

# What Is Positive Psychology | PERMA To PP2.0 | Courses

Positive Psychology is the scientific study of happiness, wellbeing, and positivity. Actually, it is the study of every aspect that makes life most worth living.

The field was created to fill a void in psychology. Traditional psychology mainly focused on psychological diseases, neglecting the positive aspects of human life. Positive psychology began to investigate what makes us happy and [mentally strong](#).

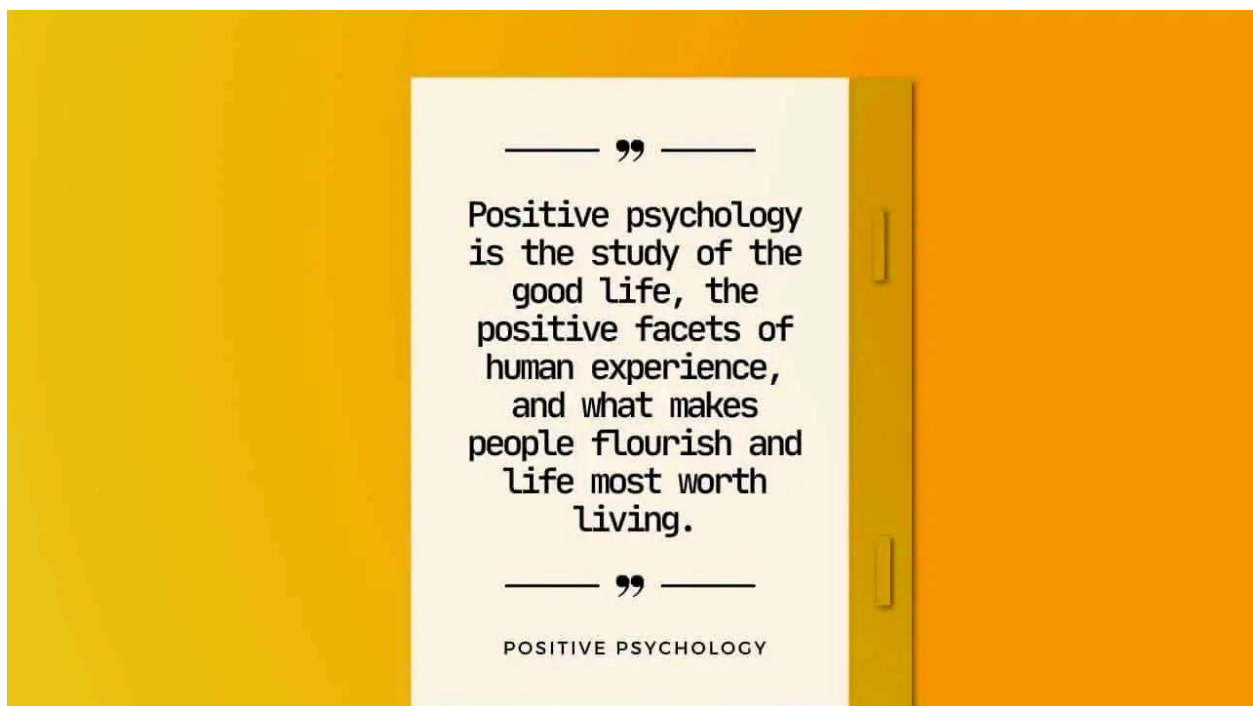
We know that the mere absence of disease does not make us healthy. Similarly, mental health is not the mere absence of mental illness. The mere absence of sadness is not equivalent to happiness. And, happiness is not always a smile.

*“Health is a state of complete positive physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”*

*— WHO, Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization (1946)*

## What Is Positive Psychology?

Positive psychology is essentially the science of happiness and wellbeing, but also includes the study of the aspects of life, including suffering, that make it worth living. It examines [the meaning of life](#), the welfare of society, and the [methods of increasing life satisfaction](#). A few of its core topics are [gratitude](#), [resilience](#), [flow](#), [hope and optimism](#), and [mindfulness](#).



Positive psychology debuted in 1998 when [Martin Seligman gave his presidential address](#) to the American Psychological Association (APA). He invited eminent psychologists to embark on a new quest to identify and find ways to boost human **Strengths and Virtues** so that people and societies could prosper and live healthier and happier lives.

*Positive psychology is the study of how human beings prosper in the face of adversity.*

*— Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000*

Positive psychology (PP) is the study of the good life, the positive facets of human experience, and [what makes people flourish](#) and life most worth living.

Initially, positive psychology focused on *positive states*, *positive traits*, and *positive institutions* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000):

1. **Positive states** mean feeling great, feeling grateful, feeling proud, and feeling alive.
2. **Positive traits** mean character, and also things like talents and interests that we consider to be positive characteristics, along with grit, self-control, kindness, sense of humor.
3. **Positive institutions** indicate our schools, our religious places, our sports teams, our cultural traditions, and the things that really support us in feeling good and being good.

Wikipedia says, “*Positive emotions are concerned with being content with one’s past, being happy in the*

*present, and having hope for the future. Positive individual traits focus on one's strengths and virtues. Finally, positive institutions are based on strengths to better a community of people.”*

Positive psychologists study the strengths, virtues, and talents that play a vital part in the successful functioning and flourishing of individuals and communities.

Christopher Peterson, a founder of the positive psychology movement and the author of [A Primer in Positive Psychology](#), explained in 2008:

*Its value is to complement and extend the problem-focused psychology that has been dominant for many decades.*

Beware, at any point, positive psychology does **not** advise ignoring the problems that people face. It also does *not* try to negate other areas of psychology that strive to treat mental health issues like depression, anxiety, bipolar, or personality disorders.

