Living Your Best Life with MS

Program Overview

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Overall Program Objectives

• Increase your knowledge of the principles of positive psychology.
• Identify a challenge you would like to address, along with the positive psychology strategy(ies) you want to employ to develop an action plan
• Participate in an interactive learning experience through sharing and connecting with others
• Increase your confidence in developing a personal approach to addressing challenges
• Identify additional community resources for support and connection
Learning objectives:

• Understand the underlying principles of positive psychology
• Be able to develop personal goals using a goal setting tool of your choice
• Be able to describe the steps required for moving from knowledge to action
• Understand the components of happiness
• Discuss ways to raise happiness levels
• Identify the benefits of social connections and strategies to create them
• Everyday Matters is a program of the National MS Society for those affected by MS - both those living with the disease as well as friends, family and loved ones.

• The program focuses on the principles of positive psychology and how to apply them to life challenges.
Learning objectives, con.:

- Identify strategies to change your mindset and perspective as it relates to happiness
- Become more aware of the mental obstacles holding you back from finding your happiness and how to work through them
- Understand how to create habits to support action
- Describe how the principles of positive psychology are interrelated
- Describe how to spread the principles learned through their networks and communities of support
What is positive psychology?

• Simply put, it is the study of what makes people happy. It is the study of what works, not just what doesn’t.
What we know about happiness:

• Happiness is a learned trait
• Happiness is not a mood – but a work ethic
• While happiness is influenced by genetics, people can learn to be happier by developing optimism, gratitude and altruism
Principles of Positive Psychology

• Happiness as a Habit (aka The Happiness Advantage)
• Building Your Community (aka Social Investment)
• Re-training Your Way of Thinking (aka Fulcrum and the Lever, Tetris Effect, and Falling Up)
• Removing the Barriers (The Zorro Circle and The 20-Second Rule)
Goal Setting Techniques

- Personal Goals = Vision for Your Future
Happiness as a Habit, Capitalizing on Positivity

The Happiness Advantage

Key points:

• It is a misconception that success breeds happiness
• Happiness is a choice
• Waiting to be happy limits our potential for success
• There is no single meaning for happiness. Happiness is relative to the person experiencing it; it’s based on how we each feel about our own lives.
Strategies to Increase Happiness

- Meditation
- Three gratitudes
- Journaling
- Finding something to look forward to
- Committing conscious acts of kindness
- Infusing positivity into your surroundings
- Exercising
- Spending money - but not on “stuff”
- Exercising a signature strength
- What else is missing?
Building Your Community

Social Investment

Key points:

• A common mistake: at the time when we need one another most, we let go of our most valuable resource: social support

• The most successful people take the exact opposite approach. Instead of turning inward they hold on tighter to their social support

• MS can be isolating. It is important to make sure that doesn’t happen

• Research shows connections are core to happiness (for coping, friendship and support)

• Social relationships are the greatest single investment we can make
Retraining Your Way of Thinking

Principles for discussion:

- Adjusting Our Mindset (aka The Fulcrum and the Lever)
- Identifying Patterns of Possibility (aka The Tetris Effect)
- Success Through Resiliency (aka Falling Up)
Identifying Patterns of Possibility, Seeing the Not So Hidden Opportunities

The Tetris Effect

• Our brains easily get stuck in repetitious patterns of viewing the world. So when we are always looking for the negative, we get the negative.
• Think of those “Yes, but…” people you know – they always focus on what won’t work even when presented with positive, viable options.
• We need to retrain our brain to scan for good things.
• Instead of creating a pattern that looks for negatives and blocks success, flip the switch and scan the world for opportunities and ideas that allow success to grow.
• When our brains scan for and focus on the positive, we benefit from three of the most important tools available to us:
  – Happiness
  – Gratitude
  – Optimism
Building Out from a Smaller Circle

The Zorro Circle

Key points:

• Often we are very lofty and grand in making goals – think New Year’s resolutions

• The vastness of the goal can be paralyzing, but by chunking out the big, overall goal into smaller, supportive goals, it becomes easier to reach the overall goal

• Feeling more in control is one of the strongest drivers of well-being and performance

• Setting smaller, more manageable goals helps us build our confidence, celebrate our forward progress and keeps us committed to the task at hand.

• Small successes can add up to major achievements; all it takes is drawing that first circle in the sand
The Path of Least Resistance

20-second Rule

Key points:

• Lowering the barrier to change (aka the activation energy) by just 20 seconds is all it takes to begin a new habit.

• The more we lower, or even eliminate, the activation energy for our desired actions, the more we enhance our ability to jumpstart positive change.

• Limiting the choices we have to make also helps lower the barrier to positive change.

• The less energy it takes to kick start a positive habit, the more likely the habit will stick.

• It takes 21 days to form a habit, so be patient.
Keeping the Momentum Going

The Ripple Effect

Key points:

• Once we start capitalizing on the principles of positive psychology, the positive changes quickly ripple out

• Practicing the principles in our own lives can become our most effective tool for spreading positivity and ensuring that each person around us is spreading positivity too

• The principles of positive psychology can have positive benefits for family members who are also living with the challenges MS can bring

• Positive emotions are infectious, making them a powerful tool in our interpersonal relations

• The happier everyone is around you, the happier you will become – and vice versa
Resources
National MS Society 1-800-344-4867

• BOOKS
  • The Happiness Advantage by Shawn Achor (2010)

• ONLINE
  • www.everydayMSmatters.org
  • The Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu
  • Authentic Happiness Resource Projects www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/resources.aspx
  • http://psychology.about.com/od/branchesofpsychology1/a/positive-psychology.htm