

Reading skills practice: How to be happy – exercises

What can we do to be happy in life? How can we avoid being unhappy? Four psychologists give their advice.

Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

1..... the feel-good factor

2..... to lounge around

3..... to lose track of time

4..... to be true to yourself

5..... to play to your strengths

6..... to have a heart-to-heart

7..... for its own sake

8..... to fly off the handle

a. because the thing itself is worthwhile (not for any other reason)

b. the quality in something that makes people feel happy and positive

c. to suddenly become angry with someone

d. to have an honest, open chat with someone about feelings

e. to become unaware of the passing of time

f. to spend time sitting or lying somewhere and not doing very much

g. to do things that you know you can do well and to avoid things you are not so good at

h. to behave in accordance with your beliefs



We asked four psychologists for their advice on how to be happy and, equally importantly, how to avoid being unhappy.

- A** There has been a lot of research which shows the importance of physical health in avoiding anxiety and depression. The mind and the body are highly interconnected. We can all make fairly easy changes in our lifestyle to include more exercise, healthier eating, getting enough sleep, being exposed to sunlight and so on. Research into exercise has found that it has a positive impact on mood. Physical activity stimulates the release of endorphins in the brain to produce the feel-good factor. Sleep is vitally important for children and adolescents to help concentration levels. A good night's sleep also stops people being bad-tempered and flying off the handle.
- B** Having good relationships is a big part of being happy. In one study, most happy people were found to have strong ties to friends and family and they made sure they spent time with them regularly. You also need at least one person who you discuss personal feelings with – called 'self-disclosure'. Just one person for a heart-to-heart is enough, together with a network of other relationships. It's not enough to have lots of friends just to do things with or chat to about music or football. That deeper connection is all-important. Some people need to learn how to listen effectively to others in order to develop stronger relationships.
- C** I would recommend being completely immersed in a pleasurable activity, sometimes called experiencing 'flow'. The activity could be anything from doing judo to painting a picture to playing chess. Typically, the activities require a certain amount of skill and are challenging but not too challenging. If you are experiencing flow, you lose track of time and are immersed in the present moment. You find the activity rewarding for its own sake. People who spend time doing 'high-flow' activities feel more long-term happiness than those doing things like just lounging around or chatting online.
- D** Make like Superman! Discover what your unique strengths and virtues are and then use them for a purpose which benefits other people or your community. People who play to their strengths (e.g. curiosity or persistence) or virtues (e.g. justice or humanity) and use them in different ways and in different situations are happier than those who focus more on their weaknesses. In other words, focus on the positive, not the negative, and be true to yourself. Studies in different countries have shown that people who do this report higher levels of well-being.

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1. Check your understanding: multiple choice

Choose the psychologist who gives the following pieces of advice. You can choose each psychologist more than once.

1. Pay more attention to what people are saying to improve social bonding.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
2. Don't attach importance to things you don't do well.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
3. Work on how you bond with other people.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
4. Do something absorbing.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
5. Adjust simple aspects of your daily routine.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
6. Think about how you can help others.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
7. Make sure your activities aren't too easy (or too difficult).
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D
8. Be authentic.
 - a. psychologist A
 - b. psychologist B
 - c. psychologist C
 - d. psychologist D

2. Check your understanding: true, false or not given

Read the sentences and write *True* if the information can be found in the text, *False* if the information says the opposite to the text or *Not given* if the information cannot be found in the text.

1. According to A, it isn't difficult to make changes to our everyday habits.
2. B thinks having a large group of friends is a waste of time.
3. B believes that you should spend large amounts of time with your close friends.
4. According to C, we should do activities which are enjoyable but require some effort.
5. C thinks that we should seek to develop new skills.
6. D believes that we should prioritise improving our weak points.

3. Check your vocabulary: grouping

Write the collocations in the correct group.

an activity	changes	things with your friends	research	friends with someone
judo	a decision	progress	something enjoyable	like Superman

Do	Make

Discussion

What do you do to be happy?

Which of the advice in the text do you think is good advice?

Are happiness levels high in your country?