

Three Good Things

Three Good Things is an activity that gets students thinking positively by reflecting on good things that happen to them. For this activity, students are encouraged to write down 3 positive things that have happened to them every day for a week. These can be simple things like “my mom packed my favorite lunch” or more impactful positive events such as, “I got a great grade on my test!” After writing down their list of 3 good things, students are asked to reflect on why those things happened and how they can replicate more happy events in the future. As students do this activity, not only will they learn to recognize the good around them, but they will become more optimistic and happy (Carter et al., 2016).

Grade Level: All

Materials: Paper, writing utensil

Duration: 3-5 minutes daily, for one week. Repeat as needed.

Implementation: 1. Decide what time of day you will set aside for the activity each day. If you decide to do the activity at the beginning of the day, consider having students reflect on the previous day.
2. Introduce students to the idea of 3 good things and provide examples perhaps by sharing your own 3 good things.
3. Give students a few questions to get them reflecting on their positive things.
Examples: "Why did this good thing happen? What does this mean to you? How can you increase the likelihood of this event happening in the future?" (Seligman et al., 2009, p.301)
4. Provide students a few minutes to write down and reflect upon good things.

Does it work?

Much research has been done by Martin Seligman on this activity and its impact on wellbeing with its use as part of the Penn Resiliency Program, which has gained great acclaim for its effectiveness in improving wellbeing of students at the Geelong Grammar School (Seligman et al., 2009). Recent research has studied how to implement this activity with children and its impact on youth wellbeing. In one 2016 study, 606 children ages 9-11 were given a booklet to record 3 good things and a brief explanation each day over 1 week. At the conclusion of the activity, researchers found that the children reported an increase in happiness, decrease in depressive symptoms (Carter et al., 2016).

Two studies done in Anglesey, North Wales with nearly 700 elementary students from ages 8-11 found that when students recorded 3 positive events in a diary every day for a week it “resulted in significant increases in self-reported happiness and decreases in depressive symptoms” and increases in life satisfaction (Wingate, Suldo, & Peterson, 2018, p. 114). These positive effects remained at the three-month follow-up and the larger sample study found that this intervention was most helpful for the unhappiest of children. However, it is important to note that in the larger study “the happiest group of children displayed significantly reduced levels of happiness and higher levels of depression following the intervention” (Wingate, Suldo, & Peterson, 2018, p. 118). It is hypothesized that this small effect was because these children hit an emotional ceiling and did not engage in wellbeing practices after the completion of the study. The slight variance of results supports the idea that positive psychology interventions are not “universally applicable and that interventions tailored to the wellbeing needs of specific children will be more effective” (Wingate, Suldo, & Peterson, 2018, p. 119). Lastly, another benefit of this intervention is that administering it can be done by teachers as part of the fabric of their normal school day.

References:

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