experiences mindfully can make them even more valuable! Emphasizing mindfulness is important because our brains tend to be biased towards negative experiences and emotions. This [article](#) presents four tips to focus on positive emotions to act against our tendency towards negativity⁶. You can plan how to incorporate at least one of these tips into your next week on page 4 of your [Module 3 Handout](#).

Dive Deeper

To learn more, check out the following resources:

World Economic Forum (YouTube)

[Understanding the role of emotion in ageing | Robert Levenson](#)

This video presents how our emotional skills develop and impact us as we age. It also explains normal changes in emotions due to aging as well as atypical changes due to injuries or diseases.

Collaboratory on School and Child Health

[Paper Summary on Family Interventions](#)

This paper summary provides an overview of a research article that studied two different programs aimed at creating positive emotions among families

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¹ Park, C. L., Kubzansky, L. D., Chafouleas, S. M., Davison, R. J., Keltner, D., Parsafar, P., Conwell, Y., Martin, M. Y., Hanmer, J., & Wang, K. H. (2023). Emotional well-being: What it is and why it matters. *Affective Science*, 4(1), 10-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-022-00163-0>.

² University of Connecticut (2023). *Introduction Facilitator Steps*. Feel Your Best Self.

³ Inner Path Seekers | Lessons For Life. (2022, November 8). *Dr. Rick Hanson Ph.d. Explains The Strength Of Positive Emotions* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/TsBOYHpUt-g?si=kCU_G-V2hSe5xdTl.

⁴ Pogosyan, M. (2018, March 30). *How Culture Shapes Emotion*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/between-cultures/201803/how-culture-shapes-emotions>.

⁵ Nevid, J. S. (2025, May 15). *The Four C's of Successful Aging*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-minute-therapist/202505/the-four-cs-of-successful-aging>.

⁶ Davis, D. L. (2023, August 2). *The Power of Mindfully Embracing Positive Experiences*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/laugh-cry-live/202308/the-power-of-mindfully-embracing-positive-experiences>.



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