And, of course, according to positive psychology, being positive does **not** mean being [toxic positive](#).

## **History of Milestones in Positive Psychology (PP)**

Some consider **William James** to be “America’s first positive psychologist” (Taylor, 2001). In his presidential address to the APA in 1906, James raised the question of why some people were able to utilize their resources to their fullest capacity and others were not.

Fifty years from James’ presidential address, the term “positive psychology” first appeared in the last chapter of **Abraham Maslow**’s book *Motivation and Personality* (1954). The chapter was titled “*Toward a Positive Psychology*.” Maslow wrote:

*The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side; it has revealed to us much about man’s shortcomings, his illnesses, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his full psychological height. It is as if psychology had voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that the darker, meaner half.*

— Maslow, 1954

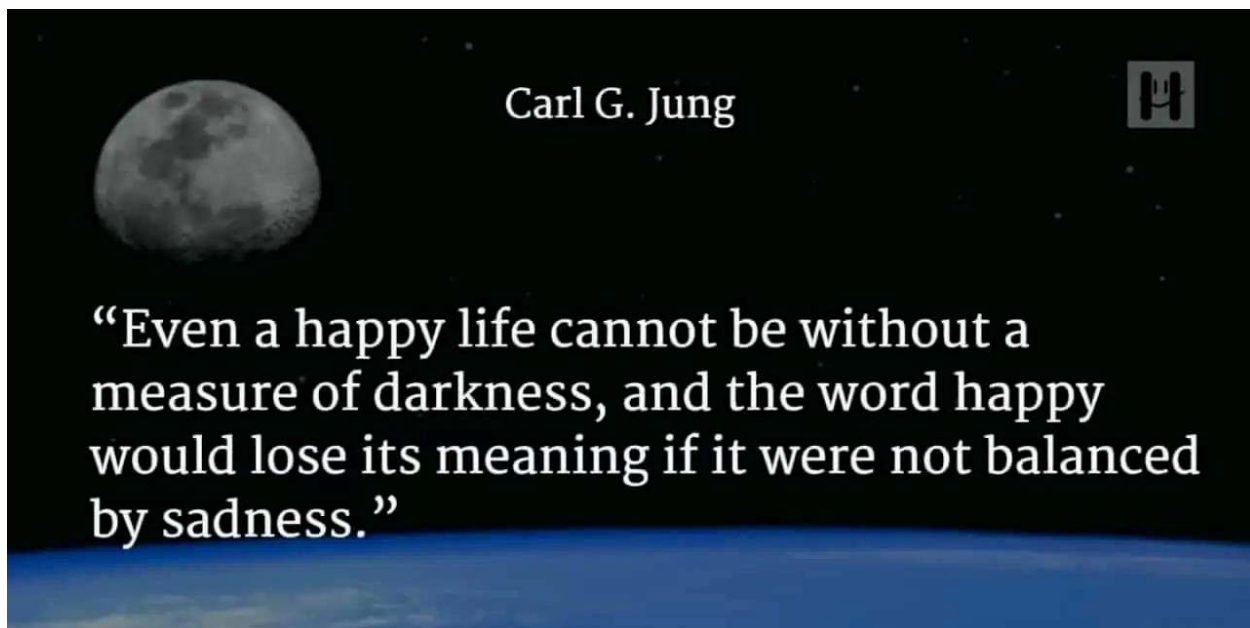
*The story of Positive Psychology (PP) in America begins long prior to the modern movement called PP. Humanist psychologists were the first psychologists who focused on the positive side of people – their innate goodness*

*and natural tendency toward the self-actualization of their potentials. Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow were the leading figures in this movement.*

— Paul T. P. Wong, [The International Handbook of Positive Psychology](#), 2022

- **1954:** The term “positive psychology” was first used by psychologist **Abraham Maslow** in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*, to describe his emphasis on creativity and self-actualization.
- **1998:** In 1998, **Martin Seligman** was elected the president of the American Psychological Association, and he made Positive Psychology the theme of his term. In the first sentence of his book *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman wrote: “...for the last half-century psychology has been consumed with a single topic only — mental illness.” Today, Seligman is widely regarded as the *Father of Modern Positive Psychology*.
- **1999:** The first Positive Psychology Summit took place in 1999.
- **2000:** Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi define positive psychology as “a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions.”

- **2002:** The First International Conference on Positive Psychology was held. Seligman publishes his bestseller *Authentic Happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*.
- **2004:** Seligman and Peterson publish *Human Strengths: A Classification Manual*.
- **2006:** The [Happiness 101](#) course by Tal Ben-Shahar at Harvard University became wildly popular.
- **2009:** The first World Congress on Positive Psychology was held in Philadelphia.
- **2011:** [Positive Psychology 2.0](#) by Paul T. P. Wong, which identifies the four pillars of the good life as meaning, virtue, resilience, and well-being, all shaped by culture.
- **2020:** Martin Seligman was named the #1 *academic influencer* in the field of psychology (2010–2020) in a [recently published list](#).



## 10 Key Findings from Positive Psychology

1. Most people declare themselves to be happy and are actually happy.
2. [Happy people make good things happen](#). And happiness is a reason for good things in life and a precursor to success and good outcomes.
3. Politically, conservatives are happier than liberals.
4. Most people are resilient and can bounce back quite well from adversities.



