

9 happiness helpers

It is possible to build a sunnier outlook in every room. Try these strategies for replacing negative patterns.

KEY PROCESSES

PEARLS

Screening Sometimes it feels as if you can replay childhood memories like a movie, and these scenes take on more importance than other life events. Freud called such past moments “screen memories” because we tend to filter our lives through them. Vivid as they appear in your head, these film clips belong in the basement with other old stuff. Try to stop reacting to them and live for today.

You can't live in the past. Now is it.

Pinging Also called mirroring, it is the feedback you receive from trusted loved ones. You use these sonar signals like dolphins that ping their way through jagged shoals to open water. If used correctly, pinging teaches you to follow your inner compass and not let other people's stinging comments set you off course. You ping mostly in the family room because relatives know just how to push your buttons.

Be authentic; be true to you.

A+B=C In the relationship equation, you are A, B is someone you have conflict with and C is the relationship. This equation is especially relevant whenever you're fighting with someone you love. If you want to change the outcome, it's simple: Change A, and C will change. You can't change anyone else.

You can change only yourself.

Venn diagram Sorry, all you *Jerry Maguire* fans, but “You complete me” isn't the goal here, because you already are a complete person. Make a circle with your index finger and your thumb on each hand and bring the two circles together so they overlap. The overlap shows how two people come together in a healthy relationship. You're each a full circle; connection is the goal, not a total merge.

We don't complete each other. We overlap.

Self-involvement Any overinvolvement in the self—positive or negative—will affect relationships in every other room of the house. Self-involvement, or narcissism, originates in the bathroom, at the mirror. You may not always like what you see, but whether you're too admiring or overly self-critical, walk away from the reflection in order to have a fuller, happier life.

It's not all about you.

It's not either/or...it's both/and The idea is to give up the all-or-nothing mentality and realize two contrasting ideas can be true at once. You may be furious at someone and love him or her at the same time. Disagree but be civil. This is most useful at the kitchen table, where conflict is on the menu. Learn to tolerate discomfort and not let conflict or disagreements get you down.

Conflict can be OK.



Acting out When you can't express yourself, you tend to misbehave in passive but noticeable ways—for instance, arriving late to meet someone you're angry with or “forgetting” to tell a respected elder you have to miss the family reunion. Acting out happens in every area of your life, but especially in situations in which someone, such as a grandparent or boss, has authority over you.

Actions speak louder than words.

Too much of a good thing is a bad thing Being too nice or too giving allows others' needs to suck the life out of you. It occurs so often in the living room, we call it “the giving room.” (You'll also see it in the kids' room and family room.) Remember, the airlines tell you to put on your own oxygen mask first! Take care of yourself. (No, it's not selfish; it's simply self-preservation.)

Know your limits. Be strong to help others.

Not to decide is to decide If you're putting off a decision, know that delaying is a form of action. By choosing to postpone, you may miss out on achieving your goals or regret not moving ahead in your life. It's like the old saying—nothing ventured, nothing gained. But something may be lost.

Go (with the status quo) or grow.