

LIFE SATISFACTION

Brief No. 5

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This is the fifth brief related to the series, Emotional Well-Being: The Science and Practice of Feeling Well. In this brief, we explore life satisfaction as an important component of emotional well-being.

Module 5 Objectives

By the end of Module 5, you will be able to:

1. Define life satisfaction and its connection to emotional well-being.
2. List factors that can influence life satisfaction.
3. Identify everyday practices that can promote your life satisfaction.

Throughout this series, we use the following definition of emotional well-being.

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 age¹.

What is life satisfaction?

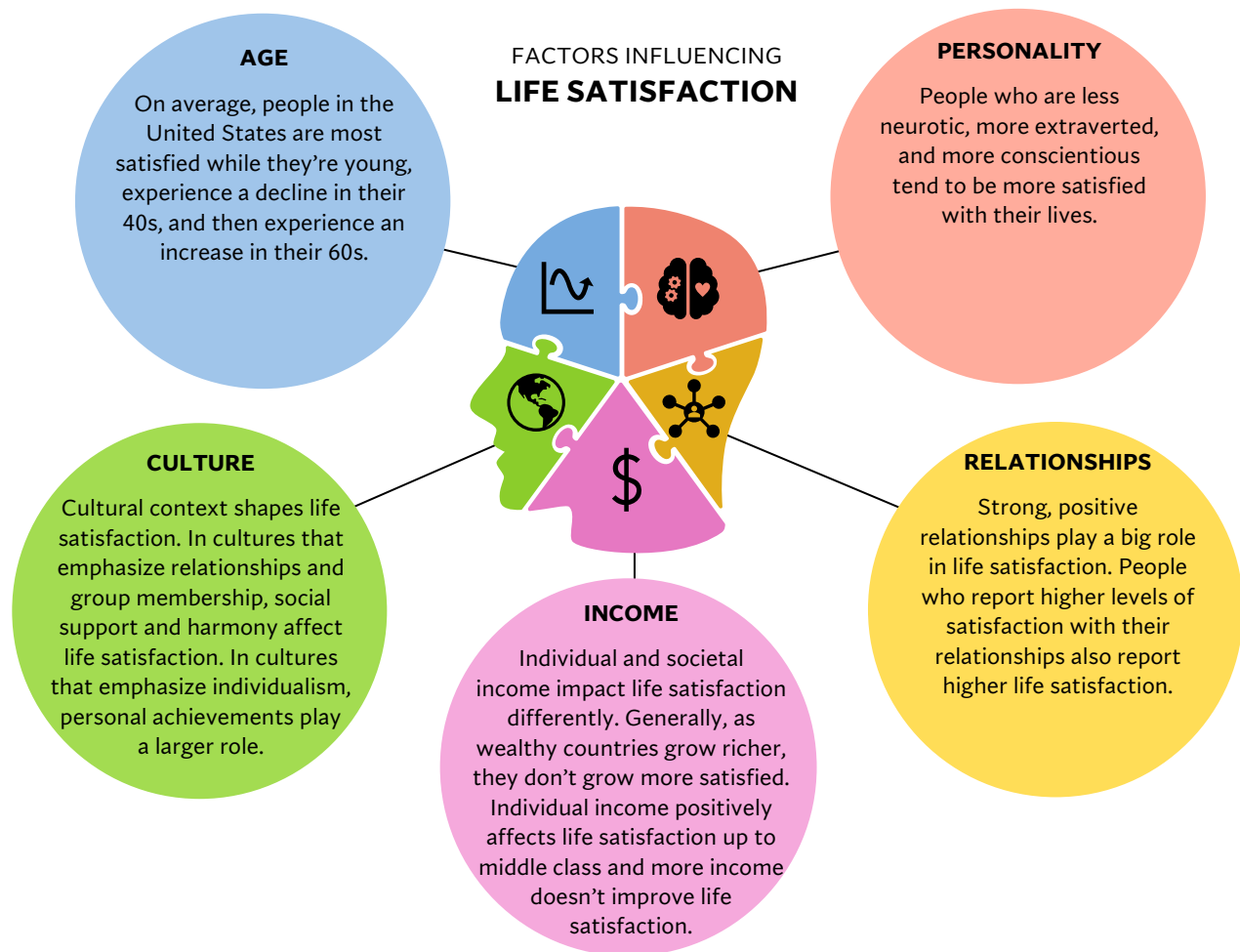
Life satisfaction is a reflective feature of emotional well-being. Life satisfaction is the feeling of contentment we experience when we reflect on our lives and feel that we have accomplished something meaningful. Life satisfaction is not just experiencing positive emotions. It has more to do with how we perceive our lives to be.