5. Happiness, good relationships, and strengths of character shield against the harmful effects of failures and setbacks.
6. Religious people are happier and cope better with stress as compared to non-religious people.
7. The effect of money on well-being peters out beyond a point, and then more money doesn't get more happiness. But money can buy happiness if spent on others (prosocial spending).
8. For a satisfying life, a life of meaning (eudaimonia) outdoes a life of pleasure (hedonism).
9. Good days are marked by a feeling of autonomy, competency, and connection to others.
10. The principles of a good life can be learned and taught.

## **Why did we need positive psychology?**

*Why, however, in a world of suffering should one bother to work on mental health, well-being, and happiness in the first place?*

Throughout history, *traditional psychology* mostly dealt with identifying and treating human illnesses. It focuses largely on reducing defective emotions and actions, while generally ignoring the positive and best behavior.

In contrast, *positive psychology* intends to diagnose and develop the positive aspects of life, the *human strengths and virtues* that make life worth living. It focuses on measuring the facets of human life that lead to happiness, fulfillment, and flourishing.

Martin Seligman explained it in a few crisp words:

*Bringing about well-being —positive emotion, engagement, purpose, positive relationships, positive accomplishment—may be one of our best weapons against mental disorder.*

— Martin E.P. Seligman, [Positive Health, 2008](#)

Its attention and resources target the study of positive human traits like hope, wisdom, gratitude, creativity, kindness, courage, spirituality, love, resilience, and grit.

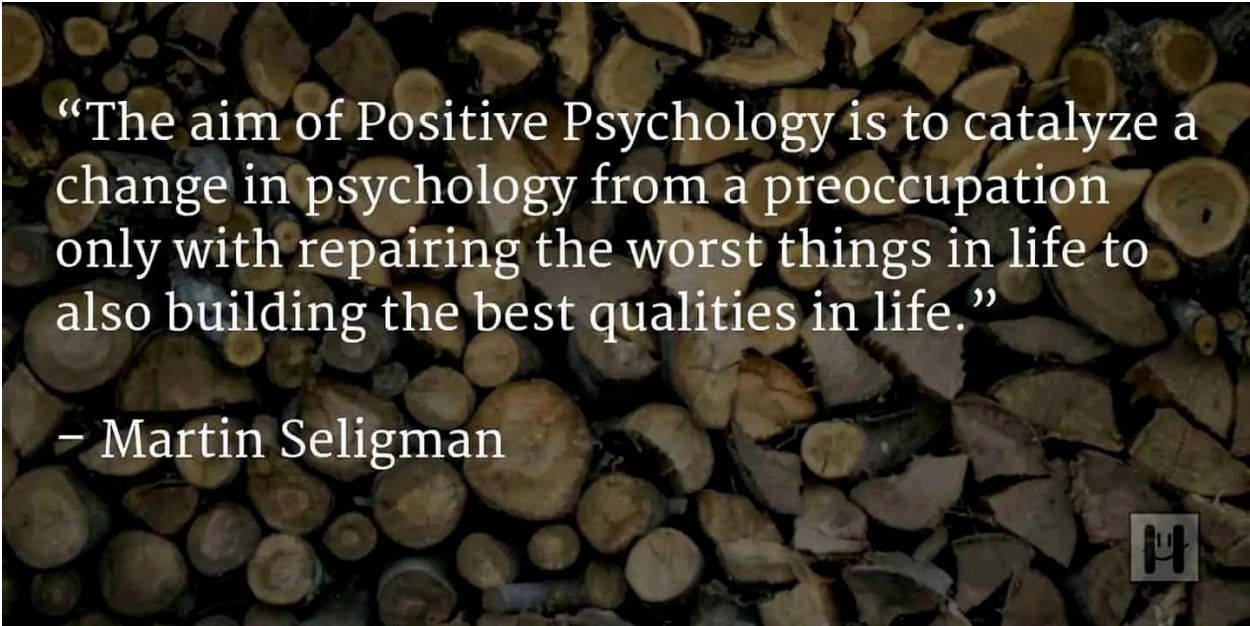
While traditional psychology tends to focus on the dysfunction and abnormalities of human behavior, positive psychology centers around helping people thrive.

Away from an exclusive emphasis on distress, illness, and dysfunction, positive psychology moves the area of focus to wellbeing, health, and optimum functioning.

The central point in positive psychology is this pursuit of happiness, satisfaction, and wellbeing, which its practitioners hold as worthy as the study of the negative mental health conditions in traditional psychology.

*We believe that a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities.*

— *Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*



“The aim of Positive Psychology is to catalyze a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life.”

– Martin Seligman

Martin Seligman On The Aim of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology strictly adheres to science-validated perspectives on living a happy and positive life. It stands in stark contrast to the positive

thinking movement popularized by Norman Vincent Peale ([The Power of Positive Thinking](#)) and Rhonda Byrne ([Law of Attraction](#)).

The field keenly observes and explores how people, institutions, and communities flourish. It bases itself on the idea that the absence of illness is not equivalent to a joyful and fulfilling life.

Positive psychology does not intend to replace traditional psychology but strives to work side-by-side with *traditional psychology*, trying to find out [what wellbeing is](#) in terms of living a good life.

- Positive psychology is *not* about fake happiness, telling people to smile it up while denying the existence of hard times. What positive psychology informs us is that when we face challenges, we can wield our weapons from its armory of positive interventions.
- We can learn what makes us more resilient, gritty, and hopeful, and cultivate responses that enable us to meet adversity with mindfulness and equanimity.
- The wisdom of positive psychology lies in using our strengths and resources gathered from our experiences to push through the tough times and grow from them. It tries to uncover why a

life lived merely around pleasure and positive emotions isn't a fulfilling one.

