**Positive Psychology: Positive Emotions**

**Transcript**

Okay, so welcome everyone who's here with me live. And welcome to those of you watching on replay. As already mentioned, today's session is positive psychology, and specifically positive emotions. So just briefly, when it comes to the topic of overall wellbeing, and this is one model called the PERMA model, positive psychology can play a really helpful role in creating and experiencing higher levels of wellbeing. Hence, it's one of the things we're talking about. So as you can see, in this model, there are five aspects to wellbeing. And we're going to concentrate on the positive emotion component. And we'll look at other components in some future sessions. So first, I wanted to give you a little bit of a background to positive psychology for those of you that aren't aware of it.

The positive psychology movement started in the late 1990s. And as you can see, here, the definition is the study of, the scientific study of optimal human functioning, to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive. And this definition is important for three main reasons.

Firstly, because it emphasises the scientific aspect, and the scientific method. So it's not the same as self-help. Even though if you were to go into a bookshop, and ask for the positive psychology section, or you went to look for it, you would find those books probably alongside the Self-Help section. But it's different because the techniques that you find in positive psychology are grounded in the scientific method in that they've been tried and tested, to ensure that they actually have the impact that we think they do, and the impact that we want them to have. So you can be sure that there is an evidence base behind positive psychology. And that's not necessarily true of many of the self-help approaches. Secondly, the definition focuses on optimal human functioning. So the idea is that you begin to learn who you are when you're at your best, rather than only looking at problems and difficulties and weaknesses that we might have, and how they show up when we're not doing great. So it's really focusing on what we do when we're at our best, at our peak, when we're functioning optimally, whether that's at work, whether that's at home, in our personal lives, and trying to understand the different insights into this optimal human functioning. And the third thing that's important about this definition, is the fact that it's not just about the individual. It's also about who we are, when we come together, be that in our immediate family, our wider family are with our friends as a team in the workplace, or indeed wider than that in, in a community or even as a society.

And the main reason that positive psychology came about was because the type of research that had been done up until the late 1990s was really based on exclusively on the pathology. So two researchers Martin Seligman, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi… I think I've got that right. They realised that most of the research that had been done from the Second World War up until up until the late 90s, had really focused on all the things that were wrong. And that's really reflected in the research as you can see on this slide. So for example, there were over 113,000 research papers written in the 30 years or so, between 1972 to 2000. And only 22 and a half thousand are written about mental and emotional wellbeing. So you can see that within the academic world. There's a much bigger emphasis on understanding depression, but not really that much emphasis or certainly not the same emphasis being placed on understanding what mental and emotional wellbeing looks like what the experience of feeling, you know, emotionally, mentally well means and looks like for people on a day to day.

And then if you look more specifically at wellbeing, so this is subjective wellbeing, it's known as, which is about the individual experience of happiness. That, you can see that the ratio is even greater. So there's a ratio of 72 to one when it comes to the number of those papers on depression versus the amount of research that had been done on the subjective wellbeing. And so these two researchers realised that, you know, all the academic focus, all of that research focus was being put into really understanding what's wrong with people. That's the pathology and and really waiting until things have gone wrong. And that there was considerably less emphasis on understanding what's right with people, what great emotional mental wellbeing looks like, and what factors led to that experience, and how it could be achieved. And they decided that that just wasn't acceptable. They felt that it wasn't good enough. And they wanted to create a better balance. So that who we are when we are at our best, is, you know, is achievable, because that really deserves as much emphasis as who we are when we're struggling or at our worst. And one way of describing this difference between normal kind of normal psychology, and what we call positive psychology is to see it in terms of this continuum here from zero minus 10 to plus 10. And traditional psychology could be placed at the lower end of the scale at that minus 10 end of things. And that's where the focus is really trying to understand what's wrong with people, whether they've got a diagnosable depression or anxiety, or, you know, an issue with anger management or obsessive-compulsive disorder, traditional psychology is looking at those and trying to understand them, and overcome those problems. Whereas the other end of the spectrum positive psychology is understanding or trying to understand optimal human functioning, who we are, we're at, when we're at our best, as I've said, whether that's about our strengths, our natural competencies, or, you know, our natural optimism, or whether we're more pessimistic and so on. And of course, I'm not saying that we should get rid of the more traditional psychology not at all, we need both. And we, what we what we really want is, you know, this understanding that if we're able to cure somebody's depression or anxiety, that's fantastic. But does that naturally mean that they're going to immediately move to the plus 10 side of the scale? Does that naturally mean that they're performing at their peak? That they're experiencing the world, you know, as optimally as possible? Are they living out of their potential? And the answer, of course, is no. One doesn't naturally follow the other solving depression or anxiety or, you know, any type of mental health diagnosis being medicated. Hopefully, that will bring somebody past the midpoint,you know, heading up the scale significantly, but it won't necessarily mean that they're automatically flourishing on all levels, personally and professionally. And that's because the things that we need to do, to reach optimal performance to be flourishing can be quite different to alleviating a diagnosis that's involved in the mainstream or traditional form of psychology. And that's things like, you know, understanding our purpose, understanding our strengths, focusing on becoming engaged and creating flow in our lives. And positive psychology recognises that happiness and wellbeing are an essential human skill, which is great news, because it means that we can cultivate and learn those skills and then use them to make an impact on our own quality of life.

