



Balanced Living

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Choosing happiness will enable you to be more alive, contributing and flexible.

Is Happiness Overrated?

Some might think that it is overrated. Personally, I don't believe it is. Look around you, talk to people. This alone can give you excellent clues. Many people have limiting beliefs programmed into their thoughts due to childhood and life experiences. These beliefs often reinforce negative thoughts which are very difficult to overcome.

In order to break through this negative thinking pattern, you must accept 100% responsibility for your life. You begin by weeding out negativity in your everyday decisions. For each decision you make in a day, ask yourself... "Is this healing or hurting me?" This will encourage you to make decisions that are good for you. You will be amazed at your results. When you make a conscious effort at every turn, you start to transform yourself and your thoughts.

Accept that life events are often out of your control. Expectations can lead to disappointments and this may increase

your unhappiness. The only thing you can change is **you**. Other people in your immediate environment and the frustrations they bring in your life are simply that... external frustrations. In other words, frustrations tied to what you expect of them. Therefore, practice acceptance and free yourself.

Optimism takes practice. Take notice of every negative thought that comes to your mind and change it. To practice identifying with your thoughts, take 60 seconds of every day paying attention to your breathing. Relax your body and take notice of the thoughts that enter your mind. Focus on your positive thought patterns and make them a part of your daily routine.

Happiness is a mindset that only you can control. By taking action one step at a time, you can help identify different ways that can make you feel happy. Sometimes you just need to remember what it feels like to be happy. That being said, is being happy really overrated? What do you think?

Newsletter Content

- *Is Happiness Overrated?*
- *Common distorted thoughts that can affect your mood.*
- *The Challenges of Change.*

***"A person cannot directly choose circumstances, but can choose their thoughts, and so indirectly, yet surely, shape their circumstances."
-- James Allen."***



Happiness is not a destination but a way of travel.



Looking through rose colored glasses can distort the way you interpret events and perceive reality. This **filtering** can take negative details and magnify them while filtering out all positive aspects of a situation. In other words, you dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives.

Common Distorted Thoughts That Can Affect Your Mood and Your Relationships

Almost everyone has fallen into a loop of negative thoughts playing over and over in our minds during a bad day or an unfortunate situation. Common examples are "I can't get it right," "I'm such a loser," or "I'll never be able to do this." Frequently, this distorted thinking occurs during stressful times or difficult situations.

The problem with this is repeated distorted thinking can lead to a feeling of a loss of control and can even lead to depression or severe anxiety.

We all tend to use distorted thoughts in our lives but the more they are used the more they fuel negative emotions. They can affect our relationships and increase low self-esteem. Getting out of this negative thought pattern takes some effort and increased awareness.

Generally, you do not spend a lot of time looking at your own thoughts but once you realize the things you may be telling yourself, you have more control and increased ability to replace negative and unrealistic thinking with more accurate ones.

Examples of distorted thoughts:

Polarized Thinking: Things are black or white, good or bad. You have to be perfect or you are a failure. There is no middle ground.

Overgeneralization: You come to a general conclusion based on a single incident or piece of evidence. If something bad happens to you once, you expect it to happen over and over again.

Mind Reading: Without people saying so, you know what people are feeling and why they act the way they do. You are able to divine how people are feeling toward you.

Fortune Telling: You predict that things will turn out badly.

Catastrophizing: You expect disaster. You notice or hear about a problem and start "what ifs." What if tragedy strikes? What if it happens to you?

Personalization: Thinking that everything people do or say is some kind of reaction to you.

Control Fallacies: If you feel *externally controlled*, you see yourself as helpless or the victim of fate. The fallacy of *internal control* has you responsible for the pain and happiness of everyone around you.

Fallacy of Fairness: You feel resentful because you think you know what is fair but other people will not agree with you.

Blaming: You hold other people responsible for your pain; you blame others and overlook ways that you contributed to the problem. OR, you take the other track and blame yourself for every problem.

Being Right: You are continually on trial to prove that your opinions and actions are correct.

Shoulds: You have a list of ironclad rules about how you and other people should act. People who break the rules anger you, and you feel guilty if you violate the rules. You criticize yourself or other people with "shoulds," "shouldn'ts," "musts," "oughts," and "have to's."

Emotional Reasoning: You reason from how you feel: "I feel like an idiot, so I must be one." You believe that what you feel must be true – automatically.

Fallacy of Change: You expect that other people will change to suit you if you just pressure or cajole them enough. You need to change people because your hopes for happiness seem to depend entirely on them.

Remember that distorted thoughts are not "right or wrong". Everyone uses them but knowing their affects gives you more control of your mood and improves your self-esteem.

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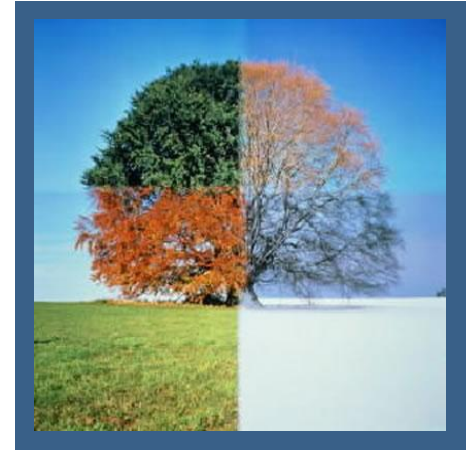
The Challenges of Change

Today is all about change. Changes challenge the way we see things. It determines how flexible we are, and how adaptable we can become. It can also alter the way we think.

When we first encounter change it appears difficult. In fact it may appear as if we won't make it. Unwelcome change in our lives can at times feel overwhelming and our thoughts are often pulled to negative consequences and the possibility of disaster. Emotions can range from extreme anxiety to severe depression.

Each person responds to change in their own way. The life experiences they have and patterns of behavior they have learned determine their ability to effectively deal with the uncertainty of stressful events. Learning how to alleviate some of the anxiety resulting from change by adjusting their thought patterns and finding ways to feel happy in spite of difficult circumstances is well worth the effort.

Creating balance of mind, body and soul happens by embracing life's challenges rather than running from them. The less we resist, the more we learn. By accepting our fear of change we develop patience and insight. The more we understand the process of change, the more patience we display, both with ourselves and with the world. There are life lessons to be learned during difficult times. Challenge yourself to see them as opportunities for self improvement.



Mike is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Northwest Metro Atlanta, Georgia. He has been in the mental health profession for 20 years and provides psychotherapy for adult individuals and couples.

Please feel free to contact him with comments on topics in this newsletter or suggestions for future articles.