

FIVE WAYS FOR FIVE DAYS FOR WELLBEING

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In keeping with our 'pick and mix' approach to helping you to manage your wellbeing; this week we explore happiness and positive ways to focus your attention. You might like to choose some aspects of this that are relevant to your life.

Choosing where to place your attention has an impact on your wellbeing. Read on to find on more...

Your happiness is determined by how and where you allocate your attention. What you attend to drives your behaviour and determines your happiness. Attention is the glue that holds your life together, so you might consider how you can make decisions about what you pay attention to and in what ways.

It may be that if you are unhappy that your attention is regularly being drawn to what's wrong in your life rather than what's right. So changing behaviour and enhancing happiness is as much about withdrawing attention from the negative as it is about attending to the positive.

TAKE NOTICE

Research suggests that what we pay attention to in our day to day lives has a significant impact on our mental health and wellbeing. When we find our attention compulsively drawn to the news reports, the daily totals etc. this can make us feel under threat, our system moves into stress reactivity and we either experience fight, flight or freeze; when we are in this mode it can be very difficult for us to focus, concentrate and to be productive. At its worst, it can make us feel anxious and the physical symptoms that come with that; increased heartbeat, breathing issues, dizziness, feeling sick are some of the indicators of anxiety.

This might explain why some people during this time have been struggling to get on with normal day to day life (freeze reaction) and others have gone into over drive, scheduling the day with numerous activities and projects (fight reaction). While these reactions are totally normal, because our lives can't continue as they were, this reactivity means that our bodies are dealing with living with low level stress all of the time. This can begin to take its toll on our sense of wellbeing.

There are a number of ways that we can support our wellbeing in terms of what we are taking notice of and to aid the 'soothe' system moving into action to combat threat reactivity.

- It can be helpful to notice the little things in life and to give them your full attention. Notice when you are in autopilot; thinking about something else while doing a routine activity and instead bring your full attention to the task in hand. These activities include what we ordinarily see as mundane things; doing the dishes or cooking dinner or hanging out the washing.
- Notice when your attention is being drawn to negative or difficult things over and over again, pause, shift your focus to your body sensations (feet in contact with the floor or breathing) and then shift your focus of attention to something else. This might be something as simple as turning over a TV channel when you realise you are watching the news for the fourth time that day. You might choose to make a conscious decision to avoid listening to the news just before you go to sleep because it might affect your state of mind and this, in turn, could affect the quality of your sleep.
- At the end of the day write down 'Three Good Things'. Reflect back on the day and jot down three things from the day that went well. The 'Three Good Things' do not need to be big things, they can be something as small as the feel of the sun on your face. Research, into this, shows improved levels of wellbeing for people writing the diary, after just one week. If you choose to make it a daily habit, it begins to change what you focus your attention on; people who keep a 'Three Good Things' diary actively look for what's right rather than what's wrong in their lives. This provides balance; as human beings, we have a negativity bias - it is why we have survived as a species. Our brains are actively looking for threat. This practice counterbalances that tendency to look for the worst. In the research people, who had had depression before reported less or no episodes in the six month period after starting to record 'Three Good Things'.

Ideas for helping children to shift their focus to noticing the good:

- ✓ Try getting them to count things that they feel grateful for on their fingers. Model this for them; demonstrating how small what you are grateful for can be;
- ✓ Be aware of watching the news with children around you as this can have the same effect on them or worse than on us as adults;
- ✓ Ask them to draw a gratitude picture or a picture of all the things that make them feel happy;
- ✓ Create a Gratitude jar, ask the children to write down one thing each day that they were grateful for and pop in the jar. You can then read these on a bad day or at the end of the year.
- ✓ Get them to create their own 'Three Good Things' picture diaries, where they draw the 'Three Good Things' each day.



Click the link below to read more about ways to be happy

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/click-here-happiness/201801/how-be-happy-23-ways-be-happier>



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Connection

During this time, where we have been in close proximity to our nearest and dearest 24/7 for a long time now, we may have had moments where we have felt really connected and close to our partners, children or housemates but other times where we have just felt it was impossible to spend another night under the same roof.

The challenge of sharing the same space is likely to prove difficult for everyone at some point, children, teenagers, parent and grandparents alike so regular opportunities to revisit the parameters around 'house rules' and respectful ways of communicating with each other is often useful – whatever our age!

Previous to this time, for most people it was only holidays and annual celebrations that were times where families were forced into such close contact with each other and even then it was possible to spend time apart. In view of this, how might we cope with the challenges of this enforced proximity?



Tips:

- Allow space for venting time. Some families are setting aside 30 mins/1 hour daily to give everyone a chance to get everything off their chests.
- If possible, when you spot a problem brewing, pause, perhaps try the STOP technique, take yourself away from the situation and focus your attention on something else.
- Choose your battles; when confined to the house small things can be magnified. See if you can pick which things are worth discussing.
- Along the same lines, we can zoom all our attention in to just noticing the faults of the people we live with. Consciously focus on their strengths and what you like/love about them.
- When arguments happen, try not to judge yourself or the other person. Increase your tolerance levels for people having bad days and allow yourself to ride the wave, trusting that the unconditional love that sits beneath our meaningful relationships, means that we can make amends and repair. Try to avoid holding grudges, see if you can quickly let go of what has been said.



