



Ageing Well

Positive Ageing Toolkit



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AGEING WELL

Ageing Well: Science based habits of people who age well

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Module 3: Examples and case studies through Positive Psychology practices

Introduction

Positive Psychology focuses on the study and promotion of well-being, happiness, and positive human functioning. It emphasizes strengths, virtues, and factors that contribute to a fulfilling life (Seligman, 2002). Incorporating Positive Psychology practices can significantly enhance the quality of life for the elderly, fostering both emotional and mental well-being. For caregivers, these practices offer valuable tools to support their loved ones while also maintaining their own well-being.

This module features examples and case studies of people whose lives have been positively transformed through Positive Psychology practices. It is divided into four sections:

- Section 1: Understanding Positive Psychology,
- Section 2. Case Studies,
- Section 3. Positive Psychology Practices and Strategies and,
- Section 4. Tips for Caregivers

Section 1: Understanding Positive Psychology

Attempts to define and understand Positive Psychology

In an attempt to define Positive Psychology and better understand its nature and context, we may assume that it is the scientific study of what makes life worth living. It focuses on human strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. It shifts the emphasis from solely treating mental illness to enhancing well-being and happiness.

In further understanding Positive Psychology, the **PERMA** model proposed by Martin Seligman (**P**ositive **E**motions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **E**ngagement, **A**ccomplishments), one of the prevalent models of this scientific area, highlights the key concepts of Positive Psychology:

1. Positive Emotions:

- **Joy:** Experiencing happiness and delight in the moment. For the elderly, joy can be found in small daily activities, engaging in hobbies, or spending time with loved ones.

- **Gratitude:** Recognizing and appreciating the good things in life. Practicing gratitude can involve keeping a gratitude journal, where one lists things they are thankful for each day.
- **Serenity:** Feeling calm and content. This can be achieved through activities such as meditation, gentle exercise, or spending time in nature.

2. Engagement:

- Being deeply involved in activities that challenge and absorb you. This state, often referred to as "flow," is when people lose track of time because they are so engrossed in what they are doing. For the elderly, this could be gardening, painting, or solving puzzles.

3. Relationships:

- Fostering meaningful connections with others. Positive relationships are a cornerstone of well-being. For the elderly, maintaining social connections can involve regular visits from family and friends, participating in community activities, or joining clubs and groups.

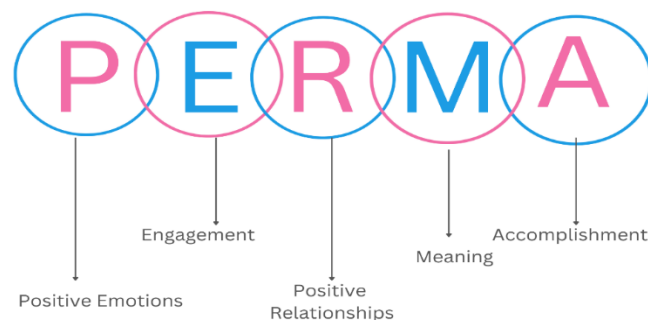
4. Meaning:

- Having a purpose or feeling that life is valuable and makes sense. Meaning can be found through various avenues such as spirituality, volunteering, or pursuing lifelong passions. For caregivers, this might come from the fulfilment of providing care and support to loved ones.

5. Accomplishments:

- Achieving goals and gaining a sense of mastery. This involves setting and reaching personal goals, no matter how small, which provides a sense of pride and achievement. For the elderly, accomplishments might include learning a new skill, completing a project, or maintaining physical health.

Introducing a new theory of Well Being



Benefits of Positive Psychology for the Elderly and Caregivers

Positive Psychology holds a number of benefits for both the elderly and caregivers:

1. Improved Mental Health:

Positive Psychology practices can lead to a reduction in symptoms of depression and anxiety, promoting a more positive outlook on life. Techniques such as **gratitude journaling** and **mindfulness** can improve mood and emotional stability.

2. Enhanced Resilience:

Developing resilience helps individuals cope better with life's challenges and bounce back from setbacks. Positive Psychology encourages building resilience through **positive emotions**, **supportive relationships**, and **finding meaning in experiences**.

3. Reduced Stress and Anxiety:

Practices such as **mindfulness meditation**, **deep breathing exercises**, and engaging in enjoyable activities can significantly **lower stress levels**. Both the elderly and their caregivers can benefit from **stress-reducing techniques** that help them manage their responsibilities without becoming overwhelmed.

