



Section 3b: Noticing the good stuff and increasing positive experiences. Activities that need more time.

Section three uses aspects of positive psychology theory and the 'wellbeing recovery action plan' model to build a practical inventory of things that make us feel good. In essence, the key to wellbeing is to find the things that make us feel good and do them again and again so that we build wellbeing habits and positive behaviour. Considering this, section three should be dipped into with individuals. There is a lot in there and the aim is not to take it all on in one go. Not everything in section three will be right for every individual, if you pick something to work on and you can tell they are not into it, move on to find something else that might work better. Get them to flick through the different ideas and note the aspects that most appeal to them. Work through key activities together and help them to **timetable** practices into their lives, which build resilience and support wellbeing growth. Some of the activities that need more time in section three can suit being explored in a group setting so that ideas are shared. Only work on one at a time, and really engage with drilling down into the processes.

Planning future happiness

Work with the individual that you are supporting, to establish what long-term projects could be set in place, which would mean they got to spend more time in the future on the things that make them happy.

Help an individual to explore these questions, when looking forward in life.

- How do I want to contribute?
- What do I want to experience?
- How do I want to grow?

Help them to visualise themselves in the future being happy and then work backwards with them to establish which steps could be put in place now, to achieve these goals later on. Questions like: "What do you want to happen?" and "What needs to happen for **that** to happen?" work well here.

You could also ask things like: "Do they like to be their own boss in a project/activity or do they prefer working with others." Explore their motivation and discuss the pitfall of motivations based on accumulating wealth or power, as these do not naturally lead to happiness.

Depending on where they are in life, it can be useful to explore future happiness goals in relation to: education paths, careers, volunteering, connections with others, hobbies and recreation activities and spirituality.

Being creative

Explain how creative activities can lead to states of flow, which have been proven to be great for wellbeing, as well as opportunities to gain a sense of accomplishment. For more information on flow, you can look up the work of Mihály Csíkszentmihályi.

Help the individual to explore what type of creative activities might suit them best. Ask them if they used to be creative but have stopped, establish why and what the barriers there are today. Explore if there are people they admire for their creativity (arts, music, chefs etc) and what has stopped them having a go at this activity themselves?

Discuss the pitfalls of unrealistic expectations within creativity. For example, if you want to become very skilled at drawing, you must be prepared to throw a lot of drawings away, on route to becoming accomplished.

Connecting with others

Positive connections with other people are much more about quality than quantity and is a life-long project. Ask them to explore: Who are the people they engage with that make them feel good about themselves and who are the ones that don't?

Discuss how the relationships are different: How do these people treat them? Do they feel they have to be someone else to fit in? Explore with them how much happier their life could be, if they connected more with the people that made them feel good. Explore all the barriers and see if they can come up with solutions.

Also get them to reflect on their own behaviour in different relationships. Can they recognise where changing their approach with some people, might benefit the relationship positively.

Meaning and purpose

Meaning and purpose allows you to feel that you have value, significance, and a sense of fulfilment. Support them to spend some time reflecting on how they can find more meaning and purpose in their life, a group discussion here could help to spark ideas.

Ask questions like: Where in life do you feel part of something bigger than yourself? Where do you feel that you contribute to life? If you feel that you don't, how would you like to? And even: How would you like to be remembered by others at the end of your life?

Get them to research individuals that have done inspirational things, to help them work out what type of meaning and purpose in life might suit them best. Encourage them to think big but then work with them to scale down ideas to smaller acts that are manageable. You can use the same questions and visualisation highlighted in the 'planning a happy future' section at the top of this list, to help them imagine a future with more meaning and purpose and work out the steps to get there.

Having a sense of achievement or accomplishment

Explore how they view themselves in relation to accomplishments. If they work hard and achieve well, do they recognise it? If not, why? If they struggle to see themselves as successful, what is stopping them doing so? What do they value as success and how did they come to have those beliefs? Do they see life as an unhealthy competition? Do they ever feel a sense of imposter syndrome? Look for opportunities in these discussions for unhelpful ideals (covered in section 3a) that could be dropped, as they are not serving them well.

Encourage them to look back and list the things they have achieved in the past. Can they list times when they were praised for good work? Encourage them to keep records of positive things people say about their hard work, so that they can go back to them, when they are feel negatively about their achievements.

Work with them to look towards future goals that they want to achieve, in the similar way they did earlier when 'planning future happiness' (above). The same questions and approach can again help here also. Talk about resilience and how successful people are the ones who get back up after being knocked down. You can cite famous people that have publicly shared their experiences, like J.K Rowling's account of how many publishers turned down her first Harry Potter book. Or the countless sports competitors, who came back to win after having a poor season. Work with them to try and find someone they can best relate to.

Being kind to ourselves

The more we think negatively about ourselves, the more likely we are going to experience stress, anxiety and low moods. Even so, conversations about being kind and compassionate to ourselves, can be tough ones to have. Some individuals can have huge resistance to this concept and so small steps are often the key here. However, the benefits of this work are huge, so it's definitely worth exploring.

Ask them if they have a tendency to focus on the things they don't like about themselves. Encourage them to use mindfulness skills to notice these stories, as soon as they start up and then take their attention away. You can work with them to find a phrase that helps here, like "I am thinking about how I am not good enough and I am going to take my attention away from this now, as it is not helping me in any way".

