

Noticing Positive and Pleasant Events

Paying attention to pleasant and positive events can sometimes take a lot of effort. We may be too absorbed with something else to notice the pleasant things that are happening all around us, or we may have trouble focusing on one thing because there are lots of other distractions going on. Remember it's important to build our ability to refocus on the positive things when our mind wanders to all the negativity that may also be happening. Both positive and negative things happen dialectically on a regular basis, they co-exist consistently, we just don't have the ability to notice them from a dialectical perspective. It takes work, and a conscious effort, to disengage the psychological filters that are drawing our attention to the activated schema in our system. This schema is the thing that's causing us to focus on the negative aspect of life in general. The stories from our past, like mistrust, abandonment, defectiveness and shame are all contributing to the way we see the world right now.

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~Steven Morris RP.

This is why it is often the case that we can come up with a boat load of evidence for the negative aspects of life because they exist all around us. In fact, when we are in an activated state, our negative childhood schema can point out, time and time again, how the number of positive events in our lives are much smaller than the number of painful events. When this is the case, it can be hard to tear our mind away from this point of view. It can be particularly difficult when we are blended with parts of our personality that are angry, resentful, or bitter about the way things are. It may even be true that these parts have the belief that feeling better about our lives will mean we have "given in" in some way. Practicing the skills of Mindfulness will help us with unblending from these parts, and checking the facts can help us to see the psychological filters and the schemas that are in place.

In these types of situations, refocusing our attention on the positive aspects of events is a great example of Taking an Opposite Action. Completing a Pros-and-Cons worksheet can also activate the motivation we need to actually take the Opposite Action. This, in turn, will help with building our awareness for the new positive and pleasant experiences. For example, when I am angry at

someone, blended with a part that is rigidly attached to a particular story, I get stuck in the thoughts about how terrible this person has treated me, how it's not fair, and how I need to lash out and do something to change things in my favour. When I get like this, it's hard to pay attention to the wonderful meal I am eating while I'm out with my wife and my family, or to enjoy the movie that I might be watching with my friends.

Positive events are not only limited to the things that happen around us. They are also related to the things that we do and the things that we achieve. No matter how small and insignificant these things may seem to be, it is incredibly important to mindfully notice them. Research shows that paying attention to the things we accomplish each and every day builds internal motivation to do more. We only have to look at the work of people like Andrew Huberman to find the evidence for this. Having a solid foundation with routine and structure can help accomplish this aspect of the skill. It is also important to make sure that when we are making the effort to notice these positive and pleasant things, we do so when we are fully engaged in the positive experience. Mindful Awareness is key, Observing and Describing what's happening, experiencing the moment as it is, removing the judgement or opinion that we need to be somewhere else, and participating in the event to the best of our ability.

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Learning the skills of DBT in combination with Schema Therapy gives us the ability to notice our childhood stories and disengage from the filters that only allow us to see the world from this subjective, and rigid point of view. For me, this has been an essential part of my daily routine for a really long time now. So much so, that I hardly notice that I do it all the time. It started with my daily One Mindful activities, where I would pay attention to the moment, and notice how enjoyable and pleasant this experience was.

It progressed into a deliberate action in my nighttime check in. I would purposely pay attention to my accomplishments, acknowledging the parts that helped me achieve the things I had achieved throughout the day, no matter how small other parts of me judged these things as. On the following page you will find a worksheet associated with the nighttime check in routine I developed for myself. Use this as a template to notice your accomplishments on a daily basis. When you complete it, walk yourself into your wise mind, or your safe place, and practice gratitude and appreciation for the parts of your personality that took the actions you noticed. Practice One Mindfulness to be in the moment and notice pleasant events that are happening all the time.

Evening Check-in with Parts Worksheet

Today I was challenged by...

What I could do differently is...

Today I had success with...

The parts of me I am grateful for are...