- Finally, it is an *empirical science*, meaning it is based on observations.

A life lived well consists of elements other than those which allow us merely to survive, and those other elements are what the science of positive psychology seeks to understand and spread.

## Outstanding Findings In Positive Psychology

[Martin Seligman writes](#): Many of the findings (that have emerged from the positive psychology initiative) are not of the “my grandmother already knew it” variety; among the more surprising ones:

- Women who flashed a [Duchenne \(genuine\) smile](#) in their yearbook positive photos as freshmen have more marital satisfaction twenty-five years later (Harker & Keltner, 2001).
- Brief raising of positive mood enhances creative thinking and makes positive physicians more accurate and faster to come up with the proper liver diagnosis (Fredrickson, 2001; Isen, 2005).
- The relation of national wealth to life satisfaction is dramatically curvilinear; after the safety net is

met, increases in wealth produce less and less life satisfaction (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993).

- In business meetings a ratio of greater than 2.9:1 for positive to negative statements predicts economic flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Though this finding has been [debunked by Nick Brown](#).

- Peripheral attention is superior under positive emotion (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

- Giltay, Geleijnse, Zitman, Hoekstra, and Schouten (2004) followed 999 Dutch seniors for a decade: high optimism produced a remarkably low hazard ratio of 0.23 for CVD death (upper versus lower quartile of optimism, 95% confidence interval, 0.10–0.55) when controlling for age, sex, chronic disease, education, smoking, alcohol, history of CVD, body mass, and cholesterol level. Similarly, Buchanan (1995) found that among 96 men who had had their first heart attack, 15 of the 16 most pessimistic men died of CVD over the next decade, while only 5 of the 16 most optimistic died, controlling for major risk factors.

- Kubzansky, Sparrow, Vokonas, and Kawachi (2001) followed 1,306 men who were evaluated by the MMPI Optimism–Pessimism scale. In a 10-year

follow-up, incidence of coronary heart disease (CHD), non-fatal myocardial infarction, fatal CHD and angina pectoris were recorded. A robust positive correlation was found between increasingly high levels of optimism and increased protection against each of the cardiovascular events and depression significantly increase the risk for cardiac events. Similarly Kubzansky and Thurston (2007) found a strong positive relationship between emotional vitality and lack of CVD.

- Optimism and positive emotions have also been linked to recovery after a major cardiac event. Leedham, Meyerowitz, Muirhead, and Frist (1995) interviewed 31 heart-transplant patients both before and after surgery. Those who reported a high level of positive expectation and good mood before the surgery were found to have greater adherence to medical regimen after surgery, as well as a better status report obtained by nursing 6 months post-operation.

- Scheier, Matthews, Owens, Magovern, Lefebvre, Abbott, and Carver (1989) investigated the effect of dispositional optimism in 51 middle-aged men who had coronary artery bypass surgery. Dispositional optimism was associated with faster recovery rates during hospitalization, as well as a speedier return to normal living upon discharge. At the 6-month



follow-up, there was a strong positive association between high optimism and good quality of life.

- Optimism and positive affect may also be protective against other physical deteriorations. Ostir, Ottenbacher, and Markides (2004) followed 1,558 initially non-frail older Mexican-Americans for 7 years. Frailty increased by 7.9% over the course of follow-up, but those men with high positive affect were found to have a significantly lower risk of frailty onset.

- Positive emotional style (PES) may also act as preventive against the onset of the common cold. Cohen, Alper, Doyle, Treanor, and Turner (2006) administered nasal drops carrying either rhinovirus or influenza to 193 healthy normal volunteers, ranging in age from 21 to 55. They found that a high level of PES was associated with a lower risk of developing either of the two conditions, manifest as upper respiratory conditions.

- In looking at more severe physiological events, positive affect and positive explanatory styles have been found to be protective against stroke (Ostir, Markides, Peek, & Goodwin, 2001), rapid progression of HIV (Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald, 2000), and general mortality rates in



the elderly (Cohen & Pressman, 2006; Maruta, Colligan, Malinchoc, & Offord, 2000).

## Definitions of Positive Psychology

Here is how some experts in the field define *positive psychology*:

*Positive psychology is the scientific study of the strengths that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play.*

— The [Positive Psychology Center](#) at the University of Pennsylvania

*Positive psychology is not a self-help movement or a re-packaging of “the power of positive thinking.” It is not American-style “happy-ology,” and it is not a passing fad. Positive Psychology is a science that brings the many virtues of science ... to bear on the question of how and when people flourish.*

— Robert Biswas-Diener, 2008

Positive psychology is the scientific study of human flourishing and an applied approach to optimal functioning. It has also been defined as the study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals, communities, and organizations to thrive.

— [Sheldon and King, 2001](#), [Gable and Haidt, 2005](#)

Positive psychology is the opportunity to change the happiness of the world.

— **Acacia Parks**, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Hiram College and Chief Scientific Advisor at [Happify](#)

Positive psychology is all about the study of what's right with people.

— **Alex Linley**, co-author of [Adolescence Life Satisfaction](#)

Positive psychology is exactly the study of what goes right in people's lives.