However, some of us might find ourselves in more extreme situations than described above, situations that are intolerable. Whether you are an adult, teenager or a child, if you are experiencing persistent abusive behavior, either physically or emotionally please seek help. There are people ready to listen and offer you support. There is also help available if you are really struggling and you need support with your mental health. Please see the helplines detailed to the left.

Keep Active



Keeping active, and fit, does not have to be a chore, or does it?

Though we are all limited to our daily outing for taking exercise, we could also turn almost anything we do around the home into exercise.

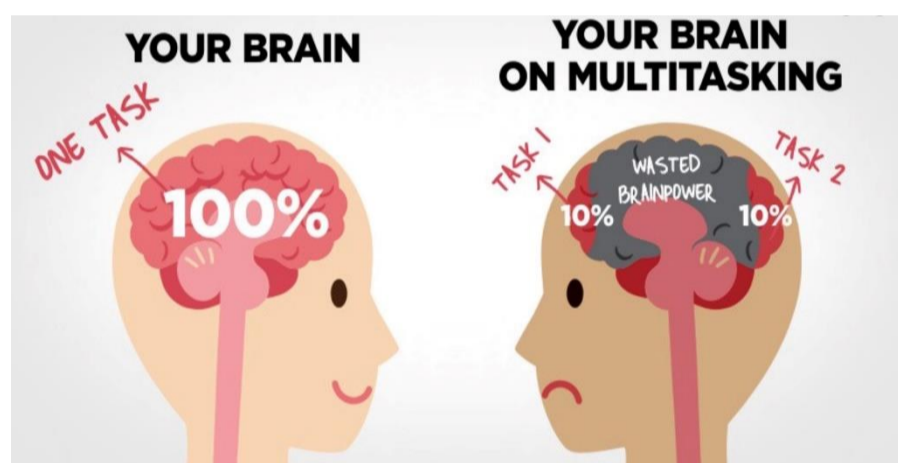
- You could add some small additions to your house workout by engaging your core while doing any activity. Try some calf raises while cooking, use ankle or wrist weights as you complete tasks around the house.
- You could also turn housework into a mindful activity through bringing your full attention to the experience, aware of the movement of the body as you work and tuning into your senses; what you can see, hear, touch, smell and taste.

Research has shown that mindset matters and having a positive attitude to housework benefits you mentally and physically. Why not engage children and young people in chores, it is good preparation for later life.

6 Ways to make chores fun for children

- 1. Make it a competition:** This works especially well if you have more than one child and they are competitive. Make it a big deal. Instead of just saying, "Okay, who can get done first?" Split the chore into two equal parts and then turn on your announcer voice. Give them fun nicknames associated with the chore they're doing and do a whole, play by play of the chore. "The crowd goes wild!"
- 2. Time them:** With young children, it can be helpful to start out helping them with a job. Say, "Hey, let's set the stopwatch and see how fast we can clean up the toys. Ready. Set. Go!" When you are all done, tell them you'll write down the time so that next time you can try to beat your last time.
- 3. Be an animal:** Some may feel a little ridiculous with this one, but it can be a huge success. Everyone picks an animal that they act like while they complete their chores. Sometimes you may have to ban certain crawling, slow or slithering animals. They tend not to be as effective in fulfilling the chore.
- 4. Mission impossible:** Create a "mission." An example might include, "Your mission, if you choose to accept it is to sweep the kitchen floor and find the hidden bomb by cleaning up your clothes on the floor before it explodes. You will save the lives of your whole family and get a clean house out of it too." You can hide a timer in the house if you want or create some other mission of your own or let them create their own mission.
- 5. The toys clean up:** Most children are great at make-believe and it takes away the monotony of the task when they can make their toys actually do the cleaning.
- 6. Race mum or dad:** Give the children a chore and tell them what chore you will be doing. Make them somewhat comparable. Make a win/win bet with them. Tell them, "If you finish first you get to pick a small treat, if I win, I get to take a break and play Lego with you." Then race.

KEEP LEARNING



Something that many of us are doing right now, because of the lockdown, is juggling our own work and taking care of the home with childcare or home schooling happening at the same time and in the same space. While some of us have adapted to these new circumstances, many people have found it a struggle and quite overwhelming. We might feel like we are failing at being a parent, home schooling and working.

One of the problems might be that we feel we have to be able to do all of these things at once and well. Our culture tells us that we can all multi-task and that multi-tasking is a good and efficient way of working.

Research has shown that 98% of the population does not multi-task very well. For most of us we are not really multi-tasking, we are shifting back

and forth between tasks. This is not very efficient because each time we shift between tasks, it takes our brain some time to refocus. Studies have shown that multi-tasking can reduce productivity by 40% and switching between activities increases levels of anxiety and a sense of being overwhelmed.

