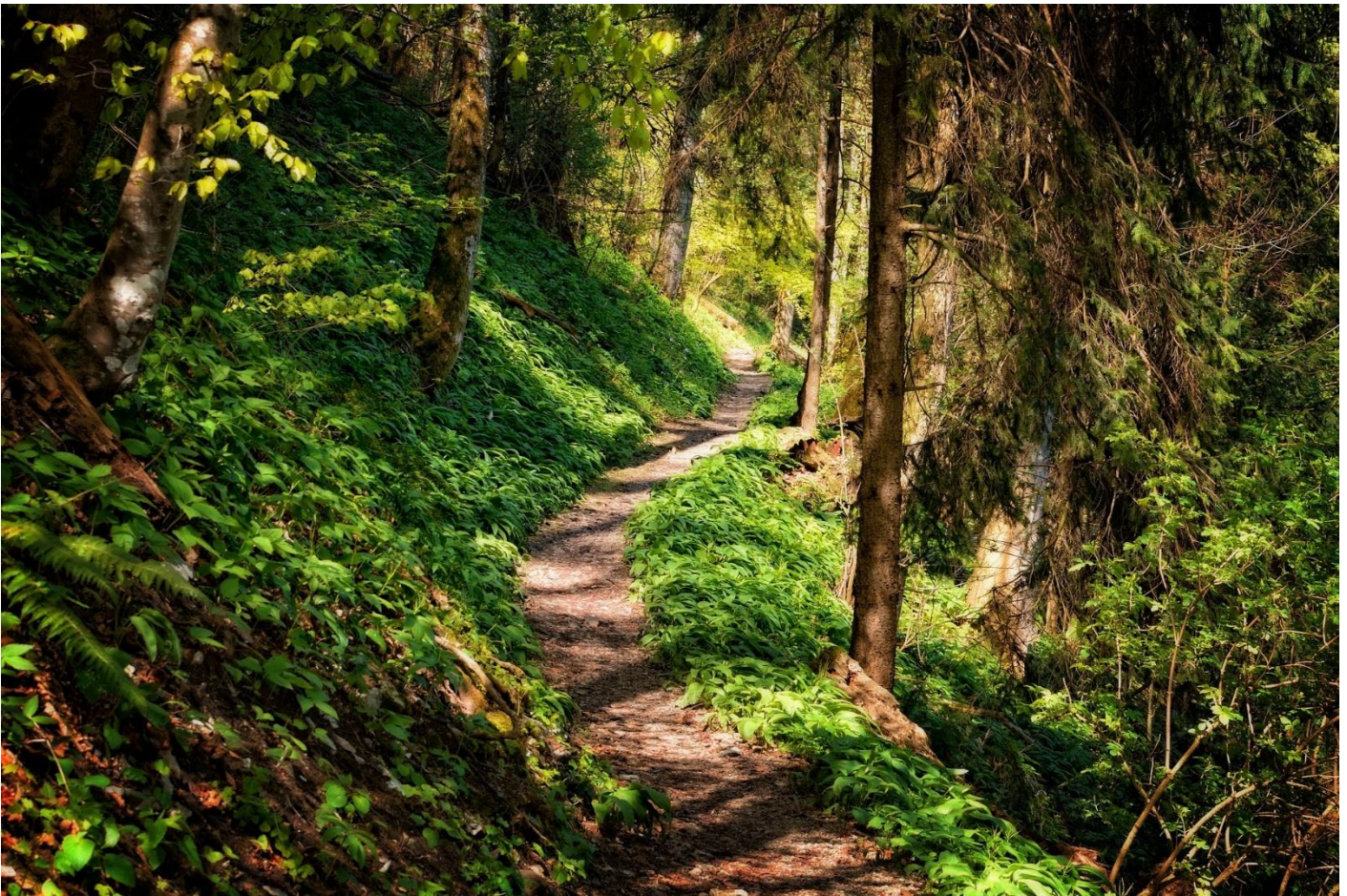




Paths to Positivity

Participant guide:
Your roadmap to a happier, healthier life



Connection

Mindfulness

Purpose

Paths to Positivity participant guide: Your roadmap to a happier, healthier life

What is Paths to Positivity?

Paths to Positivity is a well-being campaign designed to help you live a happier, healthier life. Over the next five weeks these materials and suggested action items will help you put the science of positive psychology into practice.