Feeling satisfied – like we have succeeded in life – is not entirely the same thing as feeling happy. In fact, we often feel great satisfaction and accomplishment when we overcome challenges. This satisfaction is what influences our emotional well-being.

Life satisfaction is the feeling of contentment we experience when we reflect on our lives and feel that we have accomplished something meaningful.

What influences life satisfaction?

Life satisfaction can be influenced by many factors, like those shown in the figure below.



How can I strengthen my life satisfaction?

We can do things to intentionally strengthen our life satisfaction. In a [Time article](#)⁶, Eric Barker highlights the work of Daniel Kahneman, Nobel Prize winner and author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Barker summarizes Kahneman's TED Talk to answer the question, "What can we do to not just be happy in the moment, but to feel satisfied with our lives?" Take a few moments to read the [Time article](#) and review the strategies.

In the [TED Talk](#)⁷, Kahneman distinguishes between the happiness of our "experiencing selves" (whether we are happy in the moment) and our "remembering selves" (whether we are happy with our lives after reflecting on it). This difference affects the way we make decisions, especially when it comes to our happiness and life satisfaction. Consider watching the TED Talk to learn more.

Your Turn!

In the article, Barker discusses 5 research-backed strategies for boosting our life satisfaction. These strategies are listed to the right. Pull out your Module 5 Handout and give the following activity a try.



Review the strategies and pick two you'd like to strengthen in your life.



Grow close friendships and community



Develop a coherent life story



Set and pursue clear goals



Prioritize meaning over materialism



Embrace continuous learning and adaptability

For a Deeper Dive

To learn more, check out the following resources:

Inc. Life

[Nobel Prize-Winning Psychologist: Most People Don't Want to Be Happy \(and That's Smart\)](#)

This article discusses the difference between happiness and life satisfaction, based on the work of psychologist Daniel Kahneman.

Psychology Today

[Affirmations May Improve Life Satisfaction and Well-Being](#)

This article discusses how affirmations can be used to improve well-being.

Greater Good Science Center Magazine

[To Live Longer, Find Purpose in Your Life](#)

This article discusses a growing body of research that suggests that sense of purpose may be more important to our lifespan than overall life satisfaction.

TEDx Talks

[You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It](#)

This video talks about how happiness can be created by befriending your brain.

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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 Scommenga, P. (2023, April 6). Happily Ever After? Research Offers Clues on What Shapes Happiness and Life Satisfaction after Age 65. *PRB*. <https://www.prb.org/resources/happily-ever-after-research-offers-clues-on-what-shapes-happiness-and-life-satisfaction-after-age-65/>

³ Newman, K. M. (2019, May 10). How Cultural Differences Shape Your Happiness. *Greater Good Magazine*. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_cultural_differences_shape_your_happiness

⁴ Suttie, J. (2024, August 5). How Does Your Personality Affect Your Happiness? *Greater Good Magazine*. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_does_your_personality_affect_your_happiness

⁵ Britton, J. R. (2019, February 13). Money buys happiness only to a certain point. *Purdue University*. <https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/news/2019/02/money-buys-happiness-only-to-certain-a-point/>

⁶ Barker, E. (2014, March 15). How To Be More Satisfied With Your Life – 5 Steps Proven By Research. *TIME*. <https://time.com/25208/how-to-be-more-satisfied-with-your-life-5-steps-proven-by-research/>

⁷ TED (2010, March 1). The riddle of experience vs. Memory [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgRlrBI-7Yg>

