AfHA Ep 1\_Emotion

So, hello and welcome to The Happtivist Podcast. At Action for Happiness Australia, we want to inspire action for a compassionate and connected society. To do this, we use and share the science of wellbeing, but in a way that you can connect with, understand and apply it immediately. So, in this podcast, we promote individual and collective action.

We want to empower you with your wellbeing, provide ideas, make connections, and inspire you. So, who are we?

Well, hello. I'm Narelle Lemon. I'm the chair for Action for Happiness Australia. I'm also an educator, coach and researcher, and I'm passionate about self-care and translating this into the everyday.

Hello, I'm Linda Rowley. Secretary of Action for Happiness Australia. I'm also a facilitator, coach and trainer. I'm passionate about wellbeing at work and the restorative power of walking in nature and its benefits to our body, brain and mind.

At Action for Happiness Australia, our purpose is to inspire action for a compassionate and connected society. We're aligned with the Action for Happiness, UK, who have identified the 10 Keys to Happier Living, which research consistently suggests tending to make life happier and more fulfilling.

In this episode we'll be talking about one of those 10 Keys, Emotion: taking a positive approach. So, let's have a look at what Vanessa King, Psychologist at Action for Happiness UK has to say about this key.

“Experiencing positive emotions, even just briefly, can result in greater creativity, attention, connection, trust, and resilience.”

“Emotions are part of what makes us human and have helped us survive as a race. They are signals that something's right, or alternatively that something's wrong. Emotions are central to happiness, and recently science has shown that feeling good isn't just a side benefit from things going well, it's actually an important ingredient of it. Pleasant emotions don't just feel good, they actually do us good too, and have important consequences for our wellbeing, our development and our resilience. Feeling good feels good, but that's not all it also appears to do us good and helps us do well, too.”

Nice words from Vanessa.

There is quite a bit in that, so let's explore it further.

So key point 1 is that all emotions are helpful, adaptive and useful. So, all emotions are data. They give us information about our situation and our experience from an evolutionary perspective, they help us survive and adapt within our environment. So, in this respect, we can't really label emotions as good or bad. They are just emotions, all helpful and useful to us in certain circumstances.

Yeah, really nice point. And another point to think about is negativity bias. So, psychologist and author, Rick Hanson is famous for saying our brain is like Velcro for the bad and Teflon for the good. That is so much stronger. It sticks to us.

You can just imagine that Velcro sticks to our clothes. It gets caught in our washing, anything stuck with Velcro sticks. And then if we think of Teflon, perhaps that gorgeous frypan that we've got, and we're making our Friday eggs, our you know, fritters or something like pancakes, it just slides off so easily when the Teflon is there.

So, Let's do a little experiment just for a moment. Cast your mind back to yesterday. What stands out for you? If you like most of us it's likely to be that negative or annoying thing. Oh, that interaction that just frustrated you like no tomorrow and possibly even something that you were criticized for.

So, this has the negativity bias on that day, the negative emotions we experienced are more likely to be ones that stick, the ones that we remember, and we focus more on rather than the positive. That's what negative bias could look like. And so, in terms of positive emotions, we're not disregarding the negative, but we don't want to get stuck there either.

So, don't just minimize or ignore your emotions, pleasant or unpleasant, but be mindful of what you're feeling and what your emotions are telling you. So even emotions, we label negative, such as anger as still functional and adaptive for us. So, for instance, anger promotes our survival. It can make us aware of an injustice and then motivate us to solve problems or to act in relation to that injustice.

Similarly, fear can prompt us to act and move away from that, you know, Sabretooth tiger or that fast moving tram. So negative emotions aren't a bad thing but feeling fearful or angry on an ongoing basis has a negative impact on our wellbeing.

So key 0.4 is about a focus on pleasant emotions, but in an authentic way. So, if we think about your day, you are more likely to experience a mix of emotions and we can choose where we want to put our focus.

So, Linda Ray at Neurocapability coined the term “attentional intelligence”. That is about noticing where your attention is and intentionally deciding where you want to be.

