

The Joyful Brain

Practical Neuroscience-Based Techniques to Help Your Client Rewire the Brain and Create Lasting Happiness, Improve Health, Enhance Job Performance, and Create Contentment

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Learning Objectives

- Articulate the benefits of happiness to our physical health, emotional well-being, relationships, and job performance
- –Explain how the brain’s negativity bias can lead to suffering, stress, and worry
- Summarize the notion of positive neuroplasticity, and learn specific methods for creating lasting changes in the brain
- Administer specific practices to cultivate gratitude, compassion, self-compassion, and connection – and understand how to integrate these practices effectively into treatment
- Practice specific techniques to regulate the nervous system and stimulate the vagus nerve, to help promote feelings of peace, safety, and calm.
- Explore specific areas of the brain linked to positive emotional states, and learn techniques to increase neuronal firing to these regions in order to create lasting change

Program Outline

Happiness: The What, Why, and Why Not

- Defining Happiness: what it is, and what it isn’t
- Why Happiness matters: benefits to physical health, job performance, decreasing burnout, improving cognitive functioning, increasing longevity, and more
- Sources of Happiness: about 50% is genetic, 40% is within our power to change, and only 10% is affected by life circumstances.
- Myths of Happiness: how societal messages regarding happiness lead us astray
- Unsustainable Sources of Happiness: why improving life circumstances (e.g., income or one’s appearance) does not make us sustainably happier due to hedonic adaptation and the impact bias.
- Measuring Happiness: validated measures to assess well-being, strengths,
- Habits of Happy People: activities, thoughts, and beliefs that support positive emotions, thoughts, caring, commitment, motivation and meaning.

Barriers to Happiness: Why happiness can feel so hard to come by

- Understanding the negativity bias: Teflon for good, Velcro for bad
- The Impact of Genetics: what twin studies reveal about happiness

- Hedonic Adaptation: gravity for happiness
- Identifying the hurdles that are blocking contentment, and learning to overcome them

Creating Lasting Changes to the Brain

- Neuroplasticity: how the brain changes and is rewired throughout the lifespan
- Self-Directed Neuroplasticity: targeting specific regions of the brain linked to well-being through specific behaviors, practices, and habits
- Neurogenesis: fostering new neuronal growth
- How the brain changes through intentional practice: increased synaptic connection, thickening glial cells, and increased blood vessel density
- Affect Asymmetry: understanding the difference between the brain's two hemispheres, and its implication for happiness and well-being
- Intentional Change: shifting out of the default mode in order to consciously foster change

The Joyful Brain – 50+ Neuroscience Based Techniques to boost Well-Being

- **The Grateful Brain:** how gratitude increases activation in the left prefrontal cortex, the hypothalamus, and the anterior cingulate cortex. The practice of gratitude is even linked to increased levels of serotonin and dopamine.
- Learn 10 practical exercises to foster gratitude including:
 - The George Bailey Technique
 - Meditations for Gratitude
 - Reflecting on Hardship
 - Three Good Things
- **The Compassionate Brain:** how compassion and kindness activate the limbic system, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, decrease cortisol, and spur the release of dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins
- Practice 7 tangible techniques for harnessing compassion, including:
 - Acts of Kindness
 - The Gift of Time
 - Fun versus Philanthropy
- **The Mindful Brain:** how the practice of mindfulness increases activation in the left prefrontal cortex, decreases amygdala sensitivity, increases hippocampal volume, and offsets cortical thinning.
- Learn 7 ways to easily incorporate mindful awareness into daily life, including:
 - Mindfulness of the Senses
 - 60 second awareness
 - Everyday Mindfulness

- **The Self-Compassionate Brain:** in contrast to self-criticism, self-compassion decreases amygdala response along with increasing activation in the insula and left prefrontal cortex.
- Apply 5 easy-to-use practices for fostering self-compassion, including:
 - Seeing the Double Standard
 - Self-Compassion Break
 - Self-Compassion vs. Self-Criticism
- **The Social Brain:** how our brains evolved for connection, and how social injury activates the same pain centers in the brain as physical injury.
- Explore 6 practical strategies for enhancing social connection, including:
 - Active-Constructive Responding
 - Balancing Technology
 - A Letter of Gratitude
- **The Optimistic Brain:** the impact of optimism on the orbitofrontal cortex, the amygdala, and the left prefrontal cortex
- Learn 5 easy ways to boost optimistic thinking, including:
 - A Positive Future
 - Reflecting on Success
 - Seeking the Silver Lining
- **The Savoring Brain:** how savoring increases activation in the ventral striatum and left prefrontal cortex, while reducing cortisol.
- Tap into 5 useful skills to bring savoring into everyday life, including
 - Savoring across time
 - Savoring through Visualization
 - Everyday savoring
- **Your Brain and Body on Awe:** How awe leads to reduced inflammatory response, along with activation of the parasympathetic nervous system
- Boost your awe quotient through 5 practical steps, including:
 - Awe through Nature
 - Positive Inspiration
 - Conceptual Vastness
- **Strengths & Flow:** how flow is linked to a state of transient hypofrontality, and how it leads to a cascade of neurotransmitters including dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins.
- Harness signature strengths through 5 practical tools, including:
 - Creatively using strengths
 - Identifying Signature Strengths
 - Your Strengths Story

- **Lifestyle Factors:** The impact of specific lifestyle factors to lay the foundation for well-being – including key amino acids for synthesizing neurotransmitters, along with the impact of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF)
- How small lifestyle changes can help build a happier brain
- Learn practical strategies for improving sleep quality and quantity, promoting the relaxation response, and nourishing our brain with happiness-boosting nutrients

Workplace Implications – conquering burnout and chronic stress

- How the habits of happiness have been linked to reduced burnout, increased job performance, increased job retention, and workplace wellness
- How happiness is a cause for improved job performance, not the other way around
- How healthcare professionals face unique challenges to happiness, and how to overcome these challenges
- How gratitude, kindness, self-compassion, and mindful awareness improve work performance, job satisfaction, and job retention
- Work-Life Balance: can it really exist, and can we achieve it?
- Letting go: how to practice acceptance and forgiveness in challenging workplace situations

Happiness in the Digital Age: how to maintain well-being in our changing world

- The impact of technology and social media on well-being: the good news, and the bad news
- The effects of excessive screen time on mood and brain health
- How to create a healthy relationship with technology to foster lasting well-being
- Developing an “app-etite” for happiness: specific apps and websites that can enhance life satisfaction