

The Animal Happiness Academy

Module 2

Joy and Gratitude Workbook



Age 5+

This workbook is for those who want to benefit from positive psychology in order to become resilient and live happier and healthier lives. It presents the science behind the story, and offers exercises and interventions to help with anxiety, grief 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 simply, 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 Layla encourages us all to practice Joy and Gratitude. Research shows that if practised from the early years, it enables the development of personal resilience. We become happier, live longer and have healthier lives.

Workbook - Joy and Gratitude

The power of Gratitude is probably one of most researched interventions in Positive Psychology. According to Robert Emmons, an eminent psychologist, it has the power to heal, energise and change lives. Grateful people identify good things in their life, recognise the source or cause of goodness, are more socially engaged, satisfied and happier with life.

Living a life of gratitude becomes a way of life. The act of being thankful is seen as the foundation to having a good life. Layla, for example, accepts both the good and the bad that each day presents, always remaining grateful for the small things that replenish her and her family. No matter what, she remains social and socially aware. She sees life as a gift. She is continually forgiving, compassionate and wants to do good things for others. Such an attitude promotes the development of intimate and lasting relationships.

Such practice helps us to process grief and anxiety. It works on depression, stress and gives us the vehicle to really celebrate joy. Just like Layla does everyday.

The science is quite amazing. The practice of gratitude changes the neural pathways or structures in the brain. It enables the development of new neural pathways and facilitates healing those that may have frayed due to an unpleasant event or an emotional challenge. Gratitude triggers the neurotransmitters responsible for our managing our emotions like dopamine, serotonin and norepinephrine, bringing us into a homeostasis or a much more balanced state. It thereby improves our immune system.

We know that practice of being thankful and joyful really helps us become more resilient, and gives us the tools to celebrate joy when it happens. 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: The Gratitude List

Layla is very aware of what she is grateful for on a day to day basics. She is happy with clean water and tasty food. You can make a list on what you are grateful for and place it on the fridge for example. It can be a list of people who helped you that day, being grateful for your pet. Sharing it with your friends and family helps to build the gratitude practice and allow those neurotransmitters to do their work.



Exercise 2: Gratitude Letter

Writing a gratitude letter is something that you could share with someone that has had an impact on your life, both good and bad.

You may not want to send it, but it helps to you reflect on the experience and see how it has brought you to this moment in time. You could draw or paint it as well.

Exercise 3: Keeping a Gratitude Cookie Jar

Dog lovers and owners all know that dogs can leap with joy when you open the Jar of Appreciation, and give them a titbit or a treat. They may have been naughty, chewed your favourite book and spend time in the dog house, but everything is soon forgotten when the cookie jar is open and shared.

If we keep a jar and write three good things that have happened to us in that day, no matter what might have happened, it helps us to recognise those moments of joy and assists us to come through periods of grief, giving us the strength to look beyond it. It makes us resilient and stronger. You could reflect on the contents of the cookie jar at the end of the week, or month. Or some people do it at the end of the year.

You can practice this with your own animal as they continually show us how grateful they are. Or you can practice it with Layla, and visualise her in your mind's eye. We know that works! 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.

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

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

References:

Robert Emmons on the power of gratitude: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jLjVOvZufNM>

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