

Mental Wellness for Persons with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

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Nobody ever accomplished anything because of what they couldn't do. They accomplish things because of what they could do.

Nobody ever got a job, made a friend, or found love because of their faults.

Disability Supports

- **Our disability systems, including special ed., do a terrific job of making it very clear what is wrong with people.**
- **Supports for people with disabilities have generally focused on the identification of a disability (a weakness), followed by the application of interventions to remediate that disability**

Positive Supports

- Begin with this idea: People are people, with disabilities or without!
- Same types of problems, challenges, and ways to cope with the world.
- Number one cause of community difficulty for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

JoAnn Cannon's 16 Factors Related to Wellness

Contact with nature

Optimism

Work Satisfaction

Economic essentials

Coping with stress

Spirit awareness

Positive self-image

Fulfilling relationships

Experienced creativity

Balanced nutrition

Goal accomplishment

Intellectual stimulation

Rest and sleep

Time and space alone

Physical prowess

The full Wellness appraisal entitled, "What is Right in Your life is available from Dr. Cannon at www.inwardboundventures.org, and includes the evidence base

Relaxation

Relaxation is a need for all of us. Many people, with or without disabilities, have a tough time relaxing.

Here are some strategies that work:

- Breathing meditation
- Visual meditation
- Long walks when you teach breathing meditation during walking time
- Aquatics for people with physical disabilities
- Listening to music
- Journaling

Are these included in your support plans?

- **Where would they fit?**
 - **Behavior Support Plan?**
 - **General Support Planning Document?**
- **What data would you collect?**

Positive Identity & Happiness

- Support individuals to develop a positive identity – define selves by what they can do (e.g., who I am, what I can do well, where I can make a difference, etc.).
- Individuals with IDD often develop a negative identity based on what they cannot do (e.g., not the person who gets the job, gets married, drives, etc.)
- Help people live happier lives
 - Pleasure
 - Engagement
 - Meaning

Harvey, 2009

What is positive psychology?

A branch of psychological inquiry that focuses on the experience of positive emotion and the role of healthy emotions in daily life

Is this new? No – Carl Rogers would say it is not (1951)

But it has been a side note

- **Psychology as a whole has been criticized as a field in which illness is studied rather than wellness.**
- **Negative emotions are analyzed rather than positive emotions.**

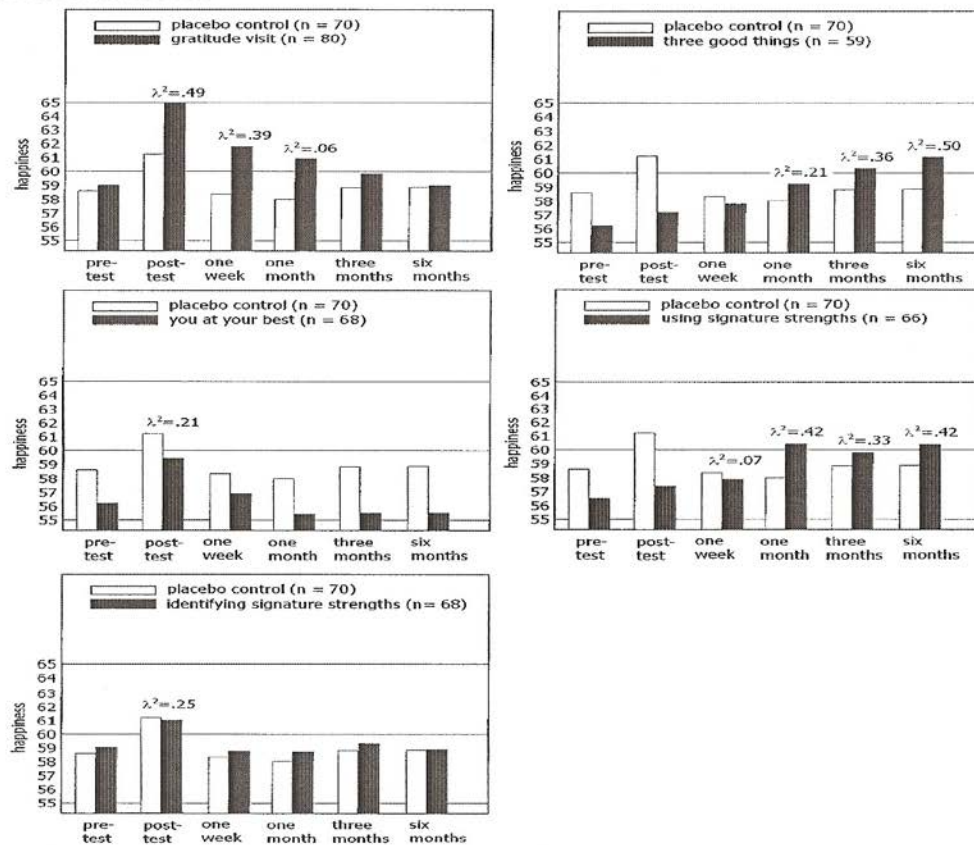
Until this happened...



What has changed?

- **The philosophy of positive psychology has an intuitive appeal for the general public... as measured by the cover story on Time Magazine**
- **Positive psychology researchers have amassed data on the effectiveness of interventions based on positive psychology (Seligmann, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005)**

Figure 1
Steen Happiness Index Scores



Note. Figures are effect sizes corresponding to a statistically significant ($p < .05$) difference between the intervention group at that point in time and baseline. If no effect size is shown, the intervention group and the comparison group did not differ.

period thereafter, however, participants in the placebo control condition were no different than they had been at baseline.

As Figures 1 and 2 show, at the immediate posttest (after one week of doing the assigned exercise), partici-

pants in the *gratitude visit* condition were happier and less depressed. In fact, participants in the *gratitude visit* condition showed the largest happiness positive changes in the whole study. This boost in happiness and decrease in depressive

Another form of validation

- **Cross-cultural studies show similar patterns of positive emotion across different cultures (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)**
- **This echoes pioneering cross-cultural work in Wellness (Cannon, 1997)**

What Does Positive Psychology Offer To Us?

- In disability, supports many of already know a lot of what Positive Psychology teaches in terms of the outlook, but we do not know the specifics that Positive Psychology is researching (Baker & Blumberg, 2011).

Strength-based Support



**Build
Enduring
Personal
Resources**

**Broaden
Emotional
Life**

**Transform
people-
produce
upward spirals**

We all know the ABCs:
Antecedent Behavior
Consequence...

Where is D?

Distracting

- **Doing something to stop the internal pessimistic explanation:**
- **The person can use thought stopping, write it down, engage in a specific activity (replacement behavior) - listen to music - read or listen to something funny, do something physical (water plants, play with pet)**

Disputing

- **A strategy for reminding ourselves (or the person) that pessimistic explanations for events are only one possible interpretation**
- **Method- make a list of all the alternative and optimistic reasons for an event or situation**
 - **Is that really what is happening?**
 - **Does the Divine Power in the Universe really hate you?**

Though Sometimes...



And my drive home daily in
NJ...



Interventions to Increase Happiness (Seligman et al., 2005)

1. Gratitude visit
2. Three good things in life
3. You at your best
4. Identifying signature strengths
5. Using signature strengths in a new way

How Can We Adapt Interventions?

- Speed
- Number
- Abstraction
- Complexity

Morasky, 2007

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