— [Kathryn Britton](#), Speaker, Coach, and Teacher of Positive Psychology

*Positive psychology is the science of happiness. More specifically, positive psychology is about focusing on what works ... on love, happiness, strength, and virtues.*

*— Tal Ben-Shahar, Founder at [Happiness Studies Academy](#), Former lecturer at Harvard*

*Positive psychology is a way of looking at things ... in a strengths-based way. We begin to look at people and ourselves from the perspective of their and our best qualities, so that our behaviors, our feelings, our thinking is curious, fair-minded, grateful.*

*— Ryan Niemiec, Education Director of the [VIA Institute on Character](#)*

*Positive psychology looks at what works well with people, what makes people happy, what makes people flourish, what makes people resilient, what makes people have great relationships, and what makes people find meaning in their lives.*

*— Lisa Sansom, Executive Director at Queen's University and [Positive Interventionist](#)*

*Positive psychology is the scientific study of wellbeing or the scientific study of what makes*

life worth living. It is the possibility of giving language to a huge range of the best of human experience.

— **Piers Worth**, Associate Professor (the local title is “Reader”) in Psychology

Positive psychology is the study of how to bring out the best in people and organizations, in spite of the dark side of life. I believe the best way to achieve the objective of our technology is to increase the dark side of human existence. So if we want to optimize wellbeing, we have to learn to manage the upside of the dark side, and the dark side of the bright side.

— **Paul T. P. Wong**, Founder, and President of the [International Network On Personal Meaning](#)

Positive psychology is the study of positive states and positive traits and positive institutions that support these two.

— *Angela Duckworth, Christopher H. Browne*  
*Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the*  
*University of Pennsylvania*

## **25 Positive Psychology Terms**

A glossary of twenty-five important terms used frequently in positive psychology:

- 1. Strength:** A positive trait or quality of character considered morally good and valued for itself as well as for promoting individual and social wellbeing. Worldwide, the strengths most associated with satisfaction in life are hope, zest, gratitude, and love. Researchers call these strengths of the heart.
- 2. Virtue:** A character trait that makes it possible for people to pursue worthwhile goals and is beneficial to one's psychological health.
- 3. Flourishing:** Living optimally and striving for wellbeing in terms of positive emotions, pleasure, engagement, good relationships, meaning and purpose, and accomplishments. Filled with vitality and functioning well in personal and social life. People who flourish score high on emotional, social, and psychological well-being, and low on mental illness.

**4. Languishing:** A state of emptiness, stagnation, quiet despair, absence of purpose in life, and lack of mental health; a languishing person shows ennui, apathy, listlessness, and loss of interest in life.

**5. Subjective Well-Being (SWB):** Involves life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect, and the relative absence of negative affect. Associated with hedonic happiness.

**6. Psychological Well-Being:** includes Self-Acceptance, Personal Growth, Purpose, Autonomy, Positive relations, and Mastery.

**7. Pleasant Life:** The “good” life where people are happy, content, and fulfilled.

**8. Engaged Life:** Happiness focused on involvement in activities, and the ability to express talent, strengths, and purpose.

**9. Meaningful Life:** Happiness that is derived from going beyond self-interests, like religious community, charity, or political cause. Connection to something “larger than the self.”

**10. Positive relationships:** The ability to form and maintain supportive, warm, and trusting relationships with others.

**11. Positive Affect:** Refers to emotions such as cheerfulness, joy, contentment, and happiness.  
**Negative Affect:** Refers to emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, guilt, and disgust.

**12. Autonomy:** the belief that we are reasonably in control of what happens to us (rather than others, fate, or luck being in total charge).

**13. Self-Acceptance:** the ability to like and accept most things about ourselves.

**14. Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** States that well-being and happiness result from the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness (close connections to others).

**15. Broaden-and-Build Theory:** Describes how [positive emotions open up our thinking](#) and actions to new possibilities, and how this expansion can help build well-being. Proposed by Barbara Fredrickson.

**16. Savouring:** The capacity to attend to, appreciate, and enhance positive experiences in life.

**17. Resilience:** Characterized by good outcomes, despite serious threats to adaptation or development. “Maintenance, recovery, or

improvement in mental/physical health following a challenge.”

**18. Post-traumatic Growth (PTG):** Experiencing an increased appreciation of life, etc. following trauma. Overcome challenges of belief in personal invulnerability, perception of a meaningful world, and the view of ourselves as positive.

**19. Affective Forecasting:** People consistently overestimate their emotional reactions to future events.

**20. Maximizing:** Getting or trying to get the best possible option in any situation. **Sufficing:** Getting what they need, but settling for something that isn't the best, but still gets the job done.

**21. Hedonic Treadmill:** The belief that people are doomed to a certain level of happiness. People will experience “positive affects” but will later return to an average level of happiness.

**22. The Good Life:** A combination of three elements: *connections to others* (as love, altruism, forgiveness, spirituality), *positive individual traits* (as honesty, playfulness, creativity, courage, humility), and *life regulation qualities* (a sense of individuality or autonomy, healthy self-control, wisdom).



**23. Love:** According to Barbara Fredrickson, “*Love is a momentary upwelling of three tightly interwoven events: first, a sharing of one or more positive emotions between you and another; second, a synchrony between your and the other person’s biochemistry and behaviors; and third, a reflected motive to invest in each other’s well-being that brings mutual care.*” According to the [triangular theory of love](#), it consists of three essential components: *passion, intimacy, and commitment.*

**24. Gratitude:** A sense of thankfulness and happiness in response to receiving a gift, either a tangible benefit given by someone or a fortunate coincidence.

**25. Meaning (Transcendence):** The three needs for meaning are purpose, value, and self-efficacy.

## **More About Positive Psychology**

**Positive psychology** is the scientific study of what makes us flourish, what is going right in our lives, and what good things we are into when we are happy. It was introduced to the world by Dr. Martin Seligman in 1998.

