Greater Good Science Center

greatergood.berkeley.edu
“Cultivating a Meaningful Life”

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The Vagus Nerve

- Helps coordinate interaction between breathing and heart rate.
- Vagal superstars:
  - More positive emotions
  - Stronger relationships
  - Fifth graders with stronger vagal profile intervene when a kid is bullied

To activate:
- Breathe in for a count of 3 and breathe out for a count of 6
The Science of a Meaningful Life

- Hope
- Mindfulness
- Gratitude
- Forgiveness
- Empathy & Compassion
- Altruism
- Play
- Awe
How This Translates in the Real World...

Forbes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>NOW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Oral Communication</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Personal/Career Development</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Creative Thinking</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting/Motivation</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Organizational Effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Something that is meaningful to you that also serves the greater good.
Where the students are...

- Disengaged
- Dreamers
- Dabblers
- Purposeful
Brian
The Experience of Awe
(Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007)

1. Sense of vastness

2. New perspective on the world and our place in it
Mental and Physical Effects of Awe...
(Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007)

- We get goose bumps and an expansive, warm swelling in the chest
- Lessens the focus on self and highlights our common humanity
- Connects us to something larger than ourselves
What Generates Awe?
(Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007)

- Nature
- Art
- People
- Grand Theories
Characteristics of Kids High in Hope

- Can set clear and attainable goals.
- Able to develop multiple strategies to reach those goals.
- Stay motivated to use the strategies to attain goals, even when the going gets tough. (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)
Students High in Hope:

• Greater academic success
• Stronger friendships
• More creative & better at problem-solving
• Lower levels of depression & anxiety
• Don’t take failure personally—they use it to improve performance.
• More optimistic  
  (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)
Developing Hope
(Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)

1. What’s most important to you? Why? Looking back on your life, what do you want to be remembered for? Why?

2. List the broad categories of what’s most important to you (e.g., family, friends, school, sports, environment, future career).
3. Pick one category you could improve. Create 2-3 goals that are specific, measurable and take a “solutions-oriented” approach.

4. Rank those goals in order of importance.

5. Breakdown the top ranked goal into steps.

6. In case you encounter obstacles to any of these steps, visualize at least 1 different pathway to reach that goal.
Two More Things About Hope...


8. Enjoy the process!
PERFECTIONISM (Covington, 1984; Dweck, 2007)

• Created by environment, not inborn

• Focus is on making mistakes, not success

• Fueled by fear of failure, avoidance of criticism (even constructive), frustration, disappointment

• Keeps kids from taking risks, embracing challenge, learning from their mistakes & enjoying their successes
Self-Compassion (Neff, 2011)

The practice of quieting the inner critic, replacing it with a voice of support, understanding, and care for oneself
3 Components of Self-Compassion
(Neff, 2011)

• **Self-Kindness** vs. Self-Judgment

• **Common Humanity** vs. Isolation

• **Mindfulness** vs. Over-identification
Benefits of Self-Compassion
(Neff, 2011)

• **Reductions in:** Anxiety, depression, stress, perfectionism, body shame, fear of failure

• **Increases in:** Life satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, creativity, gratitude

• Greater compassion & empathy for others and more forgiveness of others
3 Practices of Self-Compassion
(Neff, 2011)

• Talk to yourself as you would a best friend

• Self-squeeze

• Breathe-in, breathe-out compassion
Mindfulness

“The awareness that arises out of intentionally paying attention in an open, kind, and discerning way”  (Shapiro & Carlson, 2006)
Mindfulness and Brain Plasticity (Davidson & Begley, 2012)
RESILIENCE  (Davidson & Begley, 2012)

• The role of the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala
Benefits of Mindfulness

**Boosts:**
- Positive emotions & resilience
- Attention skills (and neural mechanisms)
- Memory

**Reduces:**
- Stress & anxiety
- Depression (and prevents relapse)
- Negative emotions
- Post Traumatic stress

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Mindfulness Practice

• Sitting meditation
• Walking meditation
• Loving-kindness meditation
Gratitude (Emmons, 2007)

“...it’s an affirmation of goodness--that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we’ve received.”

“We recognize that the sources of this goodness are outside of ourselves.... We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you’re of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.”
Why Gratitude is Good...

• Strengthens social ties.

• Increases self-worth.

• Middle school students who practice gratitude (Froh, 2008):
  • Higher levels of optimism
  • Increased life satisfaction
  • Decreased negative feelings
  • Greater satisfaction with school
Taking Gratitude Deeper...

• Notice intentions

• Appreciate costs

• Recognize the value of benefits
Gratitude Activities

Gratitude journals

Gratitude letters

Stream of gratitude (Mindful Writing) (Broderick, 2013)
You are a part of the Greater Good…

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✓ Sign up on the site for our monthly e-newsletters (general, parenting, education). They’re FREE.

✓ Become a member to support our work and enjoy benefits!

✓ Follow us on Facebook and Twitter (@GreaterGoodSC)

✓ Consider a tax-deductible donation