

# PERMA Overview

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## PERMA Model

### Well-being Theory

Happiness is a slippery concept. Sometimes it seems to us like the Holy Grail: mythical, wonderful, but probably unobtainable. But Positive Psychology suggests that happiness is more than obtainable. It is the natural result of building up our well-being and satisfaction with life. Professor Martin Seligman spent many years developing a theory of happiness. He wanted to identify the building blocks of well-being. He drew up a five-sided model of well-being called the PERMA model.

These are the five elements Seligman found essential to human well-being:



Each of these elements is essential to our well-being and satisfaction with life. Together, they form the solid foundation upon which we can build a happy and flourishing life.

### Positive Emotion

When someone asks you whether you are satisfied with your life, your answer depends heavily on the mood you are in. When you are feeling positive, you can look back on the past with gladness; look into the future with hope; and enjoy and cherish the present.

Why?

Positive emotions have an impact that goes far beyond bringing a smile to our faces. Feeling good helps us to perform better at work and study; it boosts our physical health; it strengthens our relationships; and it inspires us to be creative, take chances, and look to the future with optimism and hope. Feeling good is contagious. Seeing smiles makes us want to smile. Hearing laughter makes us feel like laughing. And when we share our good feelings with others, they appreciate and enjoy our company.

We have all experienced highs and lows in life, but we are doing ourselves harm when we dwell on the lows. If we look back on the past with pain and regret, we will become depressed. If we think of the future and worry about danger and risk, we become anxious and pessimistic. So it is

incredibly important to recognise the positive emotions we feel, so that we are able to enjoy the present without worry and regret.

How?

What is it that makes us feel good? It might be spending time with friends and family, engaging in hobbies, exercising, getting out in nature, or eating great food. We need to make sure there is always room in our lives for these things. Positive Psychology research has identified certain skills and exercises that can boost our experience of positive emotions. We can learn to feel them more strongly, and to experience them for longer. Cultivating positive emotions makes it easier to experience them naturally. Many of us have an automatic tendency to expect the worst, see the downside, and avoid taking risks. If we learn to cultivate positive feelings about life, we begin to hope for the best, see the upside, and learn to take great opportunities when they come along.

### Engagement

We don't thrive when we are doing nothing. We get bored and feel useless. But when we engage with our life and work, we become absorbed. We gain momentum and focus, and we can enter the state of being known as 'flow'. In Positive Psychology, 'flow' describes a state of utter, blissful immersion in the present moment.

Why?

In a word: momentum. When you are lying in bed, it is often hard to convince yourself to throw off the covers and plant your feet on the ground. You worry about the cold. You feel tired and sluggish. You lie in bed, thinking but not getting anywhere. But when you are running, you don't question anything. You are flying through space: one foot goes in front of the other, and again, and again, because it must. You are absorbed entirely in the present moment.

Not everyone enjoys running, but perhaps you feel this way when you are playing music, painting, dancing or cooking. If you have a job you love, you probably feel this way at work. We are most likely to fulfil our own unique potential when we are engaged in activities that absorb and inspire us.

How?

Much of the work of Positive Psychology involves identifying and cultivating personal strengths, virtues and talents. When we identify our own greatest strengths, we can consciously engage in work and activities that make us feel most confident, productive and valuable. We can also learn skills for cultivating joy and focus on the present. Mindfulness is a valuable skill taught by many counsellors. Using mindfulness, you can learn to develop a full and clear awareness of the present, both physically and mentally.

## Relationships

Humans are social animals. We have a need for connection, love, physical and emotional contact with others. We enhance our own well-being by building strong networks of relationships around us, with family, friends, coworkers, neighbours and all the other people in our lives.

Why?

You know the saying, 'a problem shared is a problem halved'? Well, it gets even better. Happiness shared is happiness squared. When we share our joy with those we love, we feel even more joy. And when we love, we become more loveable.

We depend on the people around us to help us maintain balance in our lives. When we are alone, we lose perspective on the world, and we forget that others may be bearing greater burdens than our own. But when we let other people into our lives, we remember to give as well as take. When you belong to a community, you have a network of support around you – and you are part of it.

How?

It is important to build and maintain relationships with the people in your life, but it is equally important to recognise the difference between a healthy relationship and a damaging one. Some relationships are dangerous because they are one-sided or co-dependent. Other relationships struggle because people take each other for granted, don't make time for each other, or can't seem to communicate.

The key to all relationships is balance. It is not enough to surround ourselves with 'friends' – we must also listen and share, make an effort to maintain our connections, and work to make those connections strong.

## Meaning

We are at our best when we dedicate our time to something greater than ourselves. This could be religious faith, community work, family, a political cause, a charity, a professional or creative goal.

Why?

Studies have shown that people who belong to a community and pursue shared goals are happier than people who don't. It is also very important to feel that the work we do is consistent with our personal values and beliefs. From day to day, if we believe our work is worthwhile, we feel a general sense of well-being and confidence that we are using our time and our abilities for good.



How?

What do you value most in this world? It might be family, or learning, or your faith. Perhaps you feel strongly about helping disadvantaged children, or protecting the environment. Once you have identified what matters most to you, find some like-minded people and begin working together for the things you care about. You can find meaning in your professional life as well as your personal one. If you see a deeper mission in the work you do, you are better placed to apply your talents and strengths in the service of this mission.

### Accomplishment

We have all been taught that 'winning isn't everything'. Yes, we should strive for success, but it's more important to enjoy the game. However, people need to win sometimes. What use are goals and ambitions if we never reach them? To achieve well-being and happiness, we must look back on our lives with a sense of accomplishment: 'I did it, and I did it well'.

Why?

Creating and working toward goals helps us anticipate and build hope for the future. Past successes make us feel more confident and optimistic about future attempts. There is nothing bad or selfish about being proud of your accomplishments. When you feel good about yourself, you are more likely to share your skills and secrets with others. You will be motivated to work harder and achieve more next time. You may even inspire the people around you to achieve their own goals.

How?

It is important to set yourself tangible goals, and keep them in sight. In Positive Psychology counselling, we encourage you to identify your ambitions and cultivate the strengths you need in order to reach them. Regular counselling is a great way to keep focused on your long-term goals and acknowledge the little successes along with the big ones. It is vital to cultivate resilience against failure and setbacks. Success doesn't always come easy, but if we stay positive and focused, we don't give up when adversity strikes.

Originally taken from: <https://relate.melbourne/well-being-theory/> (please note that the University of Melbourne has since updated its website and the original page is no longer available).