- Read this excellent chapter by Dr. Happy, that is, Edward Diener: [Happiness: The Science of Subjective Well-Being](#).
- Steal [The 10 Secret Happiness Hacks For You From Authentic Science](#)!
- Bookmark these [5 Habits of Happiness Backed by Science](#) to get five clear and practical keys to happiness in life.
- Did you know people with a *positive mindset* have 6 characteristics: **MOGRAH**: 1. Mindfulness 2. Optimism 3. Gratitude 4. Resilience 5. Acceptance 6. Honesty? Learn what your most friends wouldn't know about [How To Cultivate A Positive Mindset](#).
- If you're new to positive psychology, then you must own this excellent book by Sonja Lyubomirsky, where she tells us how to build a fulfilling and contented life, how to check our levels of subjective well-being, and how to create our happiness — all based on authentic research. Catch the book summary here: [The How of Happiness](#).
- *Hard-To-Believe-Fact*: As a lecturer at Harvard University, Tal Ben-Shahar created the most popular course in Harvard University's history: Positive Psychology 1504!
- We normally assume that vulnerable people can't be happy, but that idea is plain wrong as

Brené Brown proves in her book [The Power of Vulnerability](#).

- We normally link happiness and positivity with the extroverted nature and hold that extroverts are happier people. But Susan Cain, who features here, argues otherwise in her international bestseller [Quiet](#). Watch her TED talk that still stands today as one of the most viewed of all time.
- Dr. Barbara Fredrickson gave the world the [Broaden-And-Build Theory \(BBT\) of Positive Emotions](#). The BBT suggests building up positive emotions will tend to broaden our creative openness, understanding, and behavior. For example, joy makes us want to play, curiosity makes us want to explore.
- *Read the [50 Greatest Positive Psychology Quotes!](#)*

## What is Flow?

According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, people are at their optimal level of happiness when they are in a state of “flow.”

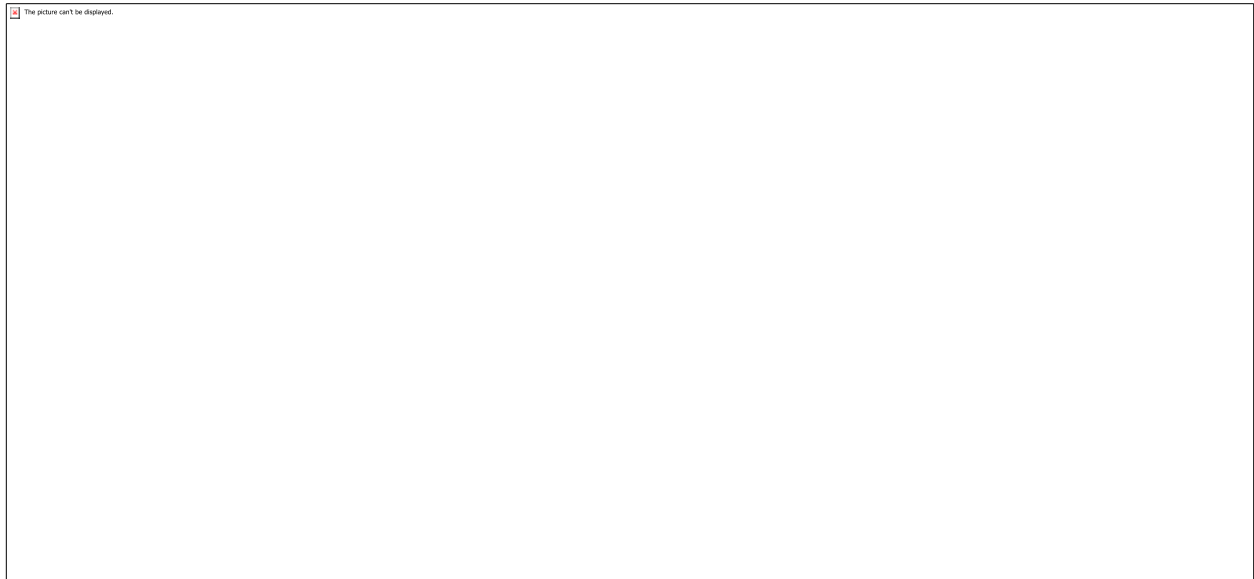
This is a state of complete immersion – mentally, physically, and emotionally. During flow, people are so engrossed in their activities, that they fail to notice even hunger and time.

People in flow are less concerned with external rewards; they do the activity out of sheer pleasure. Find out how to achieve the “flow” state of optimal happiness.

*If ‘you’re loving this’ and want to own a few great books based on positive psychology, then check this out: [50 Best Books For Happiness and Positivity](#).*

## **PERMA Theory of Wellbeing**

PERMA is an acronym that stands for the five core elements of happiness and well-being proposed by *Martin Seligman*: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.



PERMA Theory of Wellbeing (Source: [Authentic Happiness](#))

### **P – Positive Emotions**

To have feelings of joy, pleasure, and comfort. Such positive emotions allow one to succeed and flourish in what they focus on and change their mindset to serve their highest good.

While we can not be happy all the time, we can make sure we often experience positive emotions such as [pleasure](#), happiness, contentment, peace, joy, and inspiration.

## **E – Engagement**

When we are fully engaged in a task or project, we experience a state of flow: a mental state in which we lose our sense of time, we lose focus of our sense of self, and we can not observe things outside the task at hand in the present moment.

Engagement closely identifies with the act of creation, but one can also experience it when playing sports, spending time with friends, or working on attention-grabbing projects. We have a greater chance of being engaged when we work from our positive character strengths, as outlined in the VIA-CSV.