So the aims of positive psychology, the most important thing that we aim to focus on is really being as focused or as concerned with our strengths. As with our weaknesses, we mustn't overplay our strengths. We also need to develop other areas that aren't naturally strengths to balance them out. We need to be interested in building the best things in life as well as repairing the worst. So, definitely dealing with difficulties as they arise, but to also be proactive and consciously work on creating a positivity bias, so that we're functioning at our best So, we also want to be concerned with making the lives of ordinary people fulfilling as much as healing pathology, which we've already talked about. And as you know, from having looked at the definition, it won't be a surprise to see that so called Positive Psychology aims to create evidence based strategies to ensure that we know people can confidently go about using them to make a difference in their lives.

Now, one of the criticisms that's often labelled at positive psychology is that it's all about happiness. And in some circles, happiness is considered rather frivolous, and certainly not something worth robust scientific inquiry. However, we also know that about 40% of our own personal happiness is determined by intentional activities that we do every single day. So 40%. So, you know, I don't know about you guys. But I think that a little exploration of happiness can only be a good thing on a topic that we have such serious influence over. And it also turns out that being happy is really, really good for you. So whilst there still ongoing discussion about what constitutes happiness, the research has shown that we will live longer, people who are happier tend to live longer, they also tend to have higher income. So I know a lot of people think that once I'm successful, ie earning more money, I will be happier. But actually, it's in the research has shown to be the other way round, people are happier tend to be, you know, on the performance side of things at work rated more highly, they have additional creativity above and beyond what would consider to be the norm, they are more optimistic. They are persistent. They also have less vulnerability to illness, and more robust immune systems to fight external agents such as germs, and they are more popular, they're more sociable, they're more trusting, they tend to be more helpful, more willing to extend themselves for others. And, you know, they really are less self-centred, which we'll come to, because there's some very real reasons for that. And, you know, as I've already mentioned, there is a there's a direct correlation between success and happiness. So, like I mentioned, there's still quite a bit of discussion about what constitutes happiness, and what ultimately creates wellbeing. And that will vary a bit for people, of course, but if you want to measure your own subjective wellbeing, then you can do so using this formula. So you might, I can send you this slide if it's helpful.

So what you do is you take your satisfaction with life. So you have to think about, you know, how you currently feel about your life? Is it measuring up to your expectations? Is it resembling your ideal life? You know, does it feel like you're matching your own definition of success, and for some people, you might need to define that initially, then you add the presence of positive emotion. So that's how positive you feel on a day-to-day basis. And then you take away, you know, your negative emotion, so how negative you feel on a day-to-day basis. And this, this is a measure that suggests that to increase our level of happiness, overall, we should focus on minimising our negative mood, and maximising that life satisfaction that that you know, whether we're matching our own definition of set success, and our positive mood. And before we move on to talking about some of the challenges with that, I want to be very clear, I'm not talking about ignoring times when we feel unhappy, because those emotions are valid, but making sure that we're not in a rut that we're not, you know, significantly dealing with negative emotions on so often a basis that it is having an impact on our on our day to day experience of wellbeing.

So, this brings us to a couple of the challenges firstly, humans have. I don't know if any of you remember Garfield, back in the day. Humans have a negativity bias that has been with us since the dawn of time. And the negativity bias is our tendency to not only register negative stimuli things that are negative in our lives, we tend to notice them more readily, but also the tendency to dwell on those events which some people, you know, have more of than others. So our tendency to pay more attention to bad things, is likely a result of evolution. At one point in our earlier human history. It was it was a, you know, life and death, to pay attention to dangerous and negative threats in the world around us. And those who are more attuned to immediate danger, and who put paid more attention to those things were more likely to survive. And then this meant that they were then more likely to hand down the genes that made them more attentive to danger. So today, this this type of phenomenon is not really needed for most of us, thankfully, because most of us don't find ourselves in life-or-death situations on a day to day basis. But we often still have an element of our nervous system that is primed for this. And that means that it's one of the reasons why first impressions, for instance, can be so difficult to overcome. It's also a reason why, you know, past traumatic events can be so difficult to overcome, and, and to linger. And in any, almost any interaction. It's the reason why we're often if we why some people are more likely to notice negative things, and later remember the more vividly and so as tumour. Humans, we know from the research that we do tend to recall insults and focus on insults, more so than praise that we react more strongly physically to negative stimuli. And we think about negative things more frequently than positive ones. And we tend to respond more strongly to negative events than to two equally positive ones. So for example, you might be having a great day at work. And then you know, somebody makes an offhand comment on the way home, and then you find yourself stewing over that offhand comment, rather than focused on the rest of your working day, which was overall really good. When you get home from work, you know, someone asks you how your day was you, you can then tend to reply with a, you know, an excessive, excessively negative response. And that's something that you can start working on immediately by being curious about, you know, how you respond when people ask you 100 Day wars, for instance.