Encourage them to spend some time everyday thinking about the things that are good about themselves. Work with them to come up with a list and challenge them to add something to the list every day. If appropriate you can involve others in conversations about the good others see in someone and talk about how hard it is for some people to hear this, but how important it is to believe it.

Talk to them about the people or animals that they do feel kindness and compassion towards. Discuss how this differs from how they feel about themselves. What changes could they make to make those feelings similar.

You can do a visualisation exercise here, where you picture the person or animal you care for, then really focus on the sensations of that caring feeling in their body. Ask questions like: What colour is this feeling? Where do they feel it in their body? Does it move, if so, how? Once the feeling is strong, see if they can direct it towards themselves and experiment with what it would be like to feel positively like this about themselves.

Work with them to explore how they can change how they speak to themselves in their head. Explore ways their inner critic could become friendlier? Discuss how they could talk to themselves as they do their best friend. Also if it feels necessary, discuss the difference between feeling good about yourself and feeling better than others and the pitfalls within the latter.

Creating the states we desire

If we want to feel a certain way, just thinking about a time when we did feel like this, can often evoke the feeling back into the body.

Get them to experiment with the 'feeling excited' exercise outlined in the presentation, it can help to have eyes closed for this: Start by asking them generally on a scale of one to ten, how excited they feel right now? Then ask: Think about a time you felt really excited about something? Can you think about this in greater detail? Explore the scene: Where were you? Was anyone else there? What can you see? What can you hear? Even, what can you smell? Encourage them to notice all the while how this excited feeling might be growing stronger.

Get them to focus on the sensations: Can they describe what the sensation of being excited feels like? Does it have a colour or a shape? Where do they feel it most in their body? Does it move at all? If so how? Can they associate this feeling with anything else? For example: a person, an animal, a place, a song, a smell, an image or a character (real or animated)? To help with this, you can ask: When you feel excited, it is like what?

Now calibrate again, on the scale of one to ten how excited they feel and hopefully any rise in their score will show them how this exercise can work. Working with excitement to begin with, is a good way to start one because it has a very specific feeling and isn't normally associated with anything negative. You can also try a similar exercise, where the person imagines being excited in the future, ask similar questions to get them to focus on the growing sensation.

Now explore the different states that they might like to create a short cut to, like happiness, confidence, calm or motivation. Spend some time helping them to explore these feelings in exactly the same way they did with excitement. It is important that they get a clear image in their head of a picture that they can associate the feeling with and a clear sense of what the feeling feels like, in relations to colours, shapes, luminosity, movement etc. There are no wrong answers to the images that they might create, and it will be very personal to them. Encourage them to open up and get really creative or silly here, if it works. For example, if imagining galloping across a race-track, on a white stallion to Gloria Gaynor's '*I will survive*', with a silver glittery, swirly feeling high up in their chest, induces a feeling of confidence and power in them, then go with it.

Once they have the images and sensations of the states they want locked in, you can work with them to establish how best to note these down, so that they can be easily remembered. You could start with a simple list but could move on to drawings, collages, musical play lists etc.

Now you can help them practise turning this state on. Chose times when they are not feeling the state and get them to close their eyes and bring up the images and sensations. The more they focus on the sensations, they should intensify. This exercise can be trickier for some than others, so it needs some practising. And what worked for a while might stop working, in which case, a new set of images and sensations can be worked on to refresh the experience.

Move onto exploring, 'fake it, 'til you make it'. Help them to practise pretending to be calm, happy, confident or motivated etc and see if it makes any difference to how they feel. Encourage them to experiment with and use these practises in daily life and get them to report back on how they get on. The more they work on making feelings stronger and using them in different ways, when they need to, the easier this process will become.

Knowing what works

As they work through different wellbeing improvement activities, make sure they have a way to note down the things which worked best for them in certain situations.

When we are having a tough day and we are faced with a tricky situation that we have faced before. In the moment, we might forget how we successfully managed this in the past. So, keeping a good record of what worked, that they can easily turn to, will be invaluable. Explore the most practical ways for them to keep these notes.

Managing tasks

Discuss how poor moods, doubt, worry or confusion can make tasks take much longer than they needed to and cause stress. Get them to recall times when they experienced this. Discuss which of the different activities in section 3 best help them to get in a good mood quickly and simply. Help them to understand here the importance of starting off a task with a positive mindset and the pitfalls of working with a negative one.

Now help them to understand the importance of developing a clear intension for the tasks they have. Get them to bring up a real example of something they have to do. Explore what the intension is for this task and help them to work out how to break down larger tasks into smaller chunks, each with its own clear intension. Help them to imagine the end goal, and again ask the questions: "What needs to happen for that to happen, and now, what needs to happen for **that** to happen" to help them work backwards from an end goal, to plan out the steps to achieve it.

Discuss options for how they can pause mid task, if they feel their mood slipping lower and how they can get back on track, by repeating the activities which lift their mood and repeat setting a clear intension for the next section of the task.

Work with them to understand how celebrating their small successes along the way, can help them to keep their mood up and their motivation going.