How Paths to Positivity Works

- After receiving the participant guide, begin by reading the information on neuroplasticity (see page 26) to understand how this campaign can help re-wire your brain to more easily see the positive in life.
- Next, complete the subjective happiness scale pre-survey on page 27.
- Then, read through the overview section of the participant materials and choose your Path to Positivity: connect with others, mind your mood, or find your purpose. Circle your chosen path on your Paths to Positivity travel log. (See page 40.)
- During the first week of the campaign, discover more about your chosen path by working through the learn and explore section. Upon completion of this section check off the box on your Paths to Positivity Travel Log.
- Over the remaining four weeks of the campaign, choose action items to work on and remember that this is your roadmap – you choose what, when, and how often to practice the action items. Record your progress on your Paths to Positivity travel log.
- Share the highpoints of your journey with your worksite wellness coordinator.
- Refer to the weekly signposts (handouts) from your coordinator for additional tips, resources, and inspiration to help guide you on your chosen Path to Positivity. (See page 41).
- At the end of the campaign, complete the subjective happiness scale post-survey on page 28 to measure your progress.

“Life will bring you pain all by itself. Your responsibility is to create joy.”

– Milton Erickson

Questions? Contact your worksite coordinator.

Neuroplasticity: rewiring our brains

While we are hardwired to more effortlessly focus on the negative in life, thanks to the field of positive psychology, we now know that we have the power to change that!

Have you heard of neuroplasticity?

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. It's the understanding that pathways in our brain, like muscles, get stronger the more often we use them. This is true for both negative thoughts/actions/experiences, as well as positive ones.

By studying the brain, and the concept of neuroplasticity, psychologists have determined that engaging in daily happiness practices – like those suggested in Paths to Positivity – can help us literally re-wire our brain to more easily see the positive in life.

The more we think about and focus on the positive, the more we strengthen the brain's tendency to fire up the neuronal circuitry involved in boosting mental well-being!



Paths to Positivity participant guide

Overview

Read through the following descriptions to help you choose your Path to Positivity.

Path 1: **Connect with others**

Creating new relationships and strengthening existing ones is good for your well-being, and for the well-being of others. Think of these relationships as the cornerstone of your life. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day by helping you: cope with upsetting events, function better under stressful conditions, recover more quickly from illness, and even live longer. Follow this path to strengthen your current relationships and create new ones.

Path 2: **Mind your mood**

Being optimistic and having a sense of enthusiasm and hopefulness has been shown to help people avoid or healthfully manage diseases, such as heart attacks, diabetes, and depression. Feeling “down” from time to time is part of life, but ongoing negative emotions such as stress, anger, anxiety, or fear can increase systemic inflammation in our bodies and eventually lead to illness. The good news is there are simple strategies we can implement to lift our spirits and boost our mood. And that’s what this path is all about. You will learn the many things that impact mood, and the many ways in which we can take action to improve it.

Path 3: **Find your purpose**

This path is about finding purpose and meaning. Research tells us that those who are able to answer the question “Do you know your life’s purpose?” are happier, healthier, feel more in control, and get more out of living. They also experience less stress, anxiety, and depression. There is no single answer or approach that works for everyone, but there are steps you can take that help you live a life that matters. Explore this path to gain insights into what gives your life meaning.



Keep in mind that while working on being a happier person is a worthwhile cause, it's important to acknowledge that it's okay— and normal—to experience a wide range of emotions. No one is happy all the time.

Path 1: Connect with others

Learn and explore

The following information can help you learn and think more about how connecting with others can promote positive mental well-being.

What keeps us happy and healthy as we go through life? If you think its fame and money, you're not alone – but, according to psychiatrist Robert Waldinger, you're mistaken. As the director of a 75-year-old study on adult development, Waldinger has unprecedented access to data on true happiness and satisfaction. Results showed that social connections play one of the biggest roles in our happiness and health. Here are the important lessons learned from the study:

- **The more socially connected we are, the happier and healthier we will be.** People who leaned into relationships with family, friends, and community fared the best as they aged. It was found that people who are alone have health issues at a younger age and don't have the longevity of people who have close relationships.
- **It doesn't really matter how many relationships you have, it's the quality of the relationships that's important.** The study found that the people who were satisfied with their close relationships (such as a spouse) at age 50 were healthier at age 80 than were their counterparts who were not satisfied.
- **Good relationships protect not only our bodies but also our brains.** The study showed that people who felt they have someone to count on have less memory decline than others who don't.
- **Don't take relationships for granted.** They are hard work, but worth it.

To learn more about how connection is related to happiness [watch this TED talk](#). To learn why connection is so important [read this article](#).