4. Greater Life Satisfaction:

Engaging in **activities that bring joy**, maintaining **meaningful relationships**, and **achieving personal goals** contribute to **overall life satisfaction**. For the elderly, this might mean finding **new hobbies or rekindling old ones**, and for caregivers, finding **balance and personal fulfilment** in their roles.

Section 2: Case studies

Below are case studies of individuals whose lives have been positively transformed through Positive Psychology:

Case study 1: Heather embracing Positive Psychology in later life

Background: Heather Lee, a vibrant and spirited 96-year-old woman, has an inspiring story of resilience and positive transformation. Heather proudly embraces her age and views ageing as an achievement to be celebrated. Heather's life took a significant turn when her husband passed away. His parting words *"Now is the time to show your mettle"* became a mantra for her. She recognized she needed to become more **self-assertive** and **independent**. This realization marked the beginning of her journey towards self-improvement and resilience.

After her husband's death, Heather discovered a compulsion to walk. Walking became a form of grief therapy for her. She found solace and strength in the act of walking, and the faster she walked, the better she felt. This newfound passion for physical activity not only helped her cope with grief but also set her on a path towards becoming an accomplished athlete.

Achievements and Recognition: In 2011, at the age of 84, Heather's physiotherapist suggested she participate in the Masters Games in Adelaide. She accepted the challenge and, to her surprise, won four gold medals, breaking world records in the process. This achievement ignited a desire in Heather to continually push her limits and strive for excellence.

Positive Psychology and Personal Growth: Heather's story is a shining example of how positive psychology can lead to personal growth and fulfilment in later life. She has learned to embrace ageing, viewing it as an opportunity rather than a limitation. Heather has become more philosophical, accepting the ageing process with grace and wisdom. Her resilience and positive outlook have allowed her to continue achieving her goals and inspiring others.

Key Lessons and Recommendations:

Embrace Ageing: View ageing as an achievement and an opportunity for personal growth.

Stay Physically Active: Engage in physical activities, even simple exercises at home, to maintain physical and mental health.

Cultivate Resilience: Use challenges and setbacks as opportunities to develop resilience and self-assertiveness.

Share Knowledge: Pass on wisdom and experiences to younger generations, fostering a sense of community and continuity.

Stay Engaged: Keep the mind active and find new passions or hobbies to pursue.

Find Meaning: Seek out activities and relationships that provide a sense of purpose and fulfilment, enhancing overall well-being.

Use Strengths: Identify and utilize personal strengths to navigate life's challenges and achieve personal goals, reinforcing self-esteem and

Video: Positive ageing–Heather’s story–3 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZRxyhGXOkw>

(Source: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/heathers-story-living-life-to-the-fullest-one-step-at-a-time>)

Case study 2: Peter overcoming adversity through Positive Psychology

Background: Peter Dornan, an 80-year-old physiotherapist, embodies a life of resilience, positivity and continuous self-improvement. Despite acknowledging the challenges of ageing, Peter lives each day with the same vigour and determination as he did in his younger years. His story is a powerful illustration of how positive psychology can profoundly impact the lives of older adults.

A Life-Altering Diagnosis: At 52, Peter was diagnosed with prostate cancer, a turning point that deeply impacted his life. The diagnosis and subsequent surgery brought severe side effects, leaving Peter unable to work, exercise, or engage in intimate relationships. Struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts, Peter once again tapped into his inner resilience. He refused to succumb to despair and sought ways to navigate his new reality.

Building a Support Network: Determined to find support, Peter placed an ad seeking others experiencing similar struggles. The response was overwhelming; 70 men and their partners attended the first meeting. Over the next 20 years, Peter's initiative grew into a significant support network, addressing various aspects of prostate cancer. This group evolved into the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, becoming the leading consumer body for prostate cancer in the country. Peter's efforts not only provided vital support to many but also contributed to broader awareness and advocacy for prostate cancer patients.

Embracing Positive Psychology and Resilience: Peter's journey highlights the critical role of positive psychology in overcoming adversity. His experiences taught him that survival and fulfilment often require struggle and perseverance. By continuously challenging himself and maintaining a proactive approach to life, Peter has been able to thrive despite his setbacks.

Key Lessons and Recommendations:

Harness Inner Strength: Recognize and utilize the inner resilience and strength that exists within you to overcome challenges.

