



3 GRATITUDE EXERCISES

FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

Creating Savoring Rituals

It is very easy to fall into the trap of thinking that happiness is just around the corner. Many everyday positive experiences pass by without being noticed, appreciated, or enjoyed. How can you respond to these good things in ways that emphasize their positive effects? Savoring is a way to notice and enjoy positive experiences that are already present in our day-to-day lives. Making a conscious choice each day to notice and savor the things we like is an effective way to balance the negative effects of stress, promote resilience in the face of adversity, and increase positive emotions.

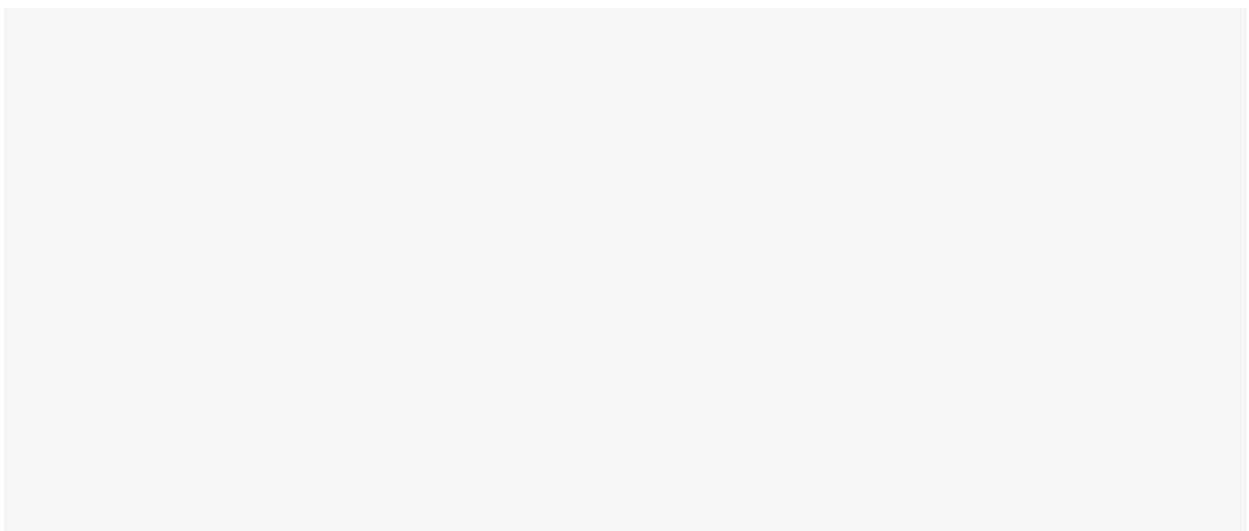
You do not need to wait passively for an extraordinary life event to occur to savor and enhance positive emotions. In reality, opportunities to savor pleasant experiences can be found almost anywhere, even while experiencing challenging life events. The number of positive experiences you have is much more critical than how special or exceptional those experiences are. In other words, it is more beneficial to savor those ordinary (yet pleasant) everyday activities rather than wait for extraordinary life events that do not happen very often.

The goal of this exercise is to help you stop, notice, enjoy, and prolong positive experiences that can be found in everyday activities.

Step 1: Identify everyday activities that bring you pleasure

This step is to get you thinking about the everyday things that give you pleasure. In other words, what do you look forward to on an average day?

Take a few moments to think about enjoyable activities that you can pursue and savor during an average day. These could include your morning cup of coffee, a hot bath, or a short stroll in the sunshine during your lunch hour. You should ensure that the activities are common sources of pleasure and enjoyment for you. List those activities below:



Step 2: Experience pleasure as it happens

You must choose to savor two enjoyable experiences each day for at least two weeks. These should be ordinary activities from your daily routine that you might typically rush through. No matter what you choose to savor, focus on fully immersing yourself in the experience. Avoid outside distractions, turn off your cell phone, put everything else aside, and give the activity your complete attention. Slow down and notice and appreciate the positive aspects of the activity, paying close attention to and filtering out any thoughts that interfere with your savoring of this moment. If your mind begins to wander, simply bring your attention back to the positive sights, sounds, and smells around you.

Think of this step as a way to create a memory. Paying attention to your senses will help you savor the moment thoroughly and evoke pleasant memories of your experiences. Pay close attention to as many positive sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations as you can.

Use as many of your senses as possible. What do you see, smell, hear, feel, or taste? For instance, if you have chosen your morning coffee as one of your pleasurable experiences, try to pay attention to the smell of freshly ground coffee. What words would you use to describe this? Rich? Sweet? Earthy? Close your eyes for that first sip. Describe the sensation and taste in as much detail as possible. Notice the pleasant surroundings and your positive feelings and try to prolong the experience for as long as you can.

Reflection

At the end of each week, take some time to record your reflections on creating your savoring rituals.

Recall as many of the positive emotions that you experienced and savored in the past seven days as you can. Write them down in the space below.

From the list above, which three positive emotions did you experience most often throughout the exercise?



Looking back over the past seven days, have you *noticed* more positive emotions compared to your typical week?

While savoring your chosen moments, did you feel your attention shifting away from the exercise? If so, what actions did you take to return your focus to the positive event?

When you think back on your savoring experiences, do you feel more appreciative of small moments of pleasure?

Did savoring make you feel more *aware* of the pleasant experiences that can be found all around you?



Did you find that savoring certain moments made these experiences more pleasurable than before?

What did you enjoy most throughout this exercise?

Did you find anything challenging throughout this exercise? If so, what?

Do you find yourself looking forward to savoring these activities in the future?

Did you share your experience with others? If so, how did this make you feel? How did others react?

