

Ep #9: How to Create Happiness Every Day



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Nicole Symcox

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Ep #9: How to Create Happiness Every Day

You don't need to be passive and just wait for happiness to just fall in your lap or just to find you. Take control of it. Create it for yourself, to the best of your ability, one small step at a time.

Welcome to *Mental Health Remix*, a show for ambitious humans who are ready to feel, think, and be different. If you want to stop struggling with perfectionism, build better relationships, and connect with yourself and your potential, this is the place for you...

Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hey, hey, everyone, welcome to episode number nine. Today, we are talking about happiness. And guess what – you can create this for yourself at any time. So that is what we're talking about today; how to cultivate happiness all on your own.

So, here's the deal; I promise you, this is not some Tinkerbell Island episode. This is real. So, you can actually create happiness for yourself at any time because the truth about happiness is it is an internal job.

Now, I'm sure you've seen a million quotes on that, a million heartwarming movies about that, but it's actually really true if you do it in a very focused way. You can create happiness for yourself one moment at a time because the deal with happiness is this; it is all about focus.

What you focus on expands, so if you take time, generate a feeling of happiness, focus on it and embrace the experience, even for a second at a time as a daily practice, you are teaching your brain to embrace happiness. And if you've listened to previous episodes on what I've taught, once you have taught your brain something is possible, it's going to begin to look for evidence to prove it to be true.

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And this is a very good thing if happiness is the thing your brain is looking for because we want more of that in our lives. We spend a lot of time chasing things we think are going to make us happy, only to leave us feeling more empty or lonely or the same.

And so this is a really key concept to learn how to do this for yourself on a daily basis. Like, why wait for the big moment or why wait for the big achievement. We should be taking daily steps of happiness all the time.

Alright, so, how does this work? Here we go, so first, mindfulness is actually a very key concept in trying to create space in the brain to begin to cultivate happiness, okay. So this is why mindfulness is actually an incredibly powerful process and why it can be so supportive and helpful for anxious brains.

Because the deal with anxiety is anxiety puts the body in a lot of stress. And if anybody has dealt with anxiety, you know that to be true. It triggers all of your stress hormones. It lights up cortisol like a mo-fo and you are totally on edge.

So it is really important to take active action to interrupt that system because the thing with anxiety is it only gets louder. It does not get smaller on its own. You have to do something about it in order to change it.

And a lot of this has to do with this kind of universal concept that is true for all humans, not just people with anxiety disorders. And we've definitely talked about this in previous episodes. The brain has a negativity bias. So, its natural tendency is to look for things that go wrong or for potential danger.

And this is all wired into our survival system, right? I mean, it makes sense. We are designed to survive. So it goes back to this idea, your brain is not wired for your happiness. It is wired for your survival.

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And this is actually true for your emotions, your mind, and your body. So emotionally, mentally, physically, your system is trying to keep you alive and surviving in the world. And so this is a lot of why it has a negativity bias, because it's constantly scanning the world for potential threats to keep you safe and alive.

So again, this is true for humans across the board. But this gets particularly complicated if you have PTSD or anxiety disorders. And anxiety is a really broad term. There's a lot of disorders that fall under anxiety. So if you have some kind of anxiety disorder, this lens for survival gets even bigger, it gets even more focused and it is constantly scanning.

So because of this, your body and mind can easily get stuck in fearful, obsessive, or ruminative places and any time your brain believes we're in danger, as I said before, cortisol is going to kick on and we're going to be living in a hyper state of arousal in order to protect ourselves from what could potentially be a threat.

So, let's just talk about why we even do this. I mean, this is actually really great if we are actually in danger because these survival mechanisms are designed to keep you alive in the event you are chased by a bear, okay. But for most of us, we're not being chased by a bear... yet anyways.

But our bodies and minds, when we have anxiety disorders, are living day to day like they are. So it's very, very hard to feel happy when your body and mind are consumed with staying safe. Because any time we're consumed with staying safe, it's going to kick on all of our survival mechanisms. And there's no way in hell your brain is going to want to experience happiness, because that would require letting its guard down.

So this is why, when you are continuously flooded with anxiety and stress, it is so hard to feel happy and that is what makes this mindfulness practice so incredibly important because you want to take the moments that you do have, where your brain is not screaming scary stories at you, to really capture that moment and embrace it because when you do that, it's a

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positive deposit in your nervous system. And if you're dealing with anxiety, your nervous system is probably really, really overwhelmed all the time with worry and stress.

So, anything we can do to make positive deposits is a good thing. But I think one of the things for people is we somehow get conditioned to believe we need to wait for happiness or we need to earn it or we need to work towards a long-term goal before we can experience it. And I think that thinking is actually quite backwards.

Your whole life cannot be about one goal or one dream. It's so important to be goal-oriented and an achiever. Like, I celebrate all of those things. But if you don't take moments for yourself to feel happy or to enjoy yourself or to do self-care, you're never going to make it. You're going to burn out.

And it is incredibly important that you don't burn out because the majority of our life is truly spent in the journey. And I'm sure there is some cliché quote out there that says that very thing and I kind of hate myself a little bit for saying something so cliché, however, it is true, so there we go.

