



Three Good Things: The Power of Positive Psychology

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Positive Psychotherapy (PPT) indirectly treats depressive symptoms not by concentrating on repairing negatives but instead by focusing on and increasing positive emotion, engagement, and meaning.

Positive Psychology Exercises (PPEs) are a group of daily activities incorporated in PPT to focus on the positive emotions and aspects of life.

History

Positive psychotherapy, explored since the 1970s, has emerged as an effective new form of therapy. Traditional therapy focuses on trauma, mental illness, negative thinking, and maladaptive behaviors. It is natural for humans to gravitate toward catastrophic thinking as a survival technique to plan and prepare for disaster. In modern times focusing primarily on the negative is pathological and will often lead to depression. The goal of PPT is to transition your attention, memory, and expectations from the negative to the positives resulting in optimism and hopefulness.

Evidence

The landmark study from Seligman and colleagues showed the true efficacy of PPEs with lasting effects on both happiness and symptomatic reduction of depression.¹ Improvement continued at least a year out from the performed exercises. Several PPEs have been studied and proven to be effective, and all of them have a common theme of the use of positive, self-relevant information. Specifically, “three good things,” focuses on remembering the positive events of the day instead of troubles and uncompleted tasks. These effects were replicated by Mongrain and Anselmo-Matthew in 2012, demonstrating lasting happiness for at least six months.²

Three Good Things Exercise

1. Set aside at least 10 minutes each day to dedicate to this exercise. It may be best to do this just before bed to look back on your day.
2. During this time, focus on and think about three good things that happened that day that you consider to be positive.
3. Continue to reflect on these three things and why they happened. Write them down.

References:

1. Seligman MEP, Rashid T, Parks AC. Positive Psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*. 2006; 61(8):774-788.
2. Mongrain M, Anselmo-Matthews T. Do Positive Psychology Exercises Work? A Replication of Seligman et al. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 2012; 68(4):382-389.