Another challenge is duration neglect. And this is because it takes more for positive experiences, to be remembered. So it's important to give extra attention to good things that happen, when negative things might be quite quickly transferred. And then stored in long term memory. We need to make more of an effort to get the same effect from happy moments. So when something great happens, take a moment to really like absorb it, to be in it to focus on it and replay that moment, several times in your memory, and focus on the wonderful feelings and emotions that that memory evokes. And there's actually an exercise called savouring that you can do on a regular basis. That's a good starting point to overcome this and build more positive experiences into your day to day. And savouring means that we attempt to feel fully enjoy and extend our positive experience in a very, very conscious way. So we can savour the past, the present, and also the future. And we can do that in in quite a number of ways. So you know, we can bask in an accomplishment. We can anticipate things that are coming in the future, we can luxuriate in the moment, I'm going to give you a little exercise for that in the in a moment and then on the you know, past side of things, you know, taking time to remember good times can be a really positive thing to do. So, in the present moment, when you feel good, as I've mentioned, you know, maybe tell somebody else share it. Because the positive things that happen day to day don't have to be big, you could simply have woken up on the right side of the bed and feel fabulous. So why not tell someone, you could show it by expressing the positive emotions and your facial expressions and body language so actively choosing to smile and laugh. You know gesticulate with your hands, which is something that some of us do more naturally than others. You know, these expressions of happiness can really help to prolong the feelings, you could even share it you know, sending a text message with a friend or you know, posting something on social media, to your friends to tell them how you're feeling and what's happened. If there's something you're feeling great about personal, particularly if it's something that you also know could help make others feel good to, then you know, share it far and wide as far as I'm concerned.

And if all of those things sound rather awkward to get started with, then you can luxuriate in the moment using your food. So, rather than just sitting down and bolting it, take the time to really appreciate the smell, maybe say a grace, we've actually written a family grace that is not that has no religious implications at all, with our children, you know, thanking the farmer thanking the seasons and so on for growing our food. And, you know, so notice the smell, notice the visual appeal, and be with your food without distraction. Take a small bite, chew it until it is, you know, basically a liquid is what your stomach's really wanting, and allow yourself to tune into how it feels in your mouth. And savouring is a really great way to develop a long-lasting stream of positive thoughts and emotions, because it allows us to utilise what is a fairly, you know, for some people mundane daily event to amplify or lengthen that positive experience, which then converts them into positive emotions.

And whilst negative emotions tend to trigger very specific types of thinking, and very specific types of behaviour, researchers has shown that the more positive emotions we experience, the better because they do more than simply make us feel good. The value of positive emotions is in something called broaden and build theory. So this is because positive emotions tend to broaden our outlook. And they tend to encourage different types of thinking and different types of behaviour. behaviour. So whereas the negative emotions give us more of a tunnel vision, if you like where, you know, we have more narrow thinking, if you think of any time when you felt very stressed and under pressure, you've maybe refused to take a break thinking, you know, if I work harder, if I work longer, then I'll get to my goal more quickly. Whereas actually, when we're more in a positive when it we were experiencing more positive emotions on a regular basis, that tends to broaden our, our creative thinking, it tends to encourage us to, you know, have different types of behaviour, different types of thinking. So instead of refusing to get out from the laptop, and have a break, somebody who's positive emotional experience has broaden, broadened, may find themselves knowing that they need to go outside and have a walk, you know, they need to get out in the fresh air. And then they may find that when they're out in the fresh air or taking five or 10 minutes to meditate, that they find the answer that they were looking for. Because it simply pops into their head, or that they feel a renewed sense of inspiration, and you know, a novel creative way of explaining a concept that was perhaps previously eluding them.