Seeing the good in others helps us see the good in ourselves. Here are three skills that will help you see the good in other people:

1. **Slow down and be curious.** Don't rush into making judgments about other people. Take your time and gather some information about them first. Keep an open mind and look for the positive traits the other person has.
2. **Look people in the eyes.** Eye contact is an important social skill and practically a prerequisite for finding the positives in other people. When you look someone in the eyes, you stay focused on them which builds a connection and helps you see them in a more positive light.
3. **Smile.** Smiling puts you in a good mood and will make other people like you more. And if they like you, they are more inclined to show you the positive aspects of themselves. Smiling is one of the easiest things you can do to help you see the good in others and have a positive interaction with them.

To learn more [watch the video or read the article](#).

The following questions will help you further explore this path, and may be helpful when deciding which action items to practice during the remaining four weeks of the campaign.

Relate and connect with others: Relationships are one of the most important overall contributors to happiness. Strong, broad social relationships help us to live longer and be happier and healthier. Having close relationships with family and friends provides love, support, belonging, meaning, and feelings of self-worth. Taking action to strengthen relationships and create new connections is essential for happiness.

1. Who matters most to you?

Give and do for others: Studies show that giving and doing (acts of kindness) for others increases happiness, improves heart function and immune strength, reduces inflammation, creates and strengthens social connections, and protects against mental illness. In other words, doing good for others makes us feel good!

2. What do you give and do for others?

Give thanks to others: Studies show that expressing our gratitude boosts our happiness, strengthens relationships, and has positive effects on the recipient. The expression of gratitude is particularly effective when done directly—by phone, letter, or face-to-face—to another person.

3. Who are you grateful for?

Act

The action items below are designed to help you work on connecting with others. Over the next four weeks choose one or more of these items to work on.

Remember that this is your Path to Positivity—you choose what, when, and how often to practice the action items. You may want to focus on just one thing for all four weeks, try something new each week, or come up with your own action item(s). At the end of each week, remember to record your progress and highpoints on your Paths to Positivity travel log.

Path 1: Connect with others action items

Relate and connect with others: you can connect in so many ways. Connect with the people around you, such as your family, friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Connect at home, work, school, or in your local community. Here are some ideas:

Family:

- Create fixed daily or weekly family time to play games, talk, exercise, cook, and eat together, etc. Try to make it TV- and electronic-free.
- Reconnect with a friend or family member you haven't seen or spoken to recently.
- Find more opportunities for humor in the home by starting a family joke collection.
- Reach out to help friends or family members when they're in need.

Co-workers:

- Eat lunch or go for a walk with a co-worker.
- Help a co-worker with a project.
- Share your expertise.
- Be friendly and approachable.
- Start a social group at work or virtually (walking, etc.).

New connections:

- Volunteer.
- Take a class.
- Join a group (faith community, book club, exercise group, etc.)

COVID-19 DISCLAIMER:

Please follow the most up-to-date guidelines regarding COVID-19.

Some activities may not be appropriate when COVID-19 restrictions are in effect. Remember to wear a mask and practice social distancing when gathering in person.

Give and do for others: Helping others makes us happier and healthier. Always keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities to give or do a good deed. Here are some ideas:

- Hold the door open for someone.
- Offer your seat.
- Drive courteously.
- Smile at others.
- Celebrate the success of others.
- Give someone a compliment.
- Volunteer in your community.
- Share your resources, time, talent, or experience.
- Mentor someone.
- Give thanks.
- Tell someone how much you appreciate them.
- Acknowledge when someone does something right.
- Help others.
- Encourage others.
- Speak kindly to others.

Give thanks to others: The benefits of practicing gratitude are nearly endless. People who regularly practice gratitude experience more positive emotions, feel more alive, sleep better, express more compassion and kindness, and even have stronger immune systems. Gratitude is most powerful when it's expressed in concrete terms. Here are some ideas:

- Write one, quick email first thing in the morning thanking or praising a member on your work team.
- Write a letter of thanks to someone who helped or mentored you in the past. This could be a member of your family, a former teacher, a friend, or anyone who has made a difference in your life. Describe in detail what he or she did for you and exactly how it affected your life; mention how you often remember his or her efforts. If possible, visit and read the letter out loud in person.
- Not into writing? Call someone you want to give thanks to. Watch [one phone call that will make you happier for weeks](#).

Add your own idea here: _____

Path 2: Mind your mood

Learn and explore

The following information can help you learn and think more about how minding your mood can promote positive mental well-being.

Being disorganized – Too much clutter can affect our ability to concentrate and process information, and can leave us feeling anxious, tired, or overwhelmed. De-cluttering can help us feel more focused, relaxed, and productive. Understanding why we hang on to things we don't need can help us declutter and keep our home and work spaces organized in a way that lasts. To learn more: [Read this article](#) on how decluttering can lead to less stress and better mental health.

