

The Problem with Chasing Happiness

Carmen and Erik had a problem being happy. They thought that the purpose in life was to feel happy, and they thought that they knew what they needed to do in order to be happy. However, when they did it, they still weren't as happy as they expected to be.

A psychologist explained a big reason why it is not effective for people like Eric and Carmin to chase happiness. If our goal is to feel an emotion (for example, happiness), and if we don't feel as we had expected to feel, we will think that there is something wrong with us.

However, researchers say that we can prepare ourselves to have positive experiences without the disappointments.

We will have a better chance at feeling satisfaction if our most important goal isn't happiness. For example, Eric was sure that if he got accepted to a high-ranking university, he would be happy all the time. A better goal for going to the university would be to learn more about different subjects, or to discover what he wanted to be in the future, or even to meet new people.

Also, when Carmen was planning a trip to Europe, instead of imagining how happy she would feel while she was there, it would be better to have goals of visiting a famous museum or experiencing a festival or practicing a foreign language.

One possible reason for their disappointment could be their high expectations. Researchers studied people who were preparing to celebrate New Year's Eve 2000. Many people had high expectation because 2000 seemed to be a special year. Before December 31, the researchers asked people how happy they expected to be and how much time they spent planning for the celebration. A few weeks later, they found that 83% of the people were disappointed with the celebration. Interestingly, they found that the more happiness the people expected to have, the more disappointed they were in the end.

A researcher studied people who are often trying to find happiness. She found that those types of people tend to actually be less mentally and emotionally healthy than other people. In fact, they tend to have higher levels of depression. In other words, the more these people are trying to be happy, the less happy they are.

Interestingly, chasing happiness can increase anxiety. When we are not experiencing the happiness that we expected, we start to worry that we are "missing out." In other words, we think that we are wasting time and should be doing something else that would make us happier.

The psychologist explained a big reason why chasing happiness is not effective. We don't actually know what will make us truly happy. Therefore, instead of only thinking about something that we think will cause us to be happy, it is more effective to think about helping other people become happy. That is a goal that can truly help us find happiness.

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Comprehension Exercise

Directions: Write T (true) or F (false) next to each sentence.

- ___ 1. Eric and Carmin tried to do things that they thought would make them happy.
- ___ 2. If our most important goal is to be happy when we do something, we might become disappointed.
- ___ 3. A good goal for Carmen in Europe could be to have a homestay.
- ___ 4. In the New Year's Eve study, most people were happy a few weeks later.
- ___ 5. If people are not as happy as they expected to be, they might become upset because they think they are missing a chance to do something that would make them happier.
- ___ 6. We probably will be most happy if we ask people to help us.

Paraphrasing Exercise

Directions: Imagine that you have this conversation with a friend.

You: I just read this interesting article.

Friend: Oh yeah. What did it say?

Write what you would tell your friend. Include as many details as you can.

After you finish writing a first draft, you can re-read the article and revise your draft. However, don't look at the article while you are writing. You can use some of these **key words** in your paraphrase.

Key Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Carmen and Eric• still weren't happy• feel an emotion• something wrong• better goals• university	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Europe• New Year's Eve 2000• 83%• less mentally and emotionally healthy• "missing out"• helping other people
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Reflection Exercise

Directions: Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reflection, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*