



Maytiv Center

Program syllabus

1. Introduction to Positive Psychology

Throughout human history people have grappled with the question of human happiness, from a religious, scientific and spiritual perspective. For scientific answers we turn to the field of Psychology, where research provides a number of ideas and tools that promote the happiness and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Many of these stem from the relatively young research field of Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology deals with the optimal functioning of individuals and groups, and the factors that promote positive emotions, positive character traits, self-fulfillment and success. In the last ten years there has been a burgeoning in popularity of positive psychology - in the field of education, therapy and organizational behavior. The introductory session exposes participants to the core ideas of positive psychology, forming the foundation of the program.

2. Change is Possible - From Theory to Practice

All children dream. Many imagine that one day they will be someone completely different. Their dreams also continuously change. To some extent, the tension between who we want to be and who we are, persists throughout our lives. However, between the ages of adolescence and adulthood, our sense of identity grows stronger and with it, our acceptance of the limitations and constraints dictated by our circumstances and realistic possibilities. The session reveals the power of belief in change. The lesson presents research-based educational interventions, that brought about far-reaching positive changes among students and teachers. A case study will be used to demonstrate important elements in the process of achieving change in our lives.

3. Permission to be Human

A fundamental assumption in theory, research, and clinical practice relating to emotion regulation is that it is helpful to process and work through negative emotions. In addition, the ability to express and analyze one's emotions evoked by unpleasant experiences has been associated with diverse physical and mental health benefits.

However, many people prefer to hide negative emotions, and choose different psychological mechanisms that reduce the role of negative emotions. Completion is a prerequisite for a healthy and authentic emotional life. When we accept our feelings and welcome our intrinsic humanity, a mental space is opened in which we can feel the range of emotions associated with the experience. The session deals with the ability to allow ourselves the permission and space to feel and express the full range of human emotions.

4. Positive Emotions

The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions (Fredrickson 1998) states that certain discrete positive emotions - including joy, interest, contentment, pride, and love - have the ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires and build their personal resources. These resources encompass physical, intellectual, social and psychological attributes. Many studies indicate that the experiences which include intense positive emotions promote creativity, resilience, social integration and physical health. The session is about the value of finding the positive and the contribution of positive emotions to achieving psychological growth and improved mental and physical health.

5. From Beliefs to Reality

The ideas that “Words create worlds” and “Thoughts create reality” have attracted considerable research interest in psychological literature over the past century. Studies have identified mechanisms and variables that explain the ability to turn beliefs into reality, including: positive expectations, optimism and hope, focus, positive interpretation of events, and a flexible mindset. The session deals with the relationship between beliefs and reality in the personal and educational context.

6. Change - Putting Theory into Practice

We all are very familiar with attempts to change that may succeed initially, but do not result in lasting change. In the wake of the latest findings in neuroscience, according to which the human brain changes constantly, even in adults, this session will introduce ways to create fundamental, stable, and ongoing change in our lives. This will be accomplished while relating to three fields in which we operate, which can be considered the ABCs of psychology: affect; behavior; and cognition.

7. Focus and Gratitude as a Way of Life

In daily life, people experience countless successes and failures, from winning championships to receiving a low grade on an exam, from winning a valuable prize to parting with a spouse. How do these events influence us? The literature in the field of psychology shows that these events' impact is not related to their objective severity or intensity in reality, but to the subjective interpretation that they are given. The research in the field concludes that the way people comprehend the world is much more meaningful to their happiness than the objective circumstances of their lives. This session addresses the role of focusing and interpretation in creating the reality of our lives. Throughout history, spiritual traditions, philosophical approaches, and religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism, emphasized the importance of expressing gratitude. Gratitude is defined as a feeling, emotion, or attitude stemming from recognition of future, present, or past benefits. The ability to express gratitude is the opposite of taking reality for granted. It arouses us and enables us to see the beauty in the world, the beauty of our lives, and the miracle of creation. Many studies have demonstrated that simple exercises in the realm of expressing gratitude yield a significant improvement in our sense of satisfaction and emotional wellbeing. The goal of this session is to provide participants with tools and to cultivate their sense of gratitude and appreciation.

8. Personal Strengths

Strengths are defined as positive character traits, based on values which can be fostered and cultivated over time. Theories about the nature of good character appeared over two thousand years ago in the ancient roots of ethics, philosophy and religion. In recent years, research about the impact of character, virtues and moral qualities on cultivating strengths and promoting wellbeing has gained renewed interest. The purpose of the session is to enable participants to identify the strengths of their character, i.e. traits that represent their natural talents and give them strength and enthusiasm. In addition, the session is designed to increase participants' awareness of aspects of life that can be promoted to make optimal use of unique character strengths.

9. Setting and Implementing Personal Goals

According to research people who set goals tend to be happier and more successful. However, not all goals achieve the same result. Some people become enslaved to a goal that is not of their choosing, making them less rather than more satisfied with their life. In this session we discuss self-concordant goals, pursued out of deep personal conviction or a strong interest. Also, we discuss the formulation and planning of meaningful personal goals, based on personal strengths, that yield self-realization and wellbeing.