## **R – Relationships**

Humans are social beings, and good social relationships are at the core of our well-being. The strongest predictor of our happiness is the time we

spend with people we care about and who care about us.

Most of our life experience revolves around other people. And research has shown that having a robust social support network reduces the risks of stress and depression, cuts down death rates, and improves health in terms of better self-care and lower self-neglect.

Building positive and supportive relationships take time and hard work, and they only form when we make active efforts to connect with others. So, commit to spending meaningful time with a friend or family member regularly.

## **M – Meaning**

We are not here on earth only to eat, work, play, have children, and die. We are here for more. And that is finding the actual purpose of our existence.

Finding meaning in our life is vital to our overall sense of well-being. Meaning looks at our sense of purpose and path in life, being connected to something greater than our selfish motivations and ambitions.

Those who say they have more meaningful lives also say they are relatively happy and content with their lives as a whole.

Find out [How To Find The Meaning of Your Life?](#)

## A – Accomplishment

There is no question that a feeling of achievement or accomplishment gives us great satisfaction.

Achieving our goals from both an external point of validation and an internal sense of success is a crucial driver of happiness.

However, if you feel your life revolves mostly around achievements and success, and the rest of your life is [out of balance](#), then you might do well by pulling back and focusing on the other elements of the PERMA Model.

Find out what the [Cross-Cultural Comparison of The PERMA Model of Wellbeing](#) says.

## Seligman's TED Talk On Positive Psychology

Martin Seligman, the *founding father of positive psychology*, in his [2004 TED Talk](#) says:

*The first happy life is the pleasant life. This is a life in which you have as much positive*


*emotion as you possibly can, and the skills to amplify it. The second is a life of engagement: a life in your work, your parenting, your love, your leisure; time stops for you. That's what Aristotle was talking about. And third, the meaningful life.*

## **The “Hamburger” Model of Happiness**

[Tal Ben-Shahar](#) first conceived the “*Hamburger*” *Model of Happiness* when he sat down to eat four burgers after winning the Israeli National Squash Championship in 1986. He later developed this model while at Harvard, from where he graduated in philosophy and psychology, and later, did his Ph.D. in Organizational Behavior.

The “hamburger” model represents four different hamburgers and how they relate to how happy a person is.



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## 1. Rat-Racer: Eats The Vegetarian Burger

It is a *healthy but not tasty* burger. It relates to people who only know pain and discomfort as the path to future happiness. All they want is future unhappiness, and sacrifice all present moments of joy for that.

The problem is that such people begin to believe happiness is something that we can only achieve in the future. They live according to the principle of *present-pain for future-profit* and renounce the present joys to benefit in the future.

But once the future arrives, it mostly doesn't look like what they expected it to look like. Meanwhile, this person is still too busy to enjoy the moment and pushes away the joys even farther into the future.

Their lives have become a *rat race*. A *rat race* is an endless, self-defeating, or pointless pursuit. They live in a constant struggle for survival and the pursuit of profit at the expense of the joys and pleasures of life today.

## 2. Hedonist: Eats The Junk Food Burger

It is a *tasty but unhealthy* burger. It relates to people who only know pleasure as the only path to happiness. They want to be happy now at the cost of future unhappiness.

When people get asked what a happy life means to them, they often think of a life full of joy and devoid of pain. These are the hedonists – who live only in the moment and worry little about future consequences.

To understand this, suppose you ate your favorite food every time. Can you enjoy the experience of eating the same food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for weeks on end? Instead, why not ask yourself how long it would take you to get sick of it?

Similarly, what would happen if your life was always about pleasure? You would utterly fail to distinguish one pleasurable activity from the other. Such a life would soon become empty and stale.

### 3. Nihilist: Eats The Worst Burger

It is a *tasteless and unhealthy* burger, and obviously, the worst kind. It relates to people who believe their lives are pointless and can never be happy. So, they are always miserable and demoralized, having lost all hope of happiness.

A phenomenon called “[learned helplessness](#)” shows how easy it is to learn you have no control over your own life and that every effort of yours will go futile. When you ask yourself why you would eat this kind of burger, the only explanation you can give is that your life is pretty pointless.

You give up the present *and* the future, both. You spend time thinking about what could go wrong in the future as well as [ruminating over](#) what things went wrong in your past life.

Ben-Shahar describes this desperate place as “[nihilism](#),” but fortunately, we can turn around learned helplessness into [Learned Optimism](#).

### 4. Happiest: Eats The Ideal Burger

It is a *healthy and tasty* burger. It applies to people who know how to be happy in the present, as well as in the future. It represents those who have reached fulfillment and purpose in their life.

It is a place where you can enjoy a healthy dose of self-indulgence, a bit of fun, and a lot of good food.

It sounds simple, but there are two crucial points:

- First, take a moment to rethink your *personal definition of happiness*, and be careful if you think you want to experience pure bliss for the rest of your days. Leading psychiatrist Dr. Raj Persaud suggests that we really should aim for nothing more than “mild contentment,” and that’s about as good as it gets.
- Second, ask yourself, does your definition of happiness include activities as well as feelings? If not, rethink your definition. If you want to be happy, then you have to do things that create meaning and purpose in your life.

*The paradox is that when we accept our feelings — when we give ourselves permission to be human and experience painful emotions — we are more likely to open ourselves up to positive emotions.*

— Tal Ben-Shahar, PhD

# VIA-CSV Directory of Positive Psychology

To counteract the traditional focus of psychology on diseases, Martin Seligman (Father of Modern Positive Psychology), and Christopher Peterson, standardized the principles of positive psychology in the book [\*Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification\*](#).

