

OPTIMISM: A Key Ingredient to Happiness

By Jordan Sim, School Psychologist

Optimism is the belief that things will turn out well. It is the expectation that good things will come your way and that you have the ability to control the direction of your life. When something bad happens, optimistic thinkers believe that what caused the problem can be fixed and won't affect every aspect of their life. On the other hand, pessimistic thinkers believe that their problems will last forever and will affect every aspect of their lives.

Fortunately, optimistic thinking is a learned skill; which is important because optimism is a significant determinant of physical and mental health, academic and work success, and overall happiness. In addition, optimistic thinking motivates people - adults and children - to continue to persist and to work to find solutions, even when situations look bleak. Below are some activities that encourage optimistic thinking.

Silver Lining Game

The goal of this activity is to find positive meaning in a negative event. Take a situation such as your daughter's or son's soccer team losing a game. S/he is upset and is having a hard time moving on. Write the following phrases on note cards and ask them to pick a card out of a hat. Read the card with them and work together to answer the question. *Change the phrases below to fit any situation.* (Note: it is important that your child doesn't feel like you are trying to talk them out of feeling badly, so don't do this when your child is very upset.)

- I don't like that we lost the game. We did some things well, though. One thing that the team did well was _____.
- I wish all our shots had scored. One great shot was _____.
- I wish I didn't mess up at all. I did do this really well in the game: _____.
- One thing our team didn't do well today that we can work on is _____.

Happiness Scavenger Hunt

Create a list of simple items or experiences with your son or daughter that make you and your child laugh, smile, or that bring a sense of pleasure (petting a puppy, reading newspaper comics, swinging, playing road hockey, etc.). Devote 30 to 60 minutes to a happiness scavenger hunt where you try to find/do several things on the list.

It Felt Meaningful When ... List

Ask each person in the family to share times when they felt that they were engaged in something meaningful and talk about what made it feel that way. Some examples to get things started:

It Felt Meaningful When...

- We raised money for the less fortunate.
- We took 15 minutes to pick up trash at the park.
- We stared up in the sky at a meteor shower.
- We looked at family pictures with a grandparent.

Keep the list in a visible spot so that everyone can see it and add to it. Sit down as a family once in a while to talk about new meaningful experiences to add to the list and which experience(s) you would like to try.