Experiencing Awe

Introduction

This exercise involves tapping into the emotional experience of awe. Awe occurs in response to experiences that we perceive to be vast and amazing. This sense of vastness can be physical, such as a sun setting across the ocean, or psychological, such as a brilliant idea. Simply put, an awe-inspiring moment is a moment that made you say “wow!”

Step 1: Recall a recent awe experience

Think back to a time when you felt a sense of awe regarding something you saw or experienced. Perhaps you witnessed something special in nature, observed an overwhelming act of kindness, or had a critical lightbulb moment. For this exercise, try to think of the most recent experience you’ve had that involved the feeling of awe. Allow yourself to relive this moment of awe by closing your eyes for a few minutes and remembering as much about the experience as you can.

Step 2: Describe the awe experience

In the space below, describe this experience (Step 1) in as much detail as possible, including what thoughts went through your mind at that moment and what feelings and emotions arose at the time. Include any positive thoughts and/or feelings that have shown up now as you have relived this excellent experience as well.

Optional Step 3: Create an awe diary

As you may have just experienced (Steps 1 and 2), reliving awe moments allows us to re-experience some of the positivity that they initially evoked in us. Taking a moment to document awe moments not only allows you to savor and enjoy the experience for a little longer, but it also allows you to store the memory so that you can recall and re-enjoy the awe in the future. As an optional next step, begin to diarize moments of awe by describing and reflecting on them in your ‘awe diary’ (see the Appendix).

Fostering Admiration in Couples

This exercise is all about fostering feelings of fondness and admiration for your partner. Did you know that positive feelings that have long been forgotten can be revived simply by thinking and talking about them? Doing so not only strengthens the bond and connection between you and your partner but also makes it much easier to address problem areas and move toward positive change. The first step is to come up with a few things that you appreciate about your partner. Second, we will do a brief meditation to allow feelings of fondness for these admirable characteristics to emerge. Third, you will share and celebrate with your partner what it is that you each cherish about one another.

Step 1: Identify admirable qualities

Come up with **three** qualities or characteristics that you appreciate or admire about your partner. For instance, you might appreciate that your partner is loving, generous, and a good friend. Once you have come up with three characteristics, write them down in your Relationship Journal under 'My partner's admirable qualities' (Appendix A).

If you are having difficulty coming up with three characteristics, feel free to define the word characteristic very loosely; even if you can recall only one occasion when your partner displayed this quality, write it down. If you are having trouble finding the words to describe your partner's characteristics, please see Appendix B, which has a list of 71 common admirable characteristics.

Step 2: Meditate on identified characteristics

Take a moment now to think about a time (in the past week) when your partner demonstrated one of these characteristics. Close your eyes and bring this memory to mind, allowing as many relevant details to emerge as possible, such as where you and your partner were, what your partner was saying and how he or she was saying it, how your partner was behaving, what was his or her facial expression, how anyone else who was there reacted to partner, and so on. Allow yourself to spend at least 3 minutes here with this memory in mind. While you are here, allow any pleasant feelings, such as fondness, admiration, and love, to emerge within you.

Step 3: Write down memory

After 3 minutes or so, open your eyes and jot down what came to your mind in the relevant space in your relationship journal (i.e., under the heading 'Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 1').



Step 4: Repeat previous steps

Repeat steps 2 and 3 on the two other qualities identified in step 1.

Step 5: Express appreciation

Come together with your partner now and share the three things that you appreciate about him or her, including your memory of when, in the past week, your partner displayed these qualities. You might like to use the following sentence structure to guide this discussion: "I appreciate that you are _____. I noticed it last week when _____." Take your time here, as this is a very personal and intimate connection activity and can be profoundly enjoyable and gratifying for each of you.

Step 6: Reflect

Now take a moment to reflect on the following individually (i.e., on your own):

- What feelings and emotions did this exercise bring up for you? For instance, did you experience feelings of love, contentment, admiration, or fondness?
- After completing this exercise, are you feeling more or less appreciative of your partner?
- Can you think of any other things that you admire or appreciate about your partner?

Appendix A: Relationship Journal

(Three of) My partner's admirable qualities

1.

2.

3.

Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 1:

Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 2:

Write about a time in the past week when your partner was demonstrating quality 3:

Appendix B: List of admirable characteristics

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|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Loving | 25. Cheerful | 49. Nurturing |
| 2. Sensitive | 26. Coordinated | 50. Warm |
| 3. Brave | 27. Graceful | 51. Kind |
| 4. Intelligent | 28. Elegant | 52. Gentle |
| 5. Thoughtful | 29. Gracious | 53. Practical |
| 6. Generous | 30. Playful | 54. Witty |
| 7. Loyal | 31. Caring | 55. Relaxed |
| 8. Truthful | 32. A great friend | 56. Beautiful |
| 9. Strong | 33. Exciting | 57. Handsome |
| 10. Energetic | 34. Thrifty | 58. Calm |
| 11. Decisive | 35. Full of plans | 59. Lively |
| 12. Creative | 36. Shy | 60. A great partner |
| 13. Imaginative | 37. Vulnerable | 61. A great parent |
| 14. Fun | 38. Committed | 62. Assertive |
| 15. Attractive | 39. Involved | 63. Protective |
| 16. Interesting | 40. Expressive | 64. Sweet |
| 17. Supportive | 41. Active | 65. Tender |
| 18. Funny | 42. Careful | 66. Powerful |
| 19. Considerate | 43. Reserved | 67. Flexible |
| 20. Affectionate | 44. Adventurous | 68. Understanding |
| 21. Organized | 45. Receptive | 69. Quirky |
| 22. Resourceful | 46. Reliable | |
| 23. Athletic | 47. Responsible | |
| | 48. Dependable | |