The *Values In Action* (VIA) classification of *Character Strengths And Virtues* (CSV) is Positive Psychology's counterpart to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) used in traditional psychology and psychiatry.

Just as the DSM, presently in its 5th version called [DSM-5](#), identifies and classifies psychiatric disorders, the CSV details and classifies the various human strengths that help people thrive.

The VIA-CSV allows people to pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses of character and learn how to work on them. The VIA-CSV identifies the 24 *character strengths*, organized under 6 overarching *virtues* — Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. It consists of 240 questions.

# Criticism of Positive Psychology

Positive psychology has its critics and detractors.

- Lazarus (2003) claimed that positive psychologists “*attack the psychology of the past to create the illusion that what they offer is new and different.*”
- James Coyne has also been critical of PP, particularly some of its interventions (Coyne, 2010).
- Barbara Ehrenreich (2010) argued that pressuring people to be happy can cause more harm than good, and her claims get support from recent research.
- Barbara Oettingen’s findings suggest that some types of positive thinking predict maladaptive outcomes.
- [Wong & Roy](#) (2018) offer a comprehensive critique of positive psychology in *Critique of positive psychology and positive interventions*. The second author, Roy, is the founder of [The Happiness Blog](#).

## PP 2.0 (Second Wave Positive Psychology or PP 2.0)

Psychology preoccupied itself with the negative (the thesis). Positive psychology (now referred to as PP

1.0 or First Wave Positive Psychology) challenged it by focusing on the positive (the antithesis).

**Second Wave Positive Psychology (PP 2.0)**, a concept proposed by [Paul T. P. Wong, 2011](#), suggested that we should focus on *both the negative and the positive aspects of human existence*, as both can result in the same positive outcomes. In doing so, PP 2.0 united Psychology and PP 1.0 by incorporating aspects of both into a new position that transcended and extended the original viewpoints (Mills, 2000).

PP 2.0 is distinguished by two elements:

1. Existential positive psychology, with **suffering** as the foundation for happiness and well-being, and
2. Indigenous psychology, with the **Yin-Yang** concept as an Asian perspective on well-being.

Positive psychology 2.0 is also an attempt to counter-challenge the critics of positive psychology, as it integrates PP 1.0 with [humanistic-existential psychology](#).

What separates PP 2.0 from PP1.0 is not just the identification of positive potentials in negative emotions, but also an important emphasis on humanistic values, the [dark side of human existence](#), and dialectical principles (Ivtzan et al , 2015; Wong, 2011).

Watch Itai Ivtzan and Tim Lomas share their findings from the new second-wave positive psychology research, including the unexpected benefits of embracing the darker side of life in this Action For Happiness video: [Positive Psychology 2.0 – New Ideas For Happier Living](#)

## **5 Online Courses (MOOCs) On Happiness**

These are the best courses on happiness and wellbeing:

1. [The Science of Well-Being](#) by Yale University
2. [The Science of Happiness](#) by Berkeley University of California
3. [Positive Psychology Course](#) by Tal Ben-Shahar at Harvard
4. [A Life of Happiness and Fulfillment](#) by the Indian School of Business
5. [Positive Psychology](#) by Barbara Fredrickson, University of North Carolina



## 6. [Certificate in Applied Positive Psychology \(CAPP\)](#) by The Flourishing Center

If you're interested in increasing your well-being, you can find ways to apply positive psychological interventions online at the University of Pennsylvania's site [Authentic Happiness](#) and [Positive Psychology Center](#).

## Positive Psychology Sites

- [Brazilian Positive Psychology Association](#)
- [Japan Positive Psychology Association \(JPPA\)](#)
- [Mexican Positive Psychology Association](#)
- [New Zealand Association of Positive Psychology](#)
- [National Positive Psychology Association \(NPPA\) Delhi, India](#)
- [Western Positive Psychology Association California, USA](#)

## FAQs

### 1. What are the elements of positive psychology?

According to Martin Seligman, the five elements of flourishing are Positive emotions, Engagement,

Relationships, Meaning and purpose, and Accomplishment (PERMA).

## 2. Why is positive psychology important?

There are many advantages of practicing positive psychology, such as gaining grit, reinforcing resilience, building strong relationships, and cultivating an optimistic outlook on life. Research in the field of positive psychology shows gratitude, forgiveness, altruism, social interaction, and compassion are all important values to living our best lives.

## 3. What is the main focus of positive psychology?

The main focus of positive psychology is the study of the good life or the positive aspects of human existence that make life worthwhile. Positive psychology is concerned with eudaimonia, that is, a life of flourishing.

## Final Words

Everyone's life has both highs and lows. Positive psychology believes life is *more than* just avoiding or undoing the troubles that come with the lows. Its main premise is this: *The good things about life are as important as the bad ones, therefore they deserve similar attention from the science of psychology.*

## Finally, here are the 5 key takeaways from the Science of Wellbeing:

1. Simple pleasure and hedonism are *not* the best paths to well-being.
2. Happiness or positive emotions are *not* the only criteria for well-being.
3. A stress-free life with no challenges is *not* the most desirable life.
4. Trying to suppress negative emotions does *not* eliminate them.
5. Positive relationships, love, emotional bonds, virtues, good character, self-transcendence, a sense of meaning, and purpose in life are all *important* for well-being.

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# **Are you Happy?**



**Yes**

**Keep  
Going**



**No**

**Change  
Something**

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