So, like warming your hands on an open fire. Your front is toasty, but you might be noticing the chill of the air on your back. So where do you put your focus?

So, Vanessa king talks about creating a jolt of joy or pocket of playfulness each day. And what are these positive emotions? It could be joy, love, or pride, hope, gratitude, appreciation.

So many of them, their list is absolutely massive, and they don't have to be high intensity of emotions, positive emotions, such as contentment and interest or curiosity have just as much impact. So, the research suggests it's about the frequency, not the intensity. So, we are very much thinking now, where do we put out pleasant emotions and how do we apply them in an authentic way so we can train our brain to notice what's good and squeeze the most out of them.

So really focusing and switching, and this is the lovely way because it corresponds nicely to that negative bias. I'm thinking the other flip side of it is the more we focus on the pleasant emotions in an authentic way. We can interrupt that focus of our natural capability, where our brain wants to take us focusing on that negative.

Absolutely Narelle, and I think it's important to point out too, that we're not talking about toxic positivity here. So, we're talking about taking the good with the bad and looking at, you know, how we focus on the good, but we're not talking about being Pollyanna or taking a good vibes only, or falsely positive approach.

It is important that we are authentic about those positive emotions, and we also sit with and acknowledge the negative emotions that we might be experiencing as well. So, we're talking about just deliberately noticing the good things that happen and the pleasant emotions we feel when they arise for us.

Yeah, going beyond noticing we can also intentionally Savour. Savouring is a really nice positive emotion, and we'll talk about some of those examples as we connect with the, what it looks like in the everyday, but savouring means that you're really tuning into the pleasant emotion and you're relishing it.

So, I'd love savouring, because you can focus on the here and now, the past or the future, and the benefits are just the same. So, it can be things like reminiscing on a past holiday and really savouring the beach that we were able to walk along and the beautiful scenery that was there and during COVID savouring is actually something that's really becoming quite apparent for us.

And we can really connect with beautiful moments of connection, and also we can plant the seeds of looking forward to future events. The savouring comes into that sort of way of engaging with those positive emotions.

It absolutely does. So, let's go back to Vanessa’s quote, one of the things that she points out there also is that pleasant emotions don't just feel good, they actually do us good too. They have important consequences for our wellbeing, our development and our resilience. So, what does that actually mean?

Barbara Fredrickson, who's a prominent researcher on positive emotions has found that. Positive emotions contribute to our wellbeing in two keyways. So, the first one is that they broaden our thinking and secondly, they help to build our resilience over time.

So, broadening our thinking. That means we're able to think more creatively. We're able to think of more solutions, more ideas, be more creative and to explore, take in more information when we're experiencing positive emotions. And that can help us in a whole range of situations from home-schooling our kids, ideas around work projects, or even cooking dinner.

And the build element, the second element refers to the role of positive emotions in creating what she calls an upward spiral, building our physical and psychological resources so that we have a well that we can draw from when the going gets tough. And just by way of the example one of my favourite things to do is walking in nature.

So, for instance, we might go out for a walk which helps us feel good. Both physically, as well as mentally during our walk, we might actually then think of a creative idea or a project, and we might then invite a colleague to collaborate on that project, which strengthens our relationships and support.

It might also then in that upward spiral, give us a sense of achievement, which we know is also good for our wellbeing, and then that can ripple out to the positive impact that that has on our family and friends as well.

I love that positive ripple. It's just, it starts with one small action, doesn't its Linda? And then there's just the ripple just keeps on, keeps on going. And it's a small, powerful way, just magnificent.

Absolutely. So that's the emotional contagion. And, you know, as the saying goes, no man, or woman is an island. And it's really [00:13:00] true when it comes to emotions. The emotional contagion is the spontaneous spread of emotions. So it is that ripple. And if you, if you think about it, you probably know people that are kind of bubbly and energetic and upbeat, and whenever you catch up with them, you can just feel that yourself, you start to feel more positive and more alive around them. So, we can create those ripples of joy to others as well.