Seek Support: Building a support network can provide invaluable assistance and camaraderie during difficult times.

Stay Physically Active: Engage in physical activities to maintain physical and mental health, even in the face of adversity.

Embrace Positivity: Focus on what you have and celebrate life daily, rather than dwelling on potential limitations.

Contribute to the Community: Use personal experiences to support and inspire others facing similar challenges.

Find Meaning: Seek out activities and relationships that provide a sense of purpose and fulfilment, enhancing overall well-being.

Use Strengths: Identify and utilize personal strengths to navigate life's challenges and achieve personal goals, reinforcing self-esteem and confidence.

Video: Positive ageing–Peter's story–3 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLcgRcKbwVE>

(Source: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/peters-story-conquering-lifes-greatest-challenges>)

Case Study 3: Isabel ageing with purpose and passion

Background: Isabel Allende, a renowned author, as she navigates the challenges and opportunities of ageing. At 71, Isabel shares her personal reflections, the inspiration she draws from others, and her strategies for maintaining passion and purpose in her later years. Her story provides valuable insights into the psychological and emotional aspects of ageing, highlighting the importance of attitude, resilience, and community support.

She fears losing independence but finds comfort in Ram Dass's teaching that accepting dependency can reduce suffering. She views her body's changes with tenderness and appreciates the help she receives.

Gains and Freedom: Ageing has freed Isabel from societal and personal expectations. She no longer needs to prove herself and focuses on enjoying life, letting go of negative emotions. She values the mental clarity that comes from releasing these burdens.

Embracing Vulnerability and Spirituality: Isabel sees vulnerability as a strength. Spirituality and meditation help her stay present and mindful. She finds spirituality essential for her well-being.

Maintaining Passion and Positive Attitude: Isabel believes in consciously maintaining passion. She embraces life's ups and downs, staying open to love and engagement. Even when she feels flat, she simulates passion to reignite genuine enthusiasm, highlighting the importance of a positive attitude.

Key Lessons and Recommendations:

Inspiration from Others: Finding motivation from those who have made significant contributions later in life.

Acceptance and Resilience: Accepting changes and focusing on resilience to enhance quality of life.

Freedom and Letting Go: Aging can bring freedom from expectations, allowing for greater enjoyment.

Spirituality and Mindfulness: Spirituality and mindfulness improve well-being and peace.

Positive Attitude: Maintaining a positive attitude and passion is crucial for graceful ageing.

Use Strengths: Identify and utilize personal strengths to navigate life's challenges and achieve personal goals, reinforcing self-esteem and confidence.

Video: Isabel Allende: How to live passionately-no matter your age

TED <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ifMRNag2XU&t=1s>

(**Source:** <https://shorturl.at/cjt7E>)

These real-life case studies highlight how Positive Psychology practices, such as mindfulness meditation, and positive affirmations, can lead to significant improvements in the lives of elderly individuals, enhancing their emotional well-being, fostering positive social connections, and building resilience (Swaranalatha et al., 2024).

Section 3: Positive Psychology Practices and Strategies

Positive Psychology focuses on enhancing well-being and happiness through various practices and strategies. This section explores key Positive Psychology Practices, such as: **Gratitude Journaling, Mindfulness Meditation, Positive Affirmations, and Strength-Based Activities**. Each practice is detailed with steps on how to start, techniques, and the benefits they offer.

Gratitude Journaling

How to start	Benefits
<p>Choose a Dedicated Notebook: Select a special notebook solely for gratitude journaling. This can be a simple spiral notebook or a more ornate journal, whatever feels personal and motivating.</p> <p>Write Down Three Things You're Grateful For Each Day: Each day, take a few minutes to write down three things you are grateful for. These can be big things like a supportive family or small moments like a warm cup of coffee in the morning. For example "I am grateful for spending time with my family" and "I am grateful for this sunny day".</p>	<p>Improved Mood: Reflecting on things you're grateful for helps shift your focus from negative to positive, leading to a more optimistic outlook and improved mood.</p> <p>Better Sleep: Ending your day with gratitude journaling can promote relaxation and reduce stress, improving sleep quality.</p> <p>Increased Well-Being: Regularly acknowledging and appreciating the good things in your life fosters a deeper sense of well-being and satisfaction.</p>

