

Gratitude Habits

- Gratitude Workshop -

Practicing gratitude can be a really useful tool which can help to combat negative thoughts and practice positive thinking. As with many mental well-being activities and coping strategies it is integral to repeat them until they become habits, which is when we receive the benefits of these wellbeing exercises in their entirety.

The best place to start before practicing gratitude is to schedule an allotted time for this activity (this can be as little as 10 minutes) where you can have some weekly consistency; for example, it could be every Monday for 10 minutes in the morning. As you become more comfortable you may increase the days or the time and experiment with different gratitude activities below.

Through these activities we are practicing positive thinking which is integral for increasing our own mental well-being as many of us may be negative thinkers. It is about achieving balance and reducing stress. This one activity will not cure or entirely remove negative thoughts, but it will contribute to the bigger picture and can be used with other coping strategies to live a mentally healthier lifestyle.

Why is gratitude important?

Within a branch of psychology that focuses on positivity and positive emotions, it has been found that practicing gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater well-being and personal happiness.

Gratitude enables people to nurture positive emotions which in turn can help combat and reduce negative thoughts. It is often that we are unable to see the positive aspects of our own lives due to the overwhelming shadow negativity can have, but practicing gratitude will enable to us to see past this shadow.

If you find it hard to focus and find the positive aspects of your life at first, keep trying, as gratitude is as much a skill as it is a state of mind. With each practice you will become quicker at focusing and finding positivity and in time it will become more automatic.

Ways in which to practice gratitude.

There are a variety of ways to practice gratitude, and some will suit you better than others depending on where you currently are in your life. I have listed five of the most effective ways to practice gratitude; try and at least practice one of these methods but the more you can introduce into your life the better. (If you are going for just one method, I recommend the 'Gratitude Journal' or 'Gratitude Walk', as these methods can be reused every day.

Write a Letter: Think about someone who has had a major impact on your life, someone who you would like to thank, or someone who you appreciate having in your life. Write a letter with specific details about what it is you appreciate about them and send it.

Visit Someone who you Appreciate: Write a letter to someone you appreciate as described above, but instead of mailing it, deliver the letter in person. Do not tell them why you are visiting! Read them the letter, and then allow them to keep it as a memento.

Say "Thank You": Keep your eyes open throughout the day for reasons to say "thanks". Try to recognise the small actions people do every day that might be overlooked such as a colleague who always goes the extra mile, or a friend who always seems willing to listen.

Take a Gratitude Walk: Go for a walk and make a special effort to appreciate your surroundings. When taking a walk stop for a moment, sit if you want to and engage all 5 senses. Spend a few minutes focusing on each of your senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) to find new things you may not have noticed. Be mindful and find the things you may not have noticed before, background sounds, small things you can see such as a leaf and focus on the detail in it, you might notice the smell of flowers, a pretty building, or a soothing breeze.

Journal about Gratitude: One of the easiest ways to form gratitude habits is to practice 'Gratitude Journaling'. Using this method, you are to record anything that you are grateful for, this could be a person who is important to you, a fond memory or a place that is special to you. You can even write down things that others may take for granted but you appreciate due to past circumstances, like a hot cup of tea and a cheeky biscuit. If you find it hard to express what you are thankful for then just start with vague statements to begin with; just include a name of the person or their relation to you, or the name of a place you are grateful for having visited. As you get more comfortable journaling, I want you to elaborately document the people you are grateful for, even describe memories in detail that you are grateful for having. If you would like more structure with your journaling to begin with, use our 'Why I'm Grateful' worksheet.

Just remember; on the days that you are feeling especially 'down', remember to practice these gratitude techniques and form positive wellbeing habits.