So for example, here, we've got four positive emotions. So excuse me, if you're feeling joyful, this tends to encourage you to want to have a go, to be experimental. To try things out, to be more creative, and to push the boundaries if you like. When you're feeling contented, you, you tend to kind of sit back, soak it all in, and that tends to integrate into the way that you see the world. If you're feeling interest, you tend to want to go out, to explore to find more information. And even to explore yourself personally more to develop your sense of yourself and, and to, you know, enable you to literally broaden your horizons. And if you are feeling a sense of love, if you feel loved, if you feel love towards other people, it tends to encourage you to want to share with those people to be less self-centred to explore and share more experiences is with those people. And as you can see the building of those positive emotions, it really does broaden in terms of impact, and it can even have benefits for these other resources that you can see on this slide. So You know, from an intellectual perspective, positive emotions tend to allow us to develop our problem solving skills and to learn new information more easily. On the social side of things, it they tend to allow us to solidify bonds between people and to make bonds with, you know, new friendships, new connections. On the physical side of things, positive, the building of positive emotional experience allows us to develop better coordination. And we see that a lot with, with young children and in neglect situations, for instance, and also allows us to develop more strength and better cardiovascular health. And on the psychological side of things, this build and broaden theory has shown that we positive emotions allow us to develop better, stronger resilience, be more optimistic, and develop a healthier sense of identity and be goal oriented, rather than, you know, just allowing life I guess some would describe it as allowing life to passes by.

So, you know, if this was a pill, I think, you know, we can safely say that people would be wanting to pop them morning noon, right? Because you really do get more than two, for the price of one. And you know, over time, the wonderful thing about this model is, is people will develop their own additional resources in their own way. So it works to naturally allow us to strengthen things that we're naturally quite good at, but also to shore up some of the things that perhaps we're less naturally adept at. And, and, and then we you know, it takes on a kind of life of its own, because it there's a sort of self-perpetuating upward cycle that happens. So as you can see, you know, we experienced the positive emotions, we broaden our for action repertoires in the moment, and that builds an enduring, you know, body of resources that then then allows us as individuals to be transformed, and, as I say, continues to produce this upward spiral. So, to finish, I really wanted to give you some additional ways that you can call in more positive emotions into your daily life. And again, if any of you're interested, I can certainly send this to you as a you know, as a document, rather than having to go and find it, or you can take a screenshot now, but you know, what's right for one person will obviously not be right for another, which is why it's important to have a repertoire are kind of a toolbox that we can go to, to create those additional psychological capacities and more resilient mental and also physical health.

So watching funny movies or television shows, that's one of my go twos, for sure. Things that you know, are failsafe ways of making you laugh, particularly good if you're not feeling it, practising meditation at the same time each day, so that you get into a rhythm doesn't have to be for a long period of time. You know, to begin with, it could just be a few minutes of nasal breathing and just tuning into the moment that you're in, you probably aware that there are some different resources available in the hub for you. You could write about your positive memories journaling about what's happened in your past, reminiscing about things that that you know what high points in your life, and giving yourself the opportunity to really feel that moment again, and experience the positive emotion all over is another really good one for those that like writing. Practising a religion or a spiritual practice that aligns with your beliefs, your values, will help you to find meaning, as well, which is another topic that we'll get to in a subsequent session. And of course, gratitude, writing down three to five things that you're grateful for, either at the beginning of the day, or at the end of the day, or even both, for some people can be life changing, building more social connections by you know, just striking up a conversation with somebody at the grocery store or talking to a neighbour or making more conversation with people that you already know whether that's going to visit or you know, via zoom. I know we're all a bit zoomed out, but at the same time, thank God we live in a time when we do have this technology Going for a walk into nature going for a walk in nature another go to, for me, stopping listening to the birds. I don't know about you guys, I know some of you are up this way near me, but the skies have been amazing the last few nights. So we've taken a few moments with our children to just watch the sky to be absorbed in the wonder of nature and marvel at the fact that it's just changing and that we'll never, you know, have that experience. Again, working with a therapist, there are times where it's absolutely fantastic to work with a therapist, not because there's anything particularly wrong, but again, to just explore your you know, inner life. I may have said this to some of you before, but you know, the longest relationship we ever have in life is with ourselves. So the more that we cultivate that relationship, in my opinion, the better identifying and working to improve stressful situations. You know, having different ways of alleviating our stress response whether that's through you know, an activity like swimming or running or punching a boxing bag, finding an outlet to ensure that our stress hormones have a way out of our body because like I say, we have a varied and wide emotional experience that is all valid is what we do with those emotions, that really counts. Looking for a silver lining and situations even when it seems like everything is going wrong. I'm sure most of you have had situations in life where you know, something went wrong. And then when you look back in hindsight, there was a silver lining, it offered an opportunity for something else, for instance, being altruistic, altruistic, so helping others by you know, sharing the love if you like we sometimes in a coffee shop, randomly gift, you know, coffee or tea and cake to an older couple, or just just randomly we like to do things like that feels fantastic. Practising self care by you know, doing things like having some time for yourself, taking a long bath, doing some painting or reading and also planning future activities and events. When I worked in a corporate situation, I always used to make sure that I had a holiday booked for when I came back from my current holidays so that I didn't go into that decline after you know the post-holiday slump as it were. So if you've got any questions, please let me know.