Some of you may already be single tasking because you have found that in practice it is just impossible to do everything at once. Try to give one activity your full attention at any one time; this is our home schooling part of our day, this is my work time etc. Many people are finding it hard to focus at the moment as it is, so make things easier for yourself and try to avoid doing too many different work activities at the same time. It is helpful to avoid checking emails or messages when working on a task. Invite your children to work this way too; one thing at a time.

GIVE - The Oxygen Mask Principle



When we think about giving, it is common for most of us to think about how we can give to other people. It is important, especially in these times, that we turn the focus of that kindly attention to ourselves as well.

You will remember from the guidance given by air crew when you have flown, that when the oxygen mask drops down, you must put your own mask on first before you put a mask on your child. The principle being that you cannot look after your child if you have not received oxygen and are unconscious. We need to make our own wellbeing a priority. If all of our attention is placed on giving to others, we can easily feel worn down and feel like we have nothing left to give.

How can we best take care of ourselves in these times?

- Making sure our basic needs are met is a priority; eating well and regularly, drinking enough water, taking exercise and improving our sleep habits. All of these fundamental parts of our life really impact our energy levels, mood and mindset.
- Make sure that there is something in every day that is time just for you; this could be spending time in nature, reading a book, listening to some music, taking a bath, meditating, gardening, practising yoga, cooking or baking for pleasure, talking to a friend or just doing nothing. You will know what is best for you.
- Our needs are going to be different at different points during this time and one of the ways that we can tune in to what we need is to pause, tune in to how the body and mind feels, see if we can recognise our mood and ask ourselves the question – 'What do I need right now?'

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Coping with Loss

There may be times where your sense of happiness is challenged due to the loss of a loved one. If this is the case, please accept our condolences. We hope that the happy moments that you shared, with your loved one in life, are of some comfort to you during these difficult times as you grieve their loss. Anyone who has lost someone special knows that grief is a very personal thing. One of the challenges for parents, is that as well as coping with their own feeling around loss, they also need to support their children. Fiona Inman has shared some advice, from her work as a Chaplain, her own reading, discussion with Priests and her life experience as a parent herself. We hope that you find it helpful should you need to support children through the grieving process.

Things that might be helpful to DO when a child is bereaved

- When a child is very close to the deceased person it is good to encourage them to attend the funeral, whatever their age. This obviously may not be possible with restricted numbers during Covid-19 lockdown and social distancing, but if possible involve them in whatever has been decided as part of the funeral arrangements.
- It is good to help the child to feel empowered by being able to DO something. This could be adding a flower (or teddy!) to the grave, reading or writing a poem or drawing a picture to show.
- While churches are closed, you could ask the priest to light a candle on behalf of the child, in memory of the deceased person. Also ask for a Mass intention.
- Continue to talk about the deceased person, even though it can feel upsetting. Bring out photos and recall memories of happy times together.
- Light a candle at home and say prayers together.

Things that might be helpful to SAY when a child is bereaved

- The person died of an accident, illness or natural causes. (*Adjust details according to age and maturity of child (to avoid accidentally triggering visual images that might traumatise); but listen carefully and do respond to what they are actually asking*)
- The deceased person is not sleeping; they are no longer alive.
- The person's body no longer works - they can't feel, see, hear and think anymore.
- They will not become alive again on earth.
- We believe their spirit or soul is alive and with God.
- They are at peace with Jesus and no longer in any pain.
- The love we feel for them will continue to live in our hearts.
- We can remember the times we shared with them and this may make us feel a range of emotions.
- It is good to share our feelings with someone.
- It is ok to feel like smiling and laughing when we remember the person who died.
- It is also ok to have fun, smile and laugh about other things, even in the middle of grieving and feeling sad.
- It is ok for all the family members to still have fun. Even though the sadness doesn't go quickly, we can't show that we are sad all the time.
- It is good to do something to show how you are remembering the person who has died.
- Sleeping is good for your body, it is a healthy, healing time.

Things to AVOID SAYING when a child is bereaved

- The person is sleeping in heaven. (*. . . has the potential to instill a fear of falling asleep, or of parents sleeping*)
- The deceased person was so good, God needed them as an angel. (*Thinks. . . God may take me if I'm good*)
- The deceased person will come back to be around you. (*Thinks. . . a ghost!*)
- The person has chosen to go to be with God. (*potential feelings of resentment or abandonment*)
- God decided the person was going to die. (*fosters negative image of God as a focus for blame and anger rendering child unable to find comfort in God's love*)

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

Thank you for the lives
of all those loved ones
who, whilst no longer
walking beside us
or holding our hand
along life's journey
as once they did, live on
in the collective memory
of those they have left behind.
Enjoy their company, Loving God
until we shall meet again.

Very importantly, during times of grief, look after yourself so that you are better placed to look after others.