So, in other words, you don't need to be passive and just wait for happiness to just fall in your lap or just to find you. Take control of it. Create it for yourself to the best of your ability one small step at a time because when you do that and the experience gets recorded by the body and the brain as something that was safe and enjoyable, the brain's going to flag it as such so it won't be so apprehensive to other moments that mimic the same feeling.

This goes back to this idea; what you focus on expands. So if you focus on negativity, more negativity will follow, right? It's going to trigger more negative thoughts. If you focus on trying to create happiness, it's going to trigger a whole new set of thoughts. And this isn't a perfect practice, but it's an active one. It's one you want to stay engaged with.

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So I'm sure you've noticed this. If you are an anxious person, you've probably noticed, the more you ruminate on an anxious thought, the more fearful you become, not less. Like, the more you spook yourself out, the more afraid you become.

And so I think sometimes we may have unconscious ideas that if we think long and hard enough about the thing that's making us feel afraid or anxious, that we might find a solution for it or that we might have control over the thing.

But the truth is that we don't. The trouble is that most of our fears and our anxieties are created by the imagination. So in some ways, they're not even real yet. They're very much created in the imagination. So the brain has a hard time working with that because it's looking for solutions for a hypothetical situation.

The brain needs facts and evidence to really process through it and find solutions. So working through a lot of hypotheticals when you actually don't know if it's going to work out because you actually don't really know if the thing you're afraid of is even going to happen, it spins a web of anxiety something fierce and it just keeps going and going and going and we end up getting stuck in this powerless thought loop thinking we're controlling the potential danger but actually we're just increasing our feelings about being unsafe.

And again, a lot of this makes sense because if you're stressed out and feeling emotionally threatened in some way, your brain's going to want to find some kind of solution for that. Like, if that's the story you're telling yourself, that something bad is going to happen, your survival mechanisms are going to kick on because now you're telling your brain a scary story and the brain has to react to that, right?

It's like, well shoot, if we're in trouble, I need to do something about this. But if your reaction is something hypothetical, it's going to be really hard to do anything with that. And so before you go down this path of blaming and

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shaming yourself for having such strong survival mechanisms, I want to stop you there.

These things serve a purpose. You need them. And if you had a traumatic experience, you absolutely needed them to survive. So take the time to appreciate this part of you that is so alert and is working so hard to keep you safe. And at the same time, we want to expand our awareness that not every single moment of our lives is scary and threatening, that sometimes, if it's appropriate, we can let our guard down and we can take a moment for mindfulness to let happiness in.

And so when we start to do this, it starts to create a little bit more of a balancing act. You start to have more mental and emotional resources available to yourself. So again, the goal here is not to eradicate these survival mechanisms because if something did happen, you would need them. But we do want to moderate and we do want to create an ability to be able to discern, am I actually in danger or is this actually a moment where I can embrace happiness?

Because I'm sure you've noticed, we, as humans, function best when we are in balance. And we notice this on very tangible levels, like too much good and that pushes us one way, too much bad and that pushes us one way. For example, if we overeat candy, we feel like crap. The same way, if we overeat vegetables – although it's hard to find someone who overeats vegetables, so I've heard this myth that this can happen. But if you overeat vegetables, it can give you the runs, and that's not good either.

So we are constantly needing to be in balance of both the good and the bad in our lives. And the goal of all of that is to get them to work together on the same team. So we need to create positive experiences for ourselves so we can stay in balance.

You cannot control every person, every thing, or environment in your life. And for that, you are going to need survival skills when you get taken by surprise to negative situations. However, your whole life, 24 hours a day,

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doesn't have to be miserable. You can be an active participant and create happiness for yourself.

Happiness is largely a feeling we generate inside of ourselves at any given time. It's not based on external people, things, or experiences. Everything in life is literally what we make it – back to episode five, the Stories We Tell Ourselves.

So, this is how we sometimes get this twisted because we live in a marketing culture and everybody wants to sell us something. So marketing and companies tend to prey on our fears because if we're afraid then we tend to put money out.

And because we're on our phones and because we're on our computers, we're saturated with ads all the time with all these promises of solving problems. And it's interesting in talking to people of how much sometimes the marketing makes us question our own happiness. Like, if I was skinny, would I be happy? If I had the man of my dreams, would I be happy? If I had this hair color and clear skin, would I be happy? Or if I had this house or this car or if I had this thing or this education or on and on and on it goes because it's meant to create some kind of fear-based deficit in ourselves.

And we start to wonder, am I really happy? Well maybe I need to drink that vitamin drink and then that will make me happy and maybe that will make me feel good. But again, happiness is an internal job. And so here's where it gets really twisted though is because sometimes, when we engage with external things, so clothes, makeup, cars, houses, the latest tech, we feel a certain way when we're interacting with those things.

And so a lot of times, we associate a feeling with the experience we're having. So if we buy a new car and that creates happiness, we might just start to think, well I need new cars to be happy, or I need a new house to be happy, or I need to make this much money to be happy. We start associating with it.