10. Mind and Body in Educational Work

The question of the relation between body and mind, so popular in the current time, stems way back to a past era. Hippocrates, the great healer and philosopher of ancient Greece, and the father of Western medicine, argued that “It is more important to know what kind of person carries the disease than to know what disease a person has”. In recent decades, the reciprocal effects of physical and psychological processes have been extensively studied. On one hand, the mind is affected by the body - so that functional decline in health may adversely affect mood and mental symptoms. On the other hand, the body is affected by the mind - depending on the connections that exist between psychological variables such as mood disorders and states of internal stress and chronic diseases. The session addresses the need for balance between mind and body, and the importance of sleep, nutrition, physical exercise, emotional balance and mindfulness in one's personal life and educational work.

11. Stress and Flow

Our modern lifestyle is characterized as a “Stress Era”. Stress is prevalent throughout the Western world, where high expectations and a desire for achievement impair the quality and health of vast numbers of people around the world. The psychological literature often deals with the question: “Why is the phenomenon of stress so prevalent today?”. Although this important question has great research value the phenomenon is not well understood. Positive psychology studies deal with another question: “What are the characteristics of people who do manage to implement a healthy, peaceful and happy lifestyle?”. The session provides research-based tools that enable participants to use their experiences and even their stress to increase the flow of peace within themselves, and within others.

12. Perfectionism and Self-Acceptance

For a perfectionist, life is an endless craving for achievement. Perfectionism involves the obsessive pursuit of perfection that is often associated with mood and eating disorders. Perfectionism is identified as an obstacle to creativity, productivity, self-realization and mental health. It interferes with the performance of tasks due to an exhausting preoccupation with detail. It impairs people's ability to examine a task with perspective. In addition, perfectionism is associated with a high fear of failure. The session deals with issues of control attributed to oneself and others, and with self-acceptance. It focuses on the ability to deal with failures, and to grow from them. It incorporates case studies of well-known figures from science, politics and sports throughout history.

13. Relationships and Social Support

Two key researchers in the literature of positive psychology conducted research that compared extremely happy people with a control group of people who were not happy (Diener & Seligman, 2002). When the researchers examined the characteristics of the happy group, they found that they differ radically from the others in respect of their rich and satisfying social life. They were characterized by close relationships and intimate friendships. Similar findings were obtained from studies in the field of resilience. Populations in situations of crisis and risk have shown the ability to cope and function well, despite the difficult circumstances, in situations where they experienced strong social and family support. Positive supportive relationships are the foundation of resilience and mental wellbeing. The purpose of the session is to promote positive relationships with friends, family and other members in the community, and to encourage the creation of positive functional environments.

14. Acceptance of Others, Tolerance and Listening

How a person relates to individuals and groups forms part of the mental and moral infrastructure underlying feelings of satisfaction, love and happiness. The famous quote of Voltaire (French philosopher and author) - "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" - represents the essence of tolerance. Tolerance is the recognition of the dignity of man and his freedom to be different from others, to believe, to think and to act his own way, regardless of religion, race, gender, nationality, color and faith. The purpose of the session is to cultivate sensitivity towards others, and the involvement of participants in promoting other individuals and groups in the world.

15. Pay It Forward

Sometimes a stranger passing by enriches our lives with a simple human gesture; "...like the old woman who returned your purse yesterday, like a small child who showed you the wonder of a little thing, like the poor person who offered to share his meal with you, or like a stranger who happened to be there just as you lost your way." (Yossi Front) Studies show that kindness towards others contributes substantially to increasing happiness. This session is intended to provide a space for sharing insights and processes that occurred during the program, from a personal and interpersonal perspective. Participants explore options to apply these insights and processes socially and communally.

16. Growth Mindset

In recent decades, research on motivation and personality has found fundamental individual differences between people with different basic mindsets on intelligence. Individuals with a fixed mindset believe that their level of intelligence is predetermined and their basic abilities cannot be changed. In contrast, those with a growth mindset see intelligence level as something dynamic that can be cultivated through effort and education. These mindsets influence the academic goals that students set for themselves, their willingness to put effort into something, their reaction to feedback, and their motivation to learn and develop themselves. This session will address cultivating a growth mindset as a base for increasing motivation, drive, and openness to change.

17. Inspirational Models

Each and every one of us has memories of an inspiring figure - a person whose presence at the right time and place made a mark on our identity, personality, world view, and life goals. Inspiring figures enter and exit our lives, just like we enter and exit subway cars. Each one leaves a trace - love, worth, experience, and significance - in the story of our lives and identities. This session will embark on a journey in the footsteps of the inspiring figures that shaped each participant's identity. The session will address the teacher's role as an inspirational model for students.

18. Choice

Our lives are a collection of decisions that we make at every given moment. This session will investigate research findings regarding choices that produce emotional wellbeing and that empower us to fulfill the latent potential in each and every moment of our lives. This session will address the choice to accept our feelings, the choice to act deliberately, the choice to be kind, the choice to be grateful, the choice to use humor, as well as choice in play and in our actions. In addition, it will address choice in teaching in a classroom in order to enrich the teaching and learning experience.

