



GETTING HAPPY

AHEAD OF THE HOLIDAY SEASON

“People who are happy tend to be mentally, emotionally and physically healthier,” stated Marianne Neifert. “They’re more satisfied, more productive, more energetic, more charitable; they get along better with others, and even live longer,” said Neifert. “Yet antidepressants are the third most commonly prescribed drug category in America. I think it’s safe to say that many of us would like to be happier.”

What is Happiness? At PIN’s October presentation, Neifert spoke about what happiness is and the steps we can take to get more of it. “I used to confuse happiness with relief from stress,” she explained. “I was an ‘A’ student— always trying to get good grades. To me, happiness was relief from the pressure when summer came.” But there’s more to happiness than just changing your circumstances. Neifert explained that “True happiness is being content, *despite your circumstances.*”



Neifert’s views are influenced by the work of Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl, psychologist Shawn Achor, and professor Tal Ben-Shahar, who taught Harvard’s most popular course, Positive Psychology. “Happiness lies at the intersection of pleasure and meaning,” said Neifert, quoting Ben-Shahar. She explained that it takes more than good circumstances to make us happy; rather, people find happiness when they’re serving something larger and greater than themselves—something with a higher, noble purpose.

Taking Control of What We Can. “The first step in being happy is to take 100% responsibility for your life,” stated Neifert. While we may not be able to change our circumstances, we can change how we respond to the things that happen to us. “Instead of labeling a situation as ‘bad,’ take something you’d normally call bad and name 10 good things about it,” challenged Neifert. “Gratitude is like a muscle: The more we use it, the happier we become.”

“Stress comes from the story we choose to tell ourselves in order to give meaning to the things that happen to us,” explained Neifert. When that story is one of grievance, stress is the result. Neifert discussed 20 things people can do to increase their happiness: (For more details on these, visit www.PINccsd.org to hear the presentation podcast.)

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| 1. Express gratitude | 8. Set & reach goals | 14. Volunteer for a good cause |
| 2. Stop complaining & blaming | 9. Practice your own spiritual or religious beliefs | 15. Adopt a humor perspective |
| 3. Perform acts of kindness | 10. Nurture your relationships | 16. Spend money on experiences vs. stuff |
| 4. Exercise regularly | 11. Experience moments of “flow” | 17. Focus on what you want in life, not what you don’t want |
| 5. Get 8 hours of sleep | 12. Enjoy life’s simple pleasures | 18. Live in the present moment |
| 6. Experience human touch | 13. Prime your environment | 19. Practice mindfulness meditation |
| 7. Smile more often | | 20. Simplify & declutter your life |

“If we don’t take full responsibility for our lives, we give up the belief that we can actually change,” said Neifert. Conversely, “If we see ourselves in the driver’s seat of our own life, we can turn in any direction.” For more thoughts on the subject, visit www.pursuit-of-happiness.org.

Next Up at PIN: Join us on **11/3** for *Empowering Girls to Make Change in Their World*; and for PIN’s one evening presentation on **11/11 at 7 p.m.** to hear *Raising Resilient Girls: Feelings, Failures & Friends*.

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