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But what the external did was just create a feeling of happiness inside of us because of the story we are telling ourselves around that. So again, it's not a bad thing to go on vacation and enjoy moments of happiness for yourself because of what you're engaging with. But again, I have met many people who have gone on fantastic vacations and have been miserable the entire time.

And I know you know those people too. You know the people that can ruin a party, that can ruin a good time because of their attitudes or their mindsets or how they're talking to people. We don't want to be those kinds of people.

So you want to learn how to create this happiness for yourself because it's a feeling. And so it's great, if a car makes you happy, that's wonderful, but for most of us, we can't buy new cars every single second of the day. So you have to learn how to generate that feeling of happiness that occurs for yourself in safe moments.

Okay, so here are some tips for how to cultivate happiness in your own life so you can really expand and focus on the happy moments. Okay, mindfulness is key. Take time each day to focus on some element that makes you happy. It can be nature, it can be music, it can be art, it can be reading. It can be a healthy conversation with another human, but you really want to focus on the body experience you're having in that moment of happiness.

And you want to absorb the full sensory experience of that in a moment. So you can do this by yourself or you can do this with someone else, but you really want to make this part of your daily life in carving out time. So I know, in other episodes, I've talked about self-care and carving out maybe 15 minutes in the morning for yourself. So if that works for you with this, then that's great.

But it may not play out quite that way because you might start to notice that maybe when you go on a walk at lunchtime, that's when you feel happy, or

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when you close your eyes for 30 seconds and just breathe, you feel happy. Now, I know that these sound like silly dumb things, but you are making positive deposits in your nervous system every time you take a moment to really let your brain record a moment of happiness.

So, don't attach any negative things to it. Don't go, well I was happy for a moment and then it was gone. Like, if you do that kind of thinking, you're robbing yourself of the happy experience. Don't make so much meaning out of it. Just experience it and let it happen.

And even if it's for a minute, because again, it doesn't really matter if it's for one minute because if you do it every day, that one minute is going to turn into two minutes and then three minutes and then four minutes, and before you know it, it's going to be the most impactful part of your day that you are taking control of.

So, this is why this is so incredibly important because when you start to train your brain to be mindful about things and to be able to focus on the right things that bring you joy and a feeling of happiness, you're going to start to do this a little bit more automatically in a lot of different environments or scenarios or by yourself. Because, as we talked about in the habits episode, every little step you take builds up to a bigger step, and this is absolutely true because the more you create spots in your brain for happiness, the more it's going to seek out similar feelings.

So this is really, really important. So what is important is when you are engaging in this mindful practice of trying to focus on the positive or you're listening to ocean waves crash or you're listening to music or you're staring at colorful art, if negative thoughts pop up while you are doing that very thing, just let them float by.

You notice them but you don't interact with them or attach meaning to it. You just let them pass by like a cloud in the sky and then you return your focus back to the present moment, back to the feeling of happiness.

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Now, I know for a lot of people that this can trigger some frustration because this is actually very hard to do at first. So if you need to take a class or you need to do this with someone, like a therapist or a coach or someone first to really get the trick of the thing and how to focus your brain on the happiness, then that's fine, right? We're always learning and growing.

Do not be afraid to reach out for help. Don't expect yourself to just know how to do things. That's going to create a frustration cycle and that goes exactly against everything we're talking about when it comes to creating happiness for yourself.

Okay, so number three, rig your results. So if you, off the top of your head, cannot figure out what makes your brain and body feel at ease or makes your brain feel happy, what generates a feeling of happiness – and by the way, I'm going to caveat this. If you have some addictions in your life that make you happy for a moment and then make you hate yourself for many more moments after that, those don't count, okay.

So you cannot use your addictions in this way because that's a whole different story for another day. But you can use things that make you feel happy that don't have consequences to them. So sometimes, it's taking a walk in the morning air. Sometimes it's taking a hike or meeting up with a group or going to a concert, like, figuring out and explore what makes your brain and body feel at ease, what encourages happiness inside you.

Be an explorer of this. What lights you up? And you could even keep a journal of this so that you can keep a record of the things you have figured out.

Lastly, I would encourage you to find your squad. Find likeminded people who are committed to self-improvement and are open to this idea of cultivating happiness. Many people aren't interested in self-improvement and they're not very self-aware and they end up creating a lot of drama for

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you and they create a lot of drama for everyone around them because they're just not really owning their own shit.

So you can't choose for them to change, but you can choose who you hang out with. So start to notice, who are the people that help you generate feelings of happiness? Don't be dependent on them. We're not creating dependency. But it's you noticing what creates happiness inside of yourself. Expand your world. Try new things. Don't let drama run your life or the people who create drama have influence over you.

Learn how to get control of your own mind and have influence over yourself. Learn to create happiness on your own terms in your own way.

Alright, my friends. I hope you found this encouraging and helpful. Claim your happiness, commit to the process of getting it, and create happy moments any time you feel you can. I am so rooting for you. Have a great week.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to nicolesymcox.com.