Mental Wellness Article for Families

5 Tips on How to Think More Optimistically

By Sonja Bethune

How often do you find yourself complaining about something that is so minuscule compared to the heart-wrenching maladies and tragic events that people experience in other parts of the world? We definitely live in our own “ME” world. We get upset over a coworker not pulling their weight. We become enraged when a person cuts us off on the road. We become impatient when an elderly gentleman is taking longer at the grocery checkout. Or perhaps we tend to focus more on what we don’t have in life instead of focusing on what we do have. I think we’ve all been there.

We live in a society in which delayed gratification is often unheard of; therefore, the first thing a person does is voice their disappointment with their life. According to the Mayo Clinic (2017), there are several health benefits to thinking more positive thoughts, such as a decrease in depressive symptoms, increased life span, and strengthening of your immune system. So, let’s look at what it takes to think more positive thoughts.

## Stop Worrying about the Past

One thing that really causes a person to be so negative about life is when they dwell too much on their perception of past mistakes. I say the word “perception”, because what one person may perceive as a mistake, another person might disagree that the “mistake” was an issue to begin with. For instance, you might be beating yourself up over possibly saying something that might have offended someone. You obsess over it, wishing you could take back what you said. You talk to another friend about what you said, and your friend thinks you are overreacting about something that may not even be true – thinking what was said was not really offensive. I know worrying about your past can go deeper than a blunder when talking to someone. You may be disconnected from family members who you wish were still in your life. Whatever the case may be, you need to learn to let it go and move forward, because those people are not here to help you now.

## Take One Day at a Time

Just because you have one bad day, doesn’t mean you just give up and think that all of your days will be bad. Sometimes a bad day at work can carry over to the next day, but typically within 48 hours, the skies have cleared and you are back to sunny days. Think of each day as a new learning opportunity. Ask yourself at the end of each day, “What did I learn about myself today?” Think about how the next day will be better. Visualize it and then actually play it out.

## Focus on What you Want, not on What You Don’t Have

Think about what you want out of life and then make some goals in how you will achieve those things. I’m not simply talking about material items. If you want to be more assertive, then think about how you can take those steps to get recognized more at work in a positive way. If you want to learn how to manage your time more wisely, start by developing a calendar with your present schedule and tasks. Start small and work your way up. On this note, refrain from becoming jealous of what others have. People have good things in life for a reason. Typically a person works hard for their house, car or whatever material possession you see that they have. Don’t be jealous of that! Think about how you can have what you want, but at the same time, learn to be satisfied without those things. Material items don’t last.

## Seek Support

Without a social support system, where would you be? It's good to have family and friends who you can reach out to or spend time with when you are feeling a bit down. If you don't happen to live near your favorite people, then I'd recommend joining a self-help group or engaging in a social event locally. Get yourself out there to meet people who are influential in a positive way. It's important to be around those who bring you up, not bring you down. So often I hear clients talk about their so-called "friends" and how they seem more like enemies with the criticism that they often hear. Say good-bye to people who make you feel worse after seeing them!

## Say Positive Affirmations

No one likes a person having a pity party about themselves. Every day when you wake up and looking the mirror, practice some self-talk. I know this sounds a bit "crazy", but it's important to tell yourself what you like. Do you think you are smart? Well, tell yourself that! Do you think you have what it takes to get that promotion you've been wanting? Say it to yourself! How about the way you look? Say, "You have really beautiful eyes today. Your shirt really brings out the green in them." I don't care how silly you feel. After some time of doing this, you will start believing what you're saying.

### *Final Thoughts*

I am a strong believer that we all have a choice in how we react to situations in life. You just have to decide which path to follow and then go for it without having regrets. Regret can bring about unwanted feelings, so it's important to make the conscious choice of being happy with where your life is at now and proceed with better decisions in mind. After all, it is the decisions we make that bring us down the path of happiness or sadness. What's your choice?