19. Meaning

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche famously stated, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how." This has been widely confirmed in dozens of research initiatives related to the emotional value of significant experiences. An individual's sense of purpose and meaning enhances emotional wellbeing, physical health, and even life expectancy. This session will present a process to establish goals that have personal meaning for participants. The process will also serve as a professional tool for participants to guide students in the process of setting academic goals and goals related to the functioning of the school.

20. Positive Psychology and School-wide Change

Research on programs for school-wide change concluded that stable, sustainable changes must begin with small-scale, systematic changes that gradually pave the way for comprehensive change in the school's organizational culture. This session will address mapping the school's needs and the need to formulate plans for change based on positive psychology. The school's principal and groups of teachers will initiate and lead these plans, serving as agents of school-wide change.

21. Presentation of Projects

This session will be a direct continuation of the previous session, which aimed to establish a base for small groups to initiate plans for school-wide change. The session will include presentations to introduce each group's plan for change to all the participants in order to facilitate brainstorming about the plans' goals and means of achieving them, to synchronize and integrate the different plans, and to formulate a macro-view of all the participants' plans for school-wide change.

22. Giving

Psychological research shows that happy people tend to regularly perform acts of generosity such as helping the needy or strangers, and that they spend a significant amount of their time helping others. The research literature connects generosity to high levels of satisfaction in relationships, a sense of joy and happiness, physical health, and slower aging, along with sympathy and sensitivity to the other. This session will address interventions based on research that found that increasing and diversifying generous behaviors is an efficient way to improve emotional wellbeing and to reinforce school-wide activity on behalf of the community.

23. The Teacher as a Coach - Empathetic Listening

This session begins the program's second part: the teacher as a coach and counselor to his or her students. This session and those that follow will introduce evidence-based tools from the field of coaching and short-term counseling that cultivate transformative dialogue and empower students. The methods to be presented have a scientific base rooted in positive psychology research. This session will emphasize the power and characteristics of empathetic listening as primary infrastructure for a successful counseling process.

24. Solution-Focused Advising - Loving What Is

In 1980, a young researcher named David Cooperrider performed an organizational intervention that asked managers about their previous successes in a way that enabled them to learn from their positive experiences, in order to advance their organization's goals. This was the base for a popular, powerful organizational and interpersonal intervention known as "appreciative inquiry." This session will include an introduction to three intervention tools used in counseling that emphasize the positive and extraordinary in stories of the past, in order to build a better future for the individual and the organization.

25. Storytellers' Festival

This session will serve as a bridge between focusing on the teacher as a coach and counselor and cultivating the teacher as a master craftsman who is a pedagogical expert. The art of storytelling has been part of the human experience from its very beginning. From the time of our ancestors, the story has been a basic tool in human communication to convey messages, insight, and lessons from the past as knowledge that passes from generation to generation. This session will deal with telling stories and crafting positive personal narratives as a central tool in the interpersonal counseling process and creating the desired reality. In addition, this session will address the pedagogical value of storytelling in the classroom teaching process and in empowering students.

26. Teaching that Arouses Inspiration

Each class is a unique mix of diverse populations with different needs. Optimal teaching requires providing different solutions for these populations. The question of positive psychology's relevance to children suffering from a crisis, difficulty, or distress is central among those involved in pedagogical activity in a world that includes sadness and happiness simultaneously. This session will introduce new research related to resilience of at-risk children and positive turning points in their lives that shape and direct the vital role of teachers for these students.

27. Positive Pedagogy

For two years, we have been exploring the significant contribution to our emotional wellbeing of positive emotions, acknowledging the good, permission to be human, utilizing personal strengths, the combination of mind and body, mindfulness, setting goals, flow, and social support. This session will address the distinctive contribution that these components make to teaching processes in the classroom, while integrating positive psychology into the teaching and learning process.

28. Positive Psychology - A Journey around the World

Intercultural research and measures of happiness worldwide report on high levels of happiness among children and adults in specific regions. What can be learned from different places in the world about behaviors that lead to human happiness? In this session, we will take a journey around the world for an intercultural lesson on happiness.

29. Positive Psychology at School - Summing-Up Projects

In preparation for the end of this yearlong process, this session will complete the circle regarding the plans for school-wide change. This session's goal is to present, sum up, and evaluate the plans for change that different groups of teachers initiated and implemented. Participants will distill optimal positive learning from the plans in order to continue to strive towards a positive vision of the school in the future.

30. Happiness - Local Research

Scientific research offers considerable insight regarding the desirable, elusive, and ambiguous concept known as happiness. After two years of intensive learning, practice, and activity in positive psychology, the term happiness has a distinctive meaning for each participant based on each one's personal experiences and insights related to the question of human happiness. This session will move from the pages of scientific research to the participants' personal diaries and perform local research on the factors that yield human happiness in personal life and pedagogic activity.