Most definitely, and I would also say that the contagion can happen from someone who, you know, we might describe as being really Zen and really centered and grounded. And there's something about being somebody who's just totally present in that moment, and you know, it's almost a bit of awe isn't it, of you know, the space that they've created for themselves and then how that ripples off and, you know, the connection to deep breath feeling grounded, totally present. You want a bit of it yourself.

Absolutely. Absolutely. You do.

I was thinking also about what positive emotions can look like in the everyday Linda, and I was thinking about some different examples and, you know, we've talked about savouring. We talked specifically about maybe savouring a past holiday or trip, savouring the planning for the future once we're all out of different lockdowns and we can, borders are open, and we can move around.

But there's also things like savouring time, when you connecting with a friend ever, and it can be ever so small, it could be from text messages, right through to a phone conversation, perhaps a COVID safe walk around the environment if they're in your k’s, as we talk about now.

But even things like my Chinese Herbal Doctor talks about watching two dogs play and it, you just can't but smile. And I always smile every time when she shares this story with me because she so happy about it. And then she's recollecting watching two dogs play and they might be wrestling with each other or they've got a stick and it's just joyful, and those sorts of things.

And I was also thinking about things like on this morning's walk, there was this massive pile of dirt on the football oval and it appeared within the sort of last 24 hours. And there was a suggestion by my partner this morning to run up that pile and maybe throw my hands in the air and throw some dirt around and go “I’m the king of the mountain!” and this like whole playful notion and whether I did or didn't do it, the positive emotions and the giggles and the fun and the play that came from the suggestion. and, you know, if I did or didn't do it, which I'm not going to reveal also provides that positive emotion for myself, but my partner and also those that were also out walking and observing those sorts of things.

And the everyday can be things like dancing around the house to music. I love it when you can just turn the volume up really loud to your favourite song. You know, being in awe of grand buildings and magnificent nature. And that can even be when we're watching them on the screen by a documentary and just that absolute awe of, you know, man-made or nature. I love cooking at home and enjoying different spices and the positive emotions that come from that, the tasting, when you combine them creating a new spice mix, it could be a rub and applying that to different recipes.

And we could even talk about, you know, work and connecting to activities that we carry out where we're using our strengths and we really enjoy what we're doing and what that brings to us. And possibly when we're doing something that we enjoy, those who are watching or working with us in a team, or part of us shining with what we do has that influence as well with our positive emotions.

So that's really sort of anything and everything positive emotions can really be engaged with. And it's, it's absolutely incredible what, you know, those small little aspects that we've talked about, Linda can actually come through the everyday.

Absolutely Narelle, and for me, it's often things that happen spontaneously or unexpectedly. The moments that I really find joy in. So for instance, recently I was walking through some, oh, actually I was riding my bike through some wetlands and there was some water still over the path from recent floods and so myself and the person I was with, we decided to screw up all our courage and, you know, I ride kind of along the path anyway.

And it was just the best, like just the enjoyment. It was like jumping in puddles when you're a kid, you know, because it just had that element of, it was something that was unexpected. It was new, it was different. It was a bit risk taking and yeah, it was just, you know, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful.

So, for me, it's often those things and, and I guess it's about kind of being present to what you're doing, to be able to find those moments or to create those opportunities to be spontaneous or fun as well. And I often find conversely that sometimes my most contented moments are the ones that just kind of sneak up on me when I might be doing something that's just so routine at home. I might be wiping down the kitchen bench after a nice meal. And just feel that sense of contentment, you know? Yeah. That everything's right in the world, which is just nice.

Yeah, and I love that point that it can happen in the most usual everyday mundane moments and the spontaneity that comes with those situations and what they can do for you. And it's also hearing about other people talk about it, cause I'm still smiling from your story of the bike. And I can imagine you wheezing through this messy puddle, gigantic puddle of water going everywhere, there's, you know, and the laughs and the giggles and the possible arms and legs thrown out in the air. And yeah, really nice.