Mindfulness Meditation

Techniques	Daily Practices	Benefits
<p>Focused Breathing: Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take deep breaths, focusing on the sensation of the air entering and leaving your body. If your mind wanders, gently bring your focus back to your breath.</p> <p>Video: 5 Minute Guided Meditation</p> <p>Body Scan: Lie down and close your eyes. Slowly focus on each part of your body, starting from your toes and moving up to your head, noticing any sensations or tension without judgment.</p> <p>Video: 10 Minute Guided Body Scan Meditation</p> <p>Mindful Walking: Take a walk and pay close attention to the sensations in your body as you move. Notice the feeling of your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your steps, and the environment around you.</p> <p>Video: 15 Minute Mindful Walking Meditation</p>	<p>Set a Regular Schedule: Consistency is key to building a meditation practice. Choose a time and place where you can meditate without interruptions, aiming for at least 10-15 minutes daily.</p> <p>Start Small: If you're new to meditation, start with short sessions and gradually increase the duration as you become more comfortable.</p>	<p>Stress Reduction: Mindfulness meditation promotes relaxation and helps calm the mind, reducing stress and anxiety.</p> <p>Improved Focus and Concentration: Regular practice enhances attentional control and cognitive function, leading to improved focus and productivity.</p> <p>Emotional Regulation: By observing thoughts and emotions without attachment, mindfulness meditation cultivates greater emotional resilience and regulation.</p>

Positive affirmations

Crafting Affirmations	Integrating into Routines	Benefits
<p>Personalize Your Affirmations: Tailor affirmations to address specific areas of your life or goals you want to achieve. Use language that resonates with you and feels authentic.</p> <p>Keep Them Positive and Present Tense: Frame affirmations in a positive light and use present tense language to reinforce your beliefs and intentions. For example “Every day I find happiness and comfort, even in the littlest things”, “I handle challenges with grace and wisdom” and “I am grateful for the abundance that I have and the abundance on its way”.</p>	<p>Morning Ritual: Start your day by reciting affirmations while looking at yourself in the mirror. This primes your mindset for positivity and sets the tone for the day ahead.</p> <p>Visualization Exercises: Combine affirmations with visualization techniques to enhance their effectiveness. Imagine yourself achieving your goals while repeating affirmations aloud or silently.</p>	<p>Increased Confidence: Affirmations boost self-confidence and self-esteem by reinforcing positive beliefs about yourself and your abilities.</p> <p>Motivation and Resilience: Regularly affirming your goals and aspirations keeps them at the forefront of your mind, motivating you to take action and persist in the face of challenges.</p> <p>Shift in Mindset: Over time, positive affirmations can reprogram negative thought patterns and cultivate a more optimistic outlook on life.</p>

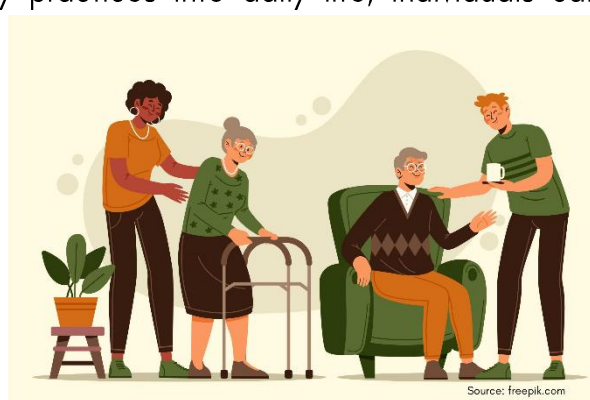


Source: freepik.com

Strength-based activities

Identifying Strengths	Leveraging Strengths	Benefits
<p>Self-Reflection: Take time to reflect on past experiences and identify moments when you felt most fulfilled and engaged. What strengths were you using during those times?</p> <p>Assessment Tools: Utilize strengths assessment tools like the VIA Character Strengths Survey or StrengthsFinder to gain insight into your core strengths and virtues.</p>	<p>Alignment with Values: Choose activities that align with your values and strengths, as this leads to a greater sense of fulfilment and purpose.</p> <p>Continuous Growth: Challenge yourself to further develop and refine your strengths through ongoing practice and learning experiences.</p>	<p>Enhanced Performance: Leveraging strengths allows you to excel in tasks and activities that come naturally to you, leading to increased success and satisfaction.</p> <p>Greater Resilience: Utilizing strengths fosters a sense of confidence and competence, enabling you to navigate challenges more effectively and bounce back from setbacks.</p> <p>Improved Well-Being: Engaging in activities that leverage your strengths promotes a sense of authenticity and fulfilment, contributing to overall well-being and life satisfaction.</p>

By incorporating these Positive Psychology practices into daily life, individuals can enhance their emotional well-being, reduce stress, and foster a more positive and fulfilling life.



