

The Animal Happiness Academy

Module 1

Loving Kindness Workbook



Age 5+

This workbook is for those who want to benefit from positive psychology in order to become resilient to live happier and healthier lives. It presents the science behind the story, and offers exercises and interventions to help with anxiety, stress and depression.

It's for children, parents, grandparents, family members, grown-ups, friends, carers, teachers and coaches. It's really a way of life, which you can start at any time. It's presented in a simple, accessible format and utilises substantial research, founded in positive psychology, to study: "human functioning (that) aims to discover and promote the factors that allow individuals and communities to thrive."

The story of Duchess encourages us all to practice Loving-Kindness. Research shows that if practised from the early years, it promotes improved self-awareness and enables the development of personal resilience. We become happier, live longer and have healthier lives

Workbook - Loving Kindness

The effects of stress is much discussed and is seen as a major disrupter to health and wellbeing. However, the following points must be noted: Stress can be good. It keeps us alert and able to respond to danger when we need to run from 'the tiger.'

The stress hormone, cortisol, which is released by the adrenal glands helps to deal with threat and helps us to survive. It is therefore a good thing for that moment. That bit keeps us alive. We respond in terms of fight, flight or freeze. Ideally, we need to come out of this stress response and move back to homeostasis, or a balanced state of being when the threat has gone. Animals are really good at coming out of this state, by utilising their body to shake it out; to somatically move through the threat and subsequent stress response, they return to a happy state of being, especially when they live in their natural environment.

We are wired to hold onto the negative experience that keeps us alert to predators and subsequently alive. It is an essential mechanism for resilience. However, today we tend to stay continuously in the stress response, making us anxious and wreaking havoc with our immune system. The reasons why are numerous and tend to be unique to the individual and their specific situation. What may be stressful to one person, might not be stressful to the other person. Environmental, genetic or food factors must also be taken into consideration. We do recommend that any diagnosis and intervention is supported by professionals and with your medical doctor.

However, we know that continuous anxiety can affect the development of your neural pathways in your brain, which determine your character or behaviour. These pathways can become stilted or frayed under stress, which can inhibit the development of character strengths, which enables you to be fully present to love and kindness that Duchess celebrates. Developing these pathways have health and well-being benefits and help to support the development of close and reciprocal relationships, which help us live long and enriched lives.

We know that practice really helps. Think of it as developing a new muscle, you need to exercise it in order to see the results. Below are a number of exercises or interventions that you can practice as a family, group of friends, in the classroom or with your favourite animal.



Exercise 1: Body Scan and Mindfulness

The purpose of this exercise is to become fully mindful of one's own body, and to engage the parasympathetic nervous system and release the happy hormone, oxytocin. Sometimes through stress or a traumatic event, you can disengage emotionally from your own body, and that can stop you from being fully present as to what is good for you. Sometimes this connection can be difficult, so we always ask Duchess to help us with this. At the Animal Happiness Academy, we ask our horses and dogs to assist us with this. If you have a pet animal at home, you may want to ask them to support the practice of the body-scanning meditation. However, we know the picture of Duchess as a visualisation, can support this as well.

Body Scan with Duchess

- Focus on her ears and breathe deeply, and ask her what she is hearing.
- Focus on her eyes and breathe deeply, and ask her what she might be seeing.
- Focus on the nose and breathe deeply, and ask her what she might be smelling.
- Focus on the mouth and breathe deeply, and ask her what she might be tasting.
- Focus on her neck and shoulders, and ask her if she is comfortable or has any pain.
- Focus on her heart and breathe deeply, gently stroke her heart, and tell her that you love her.
- Focus on her tummy and breathe very deeply, and ask her if she is comfortable or has any pain.
- Focus on her hips, breathe very deeply and ask her if she is comfortable or has any pain.
- Focus on her back, breathe very deeply and ask her if she is comfortable or has any pain.
- Focus on her legs and toes, breathe very deeply, and ask her if she comfortable or has any pain.

You can spend as long or as little on this exercise. From a minute a day, as often as you like, but the longer and more often you do it is definitely beneficial and more fun.

When you are ready, you can try doing a body scan on yourself:

- Focus on your ears and breathe deeply, and ask what you can hear.
- Focus on your eyes and breathe deeply, and ask what you can see.
- Focus on your nose and breathe deeply, and ask what you can smell.
- Focus on your mouth and breathe deeply, and ask you what you can taste.
- Focus on your neck and shoulders, and ask if you are comfortable or have any pain.
- Focus on your heart and breathe deeply, gently stroke your heart and say that you love you.
- Focus on your tummy and breathe very deeply, ask if you are comfortable or have any pain.
- Focus on your hips, breathe, very deeply, ask if you are comfortable or have any pain.
- Focus on your back, breathe very deeply, ask if you are comfortable or have any pain.
- Focus on your legs and toes, breathe very deeply, ask if you are comfortable or have any pain.



Heart to Heart exercises

Duchess loves to be stroked. It activates what we call the care and sympathetic nervous system, helping Duchess to calm down and feel safe. She loves it, and we know through scientific research that physical touch helps to release oxytocin, which can take away emotions that upset us and calms down the cardiovascular system, lowering blood pressure. It's basically good for all of us!

You can do this as often as you like.

- Visualise stroking Duchess over her body and particularly her heart area, or stroke your own pet at home.
- Place your both of your hands over your heart, and gently stroke the heart area, sometimes in round circles. You can also touch your cheek if you feel more comfortable, or rub your tummy.

This is a way to show kindness and compassion to yourself and other animals. Remember if you touch animals do it either under professional observation, and if it's your own pet, always check that it's safe to do so. And like Duchess, be careful of strangers.

At the Animal Happiness Academy, we offer online coaching to support you on this amazing journey, and you can come to see us at our centre in Gloucestershire.

If you have any questions please do contact us for further information at info.animalhappinessacademy.co.uk



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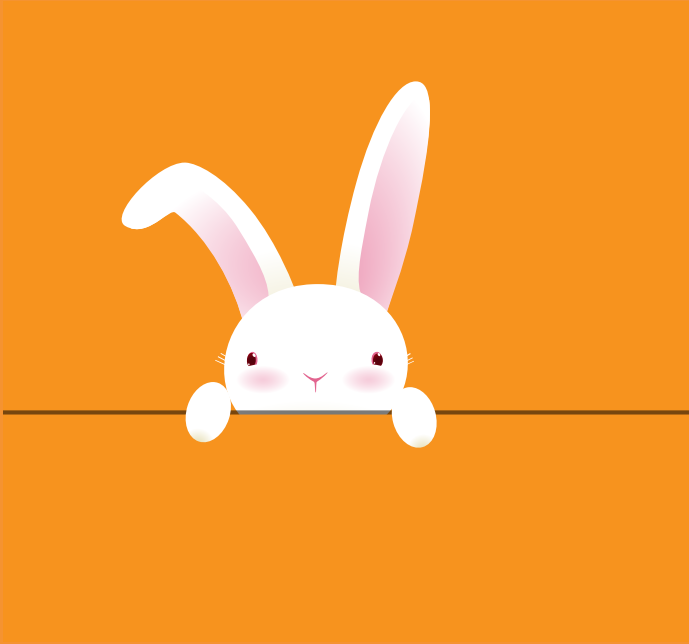
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