Yes. We ended up incredibly wet, but very happy, so that was nice. And, you know, we need positive emotions, and I sometimes think we tend to undervalue them, undervalue the fun aspect in the seriousness of life, and so some of the things that, you know, research indicates that people who experience more positive emotions do better in a whole range of aspects. They live longer. they, you know, have better mental health, they're likely to earn more money, have better relationships. They often are more well liked and believe it, or not, often are also thought of as being more attractive, which I found really interesting in the research. And they're also good at setting and achieving goals.

Sounded like you wanted to add something there? No, I was like, oh, the more attractive aspect. Isn't that interesting in terms of, I would, is that about the positive contagion, again, that you want to be around people who are smiling or enjoying what they're doing or can express themselves in ways that are connected to the vast variety of positive emotions. We kind of, yeah, more attracted to that, then those who perhaps are a bit down or negative, particularly consistently. Still acknowledging the ups and downs and very much embracing those ups and downs, but you know, the attractiveness to someone.

Yeah. The impact of that. It's a really interesting point.

It is, isn't it? I was fascinated by that one. So in terms of tips for day-to-day and increasing positive emotion, going back to Vanessa King, from the Action for Happiness in UK, some of the things she talks about is celebrating your tiny day-to-day achievements, and she talks about micro moments of having kind of, you know, private or personal celebrations. So being able to reflect on things that you've done. Which really resonates with me celebrating those small things that are in, usually our every day.

So nice. Yeah. And there is the catch, the joy from others. So, noticing and sharing and other people's joy. So, it's not only about yours, but it's also appreciating others. And when we appreciate others, that contagion effect, you know, and it comes back to us and that's, you know, really connected to empathy sharing a sense of also joy, but also there can be aspects there where, we share a sense of suffering and we can acknowledge that and we can empathize with it being careful not to wear it, but also acknowledging it.

And you know that positive empathy in terms of activities where we would reward the centres in our centres in our own brain. And we feel good and motivated as we help others to feel good. And we feel good for them as well. And it can spark throughout conversations, but the space we can hold for them as well as we listen and support.

Absolutely, and they might even catch some Zen from us as well.

Love it.

Another of Vanessa's tips is to find a way to create a jolt of joy or a pocket of playfulness. I love the language around this each and every day. So that is around pausing just to notice, you know, the beauty around you. So, you might watch a funny, I was going to say video, I still have DVDs at home, but people stream them now, don’t they?

Watch a funny show. You might contact a friend or, you know, someone that you feel good from after speaking to. So, there's lots of ways that we can incorporate positive emotions into our everyday.

Yeah. I really liked that, celebrating, catching and finding our way, three key aspects there that we could remember with that.

So, we've loved connecting with you and sharing insights into this episode about emotion, taking a positive approach.

And in our show notes, we'll have heaps of links for you to help you and to support you as you inquire for that and find out more. We want to know what you think as well and what you've been inspired by. And if you've got any questions that you would like us to answer and investigate in future episodes.

So, leave a review on Apple, because reviews help us be found and they help us help others. Plus, it's your action as well in you helping others as they discover various different aspects in our podcast.

You may like to leave a comment, or a question and you can do this by Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn as well without our accounts.

So you can find us at [www.actionforhappinessaustralia.org](http://www.actionforhappinessaustralia.org) We're also on Facebook and LinkedIn as Action for Happiness Australia. And on Instagram, we are, #Happtivist, that’s HAP P T I V I S T spreading the happy around the world.

So, it's been great that you've been here, Linda loved this conversation, thank you.

Thanks Narelle. It's been a pleasure and we look forward to connecting with you once again.

**Links to find out more about positive emotions**

[Barbara Fredrickson The Positivity Ratio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_hFzxfQpLjM)

[Are you getting enough positivity in your diet?](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/are_you_getting_enough_positivity_in_your_diet)

[The neuroscience of savouring positive emotions](https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/the-athletes-way/201507/the-neuroscience-savoring-positive-emotions)

[4 of the most important positive emotions and what they do](https://www.psychologytoday.com/au/blog/click-here-happiness/202109/4-the-most-important-positive-emotions-and-what-they-do)

[How positive emotions improve our health](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_positive_emotions_improve_our_health)