Staying up too late – According to a study published in Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, those who consistently stay up late into the night are three times more likely to develop depression than those who get to bed at a decent hour. Establishing a bedtime routine and making time for regular breaks throughout the day can help our bodies feel ready for bed earlier. To learn more: [Read this article](#) on what lack of sleep does to your mind.

The food you choose – As the saying goes, "you are what you eat." Dietary changes can bring about changes in our brain structure (chemically and physiologically), which can lead to altered behavior. Becoming aware of how different foods make us feel can aid us in choosing foods that help us look and feel our best. To learn more: [Read this article](#) on how food affects our mood.

What you see on social media – Researchers in the U.S. analyzed Facebook user data and found that negative posts had a domino effect, causing similarly downbeat posts from others. Likewise, when people posted happy messages on the site, these spread too, and proved even more contagious than the less cheerful ones. Taking a hard look at how much time we spend on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other sites is a good place to start when learning how our social media use may be affecting us. To learn more: [Read this article](#) on how social media may be to blame for your bad mood.

Exercise – In addition to preventing and improving a number of health conditions, research on anxiety, depression, and exercise shows that the psychological and physical benefits of exercise can also help reduce anxiety and improve

Just a bad mood or symptoms of depression? It can be difficult to tell the difference between feeling a little "down" and being depressed. If you have had symptoms of depression that have lasted for more than two weeks, such as feelings of hopelessness, a lack of interest in what were once fun activities, or poor concentration, consider taking this free online depression screening: www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-screen/patient-health.

Depression is a medical condition that can be treated. Depending on the results of your screening, you may want to consider talking with your doctor or your workplace employee assistance program. For more information about depression or other mental health conditions, visit the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#).

mood. To learn more: [Read this article](#) on how to start and stick with an exercise program to elicit a more positive mental state.

The following questions will help you further explore this path and may be helpful when deciding which action items to practice during the remaining four weeks of the campaign.

Start paying closer attention to your mood and simply notice when you are happy. When you observe those feelings, try to identify what led to your good mood. Exercise? A healthy, balanced meal? Accomplishing a task? When you more clearly understand what exactly brightens your disposition, you can start doing more of those activities.

1. When do I feel happy or positive?

Also pay attention to the contrary: Simply notice when you are feeling down. When you observe those feelings, try to identify what led to your bad mood. Are you hungry? Tired? Feeling overwhelmed? Disconnected? We all get into bad moods and feeling a full range of emotions is healthy. But in order to boost our mood when we're feeling low, it's important to know what led to our crabby demeanor. The more we learn what brings us down, the easier it is for us to not let things bother us so much, or perhaps even prevent those things from happening. If the cause of our bad mood is an inevitable part of life, we can learn to identify it more quickly, take action to improve it, and not let it turn into a funk.

2. When do I feel grumpy or irritable?

Act

The action items below are designed to help you work on minding your mood. Over the next four weeks, choose one or more of these items to work on.

Remember that this is your Path to Positivity—you choose what, when, and how often to practice the action items. You may want to focus on just one thing for all four weeks, try something new each week, or come up with your own action item(s) to try. At the end of each week, remember to record your progress and highpoints on your Paths to Positivity travel log.

Path 2: Mind your mood action items

- **Practice mindfulness** – Meditation is a great way to practice mindfulness and essentially train our brains to be more aware. Try this simple [one-minute meditation](#).
- **De-clutter a drawer (or a closet, or a room)** – Spend a few minutes each day ditching things you don't need and organizing your space. For more inspiration and tips, check out [The life-changing magic of tidying up](#) or the 2019 [Netflix special](#) based on the book.
- **"Three good things"** – At the end of each day, write down three things you feel good about or are grateful for.
- **Establish a bedtime routine** – Choose one thing or a series of things to do (could include a cup of tea, a bath, a mindfulness moment, or "Three Good Things" exercise) to let your body know it is time to get ready for bed. Try to stick to your routine most nights a week.
- **Keep a food-mood journal** – Learn to love the foods that love you back by recording what you eat and how you feel immediately after and then a few hours later.
- **Go on a social media "fast"** – Take a week off of social media or designate one day a week to be social media free. Notice how you feel and how you fill that time. You may also want to "un-follow" negative friends.
- **Move your body** – Research shows that as little as three 30-minute walks a week is all it takes to see a measurable improvement in your mood. Be sure to choose an activity you enjoy doing.
- **Listen to uplifting music** – This may be especially helpful when you are feeling down. Music has the power to heal and help us feel happy and motivated.

