

The Power of Optimism

Ready!

- This unit takes from 30 to 60 minutes depending on how much information you cover and time you wish to devote to activities.
- The objective of the unit is to increase knowledge of ways to enjoy optimism, and to increase the occurrence of the attitude of optimism in the lives of participants.
- The unit is intended for older youth, adults, and particularly appropriate for Extension Homemakers.
- Read or review the unit “The Power of Optimism” from http://www.arfamilies.org/family_life/human_development/the_power_of_optimism.asp

Grab!

- Copy of teaching guide
- Laptop & LCD projector or overhead projector
- PowerPoint CD or transparencies of slides
- Handouts

Go!

Can you think of someone in your life that doesn't exactly see things as they are? Maybe you'd say he or she is an idealist, unrealistic about the way the world works.

[Pause for response.]

For the most part we think that those who are in top mental health are those who have the firmest grip on reality. There is a common misconception that those who have a clear understanding of what they can and cannot do are the most happy and productive. However, the truth is that those who are overly optimistic about their ambitions generally accomplish the most. Also, the optimist is less likely to get depressed by life's challenges and will likely enjoy better health mentally and physically. How many of us are list makers?

[Pause for response.]

When writing our daily or weekly to-do list, how often do we write down only the things we can accomplish? How often at the end of a day or week have we actually crossed off every item on that list?

[Give the group an opportunity to respond. Share a personal story or example here, if you have one.]

It's common to have an endless to-do list. If we wrote down only the things we knew we could accomplish in a day or week, what would happen if we completed the tasks early? Would we proceed to work on other things, or would we say, "Oh good! I have crossed everything off my list. I can quit now." The latter would be the most likely choice. So from this example we can see, the more we write down on our to-do list, the more we will accomplish. Tell me, do you ever find it difficult to be optimistic?

[Pause for response.]

Can you identify barriers in your life that are preventing you from being more optimistic?

[Pause for response.]

A barrier that I can think of is blame. Sure it's easy to do but think about the last time blaming someone helped a situation. Blame does not help. It keeps us trapped in a negative pattern of thinking and acting. Can you think of a better way to deal with problems?

[Pause for response. Discuss some of the responses. Suggest promoting optimism, to transition to the next segment.]

A way to promote optimism in our lives could be to challenge our negative thinking. Think of some things you could say to yourself that would challenge negative thinking. Does anyone have a suggestion?

[Pause for suggestions. You may even suggest a statement such as: "I've made mistakes like this before, but I keep learning something new every time. I'm glad I can keep learning and trying." Note that it is also important to not dwell on past mistakes.]

Remember, we should challenge ourselves to move beyond past mistakes and commend ourselves for trying to improve and making good decisions.

Another way to cultivate optimism in our lives is to get outside ourselves. We can do this by helping others and by building relationships with others. What are some ways you would like to help others?

[Pause for answers. You may suggest constructing something such as a quilt, a piece of furniture, or a simple flower arrangement.]

Instead of trying to talk yourself into being happy, find a way you can be productive. Sometimes we think that we have to start feeling better before we can move forward; we can't do anything until we find a way out of our "rut." Oftentimes exactly the opposite is true: We must start doing something in

order to begin feeling better. What are some things you can think of that will help you get out of your “rut?”

[Pause for response. Suggest a couple of activities yourself: turn off the television, take a walk, join puzzle pieces, etc.]

Remember, it’s all about choices. We have a choice everyday to think about what might go wrong and dwell on what may happen, or we can enjoy the present and look forward to the future. Optimism about the future is never counterproductive as long as we keep working toward our goals.

[Pass out activity sheet. Give participants a few moments to work alone. Then ask if any feel comfortable sharing what they found. You may want to give an example of how you can switch these negative statements around in each category. Be prepared to share your own examples to get them going. Participants may visit the Extension website for more information on emotional health. Pass out The Power of Optimism fact sheet to participants before dismissing.]

Original work by Lisa Burris

The Power of Optimism Putting It to Work for You

Try to recall a time when you were upset with yourself. Consider whether you used the following three unhelpful ways of thinking:

1. Personal: "It is my fault. I am to blame."
2. Permanent: "I have always done this. I never seem to learn."
3. Pervasive: "I seem to make the same mistakes in all areas. Nothing ever goes right for me."

Most of us have had thoughts like those at times. But the healthiest people are those who learn to challenge negative thoughts and replace them with more helpful thoughts.

Directions: See if you can apply more optimistic thoughts to a situation where you have felt like a failure.

Example:

Personal: "That was an especially hard job. But I learned things that will help me do better."

1. Personal:

2. Permanent:

3. Pervasive:

The Power of Optimism

Please answer the following question in order to help us know whether this session was helpful to you.

1. This workshop gave me specific ideas that will be helpful to me.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

2. I think this session will help me be a better family member.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

3. I am glad I attended this workshop.

- I strongly agree.
- I agree.
- I neither agree nor disagree.
- I disagree.
- I strongly disagree.

Comments or suggestions: