



IFL Reflections

THE INSTITUTE OF FAMILY LIVING

Our Thirty-Seventh Year

Spring 2007

The Quest for Happiness

FL therapists often work with people who longingly say, "I just want to be happy in my work, relationship, life." But what is happiness and how is it attained?

In the past ten years, researchers have taken a long hard look at the human state we call happiness, defined as being personally fulfilled, engaged with others, and genuinely satisfied with life. Lack of consistent and positive social interaction is seen as contributing to, or resulting from, many psychological problems of our modern era.

The advent of Positive Psychology has encouraged researchers to seriously consider the power of positive emotion. This shift, in turn, has influenced the approach therapists take in helping their clients, moving from a stance of pathology, victimology, and mental illness to one of positive emotion, virtue, and strengths.

Research has found that those with the highest level of happiness and the fewest signs of depression have strong ties with friends and family and are committed to spending time with them. This would challenge the common cultural position that tries to persuade us to acquire material things and engage in exciting activities as a primary means to happiness. The advertising we are bombarded with on a daily basis is evidence of this. By focussing on superficial relief from disappointments,

sadness, or depression, momentary pleasure may be achieved, but will not lead to a sense of true personal worth, independent of how one is seen by others. Research shows that people who end each day by identifying three good things that happened to them become less depressed and happier as a result. This can be especially

tend to adapt rapidly to good things in life taking them for granted, thus needing more and more to maintain the level of happiness they seem to provide. This has been referred to as the "hedonic treadmill." By being in the present moment, through prayer, meditation, and the practice of mindfulness, we can live a more meaningful

"The strengths that matter most in producing fulfillment are what we call strengths of the heart, positive traits that connect us to other people, such as kindness, love, and gratitude..."
Nansook Park and Christopher Peterson

effective in families, as they learn to share, and savour with gratitude, their varied experiences.

The key to lasting happiness seems to be engaging with and giving to others, whether emotionally, spiritually, physically, or materially. It is through this experience of human community that true self worth is achieved. In the words of Henry David Thoreau: "Goodness is the only investment that never fails."

In *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman states that "positive affectivity" is to some extent determined by genetic predisposition. If one has the tendency to avoid social contact and spend time alone, one will have to intentionally work at engagement with others in order to feel happier. We also

life not driven by the need to acquire more.

Researchers have identified certain positive character traits which seemed to be more strongly associated with fulfillment and happiness than some others. They are gratitude, hope, zest, curiosity, and love. Love is defined as the ability to sustain close reciprocal relationships with other people. Thus to achieve lasting happiness, it would be important to cultivate these strengths.

This does not minimize the importance of other characteristics such as bravery, humour, kindness, spirituality and appreciation of beauty. These, in fact, have been strongly associated with recovery from physical and psychological illness and trauma. Being able to recognize and celebrate strengths

and to build on them allows therapists to help their clients in specific ways, depending on their goals.

Sonja Lyubomirsky, a psychologist from the University of California, has developed eight practical suggestions towards raising your level of happiness.

1. **Count your blessings** on a regular basis and write them down in a gratitude journal.
2. **Practice acts of kindness**, both random and planned.
3. **Savour life's joys** by paying close attention to momentary pleasures and wonders.
4. **Thank a mentor.** This involves writing a letter of gratitude to someone you are particularly grateful to or visiting them and expressing your appreciation to them in person.
5. **Learn to forgive.** Let go of anger and resentment. This may be done by letter, in person, or even through thought and prayer.
6. **Invest time and energy** in family and friends.
7. **Take care of your body.** Good sleep, healthy diet, and exercise all contribute to well-being.
8. **Develop strategies** for coping with stress and hardships. Religious faith plays a key role in getting through hard times, bringing comfort, joy, and inner peace.

By Nancy Molitz, RMFT and Lindsay Watson, RMFT

WHO WE ARE

I FL continues to serve a broad and diverse community. We serve several Employee Assistance Plans, and our referral network draws from clergy, physicians, social workers, teachers and principals, friends, and former clients.

We are an inclusive and interdisciplinary community of Christian and Jewish therapists, and our areas of specialty encompass clinical psychologists (including child and adolescent learning assessments), registered marriage and family therapists, a family mediator, and GP psychotherapists (the latter also work with low-income persons). We look forward to serving you.

For inquiries or to book an appointment, call our Office Administrator, Fran Crabe, at 416-487-3613.

OUR ASSOCIATES

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Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy

Employment Issues and Marriage Preparation

Immigration and Family Reintegration

Nancy Molitz, M.A., RMFT

Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy

Performance Edge

Trauma — EMDR (Level 2)

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Registered Psychologist

Counselling with Adolescents

Assessments for Learning Disabilities

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Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy

Adoption Issues

Counselling of Persons with Chronic Illness

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Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy

Comprehensive Family Mediation

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Lindsay Watson, M.A., RMFT

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Trauma — EMDR (Level 2)

OUR CONSULTANTS

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Registered Sex Therapist, BESTCO

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Spanish Community — Individual and Couple Therapy

Pablo Muñoz, M.A.

For Further Reading:

Seligman, Martin E.P.
Authentic Happiness. New York: The Free Press, 2002.

The New Science of Happiness. TIME Magazine, January 9, 2005.

Happiness. Family Therapy Magazine, November/December 2006.

Strengths of Character and the Family. Family Therapy Magazine, November/December 2006.

IFL is going 'Virtual'!

Beginning July 1, 2007, *The Institute of Family Living* will have a new administrative structure. We bid farewell, with much appreciation, to our long-time administrator, **Fran Crabe**, and to our receptionist, **Elizabeth Humphrey**. IFL therapists will work out of several offices, including our current office at Yonge and Lawrence, and will manage their own practices and book their own clients. They can each be reached by leaving messages in their voice boxes at the central telephone number of 416-487-3613.

Betsy Barlow will join us as an off-site telephone receptionist who will return calls and inquiries Monday to Friday. In addition, the Institute can be accessed through our website at www.ifl.on.ca.

While we are changing our administrative structure, our therapist Associates will continue to maintain their high level of professional service.

Administrator
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We welcome your comments.