Add your own idea here: _____

Path 3: Find your purpose

Learn and explore

The following information can help you learn and think more about how finding your purpose in life can promote positive mental well-being.

There are literally hundreds of books, articles, blogs, classes, movies, and more that offer advice on finding meaning in life. In spite of the variety of opinions, most experts agree that the meaning of life is whatever we choose it to be. The choice is ours and it is open to change. However, research shows that there are specific things we can do that can help us better understand what gives our actions a sense of purpose and gives our lives meaning.

Martin Seligman, psychologist and author, defines the meaningful life as knowing what your greatest strengths are and “using your signature strengths and virtues in the service of something much larger than you are.”

For most of us, finding meaning doesn’t happen in a moment—like a lightning bolt striking—but is a more gradual process. It comes with being aware of what matters to us, how we want to relate to other people, how we learn, and how we want to be challenged in our day-to-day journey.

To learn more:

Begin by watching how the experts define—and how they find ways to gain—meaningful lives. Watch one or all of the seven [TED talks](#) that can help inspire you to create a life that matters.

Check out this list of [personal values](#) to help you learn what is most important to you.

Read *Man’s search for meaning* by Viktor Frankl. This book, which has sold over ten million copies, was named in a Library of Congress survey as one of the top ten books to make a difference in the lives of readers everywhere. Frankl was a Viennese psychiatrist who survived being imprisoned in concentration camps during the Holocaust where his pregnant wife, brother, and parents died.



Man does not simply exist but always decides what his existence will be, what he will become the next moment. By the same token, every human being has the freedom to change at any instant.”
– Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

The following questions will help you further explore this path, and may be helpful when deciding which action items to practice during the remaining four weeks of the campaign.

This first question takes self-reflection; dig deep and try to list everything (even from your childhood) that gives you enjoyment.

1. What do I love?

As you consider the second question, begin on your own, then ask others (friends, family, co-workers) to help expand your list.

2. What am I good at?

When you are ready to tackle the third question, remember to let go of thinking there is only one purpose for you. Start with the big picture—finding meaning in life comes from being connected to something bigger than ourselves. The following three examples may help you write your own statement:

"I want to make a positive difference in the world (do good in some way)."

"I want to contribute to having a better environment."

"I want to be able to find purpose in everyday living by being present for the journey, and fully embracing it making me a better parent, friend, or spouse."

3. What does the world need? (Think of ways you can make a difference.)

"From first days in school, we are taught to listen to everything and everyone but ourselves, to take in all our clues about living from the people and powers around us."

– Parker J. Palmer, Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation

Act

The action items below are designed to help you “find your why.” Over the next four weeks, choose one or more of these items to work on.

Remember that this is your Path to Positivity—you choose what, when, and how often to practice the action items. You may want to focus on just one thing for all four weeks, try something new each week, or come up with your own action item(s) to try. At the end of each week, remember to record your progress and highpoints on your Paths to Positivity travel log.

Path 3: Find your purpose action items

- **Assess your strengths.** Research shows that using your strengths in new ways can make you happier even after just one week! Need help figuring out your strengths? Take the [character strengths survey](#). Try to answer the questions as you really are, not how you think you should be. Once you recognize your strengths you’ll be more prepared to act.
- **Build purpose and meaning** by actively participating in a group; do an outreach project with your faith-based community or volunteer in an area you would like to learn more about. Visit [HandsOn Twin Cities](#) to match your interests with opportunities, or volunteer with coworkers. Meaning often comes from connecting or contributing to others.
- **Consider ways to add meaning to your work;** for example, mentor younger employees, take advantage of learning opportunities to see how your work fits into the bigger picture, build relationships with your coworkers, and choose to engage with all you’ve got.
- **Keep a journal of the things you do** (even the small things) that give you a sense of purpose or add meaning to your day. You need to be present with your experiences if you want to find meaning in them and pay attention to how you feel. Research shows that our experiences become what we pay attention to. Those who are mindful of their experiences report more frequent and positive emotions.

Add your own idea here: _____

Paths to Positivity travel log



“Remember that happiness is a way of travel, not a destination.”

— Roy Goodman

Circle your chosen path:

Connect with others

Mind my mood

Find my purpose

I DID IT!

Week 1

- I completed the subjective happiness scale pre-survey.
- I read the learn and explore section of my chosen path.
- I read this week’s signpost.

	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
I read this week’s signpost (check the box).				
I practiced one or more happiness action items (check the box).				
Highpoints of this week’s journey (jot down any progress you made, “aha” moments, positive feelings, etc.).				

- I completed the subjective happiness scale post-survey.

Name: _____