Section 4: Tips for caregivers

As a caregiver for the elderly, incorporating Positive Psychology practices into your caregiving approach can significantly enhance the well-being and quality of life for both you and the individuals you care for. This section provides detailed tips and strategies for caregivers to encourage Positive Psychology practices in elderly care.



○ Encouraging Positive Psychology Practices in Elderly Care

Model Positive Behaviors and Practices:

- **Lead by example:** As a caregiver, your attitude and behavior set the tone for the caregiving environment. Demonstrating positivity, resilience, and gratitude in your interactions with elderly individuals can inspire them to adopt similar attitudes
- **Share personal experiences:** Practice gratitude, mindfulness, and other Positive Psychology techniques in your own life, and share your experiences with those you care for. Share how mindfulness or gratitude has positively impacted your life. Personal anecdotes can serve as powerful motivators for elderly individuals to engage in these practices.

○ Providing Resources and Tools

- **Gratitude Journals:** Offer elderly individuals dedicated gratitude journals where they can jot down things they are thankful for each day. Encourage them to reflect on simple pleasures, cherished memories, or acts of kindness they have experienced.
- **Guided Meditation Apps:** Introduce them to user-friendly guided meditation apps that offer a variety of mindfulness exercises tailored to different needs and preferences. Assist them in navigating the apps and selecting sessions that resonate with them.
- **Provide information** on local community groups or activities that promote social connection and engagement.

○ Building a Supportive Environment

Foster Open Communication and Active Listening:

Create Safe Spaces: Establish an atmosphere of trust, acceptance and support, where elderly individuals feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, emotions, needs, feelings, and concerns without fear of judgment.

Practice Empathetic Listening: Practice active listening by fully engaging with what they are saying, validating their feelings, and responding with empathy and

understanding. Give full attention, maintain eye contact, and respond empathetically to their concerns and experiences, reflecting back what they share to demonstrate that you are truly listening and empathizing.

Spend Quality Time: Make an effort to spend quality time with your elderly loved ones. Engage in meaningful conversations and activities that strengthen your bond and provide emotional support.

- **Encouraging Participation in Social and Community Activities**
- **Identify Social Opportunities:** Explore local community centers, senior clubs, or volunteer organizations, where elderly individuals can engage in social activities, pursue hobbies, or contribute to the community, promoting a sense of belonging and connectedness.
- **Provide Transportation Support:** Offer transportation assistance or accompany them to social events if needed, ensuring they have access to opportunities for social connection and engagement.

- **Practical Tips for Integrating Positive Psychology into Daily Care Routines**

Schedule Regular Mindfulness or Meditation Sessions:

Establish Routine Times: Set aside dedicated times each day for mindfulness or meditation sessions, such as in the morning before breakfast or in the evening before bedtime. Consistency is key to establishing a regular practice.

Create a Calm Environment: Create a serene and peaceful environment for meditation sessions by minimizing distractions, dimming lights, and playing soothing background music if desired.

Share and Celebrate Daily Gratitudes Together:

Morning Reflections: Start the day by inviting elderly individuals to share something they are grateful for during breakfast or morning routines. Encourage them to reflect on positive experiences or blessings from the previous day.

Gratitude Rituals: Create rituals around gratitude, such as keeping a gratitude jar where they can write down daily gratitudes on slips of paper and read them aloud together at the end of the week. Create a supportive environment where they can express appreciation for small joys and meaningful experiences.



- **Setting Achievable Goals and Celebrate Progress**

Collaborative Goal Setting: Work together with elderly individuals to identify realistic and achievable goals that align with their interests, capabilities and aspirations. Break down larger goals into smaller, manageable steps.

Acknowledge Milestones: Celebrate milestones, progress and achievements along the way, whether it's completing a goal, overcoming a challenge, or trying something new. Offer praise, encouragement, and recognition for their efforts and progress. This reinforces a sense of accomplishment and self-efficacy.

Conclusion

By incorporating these tips and strategies into your caregiving routine, you can create a nurturing and empowering environment that promotes the well-being and happiness of elderly individuals fostering both positivity and resilience. Encouraging Positive Psychology practices not only enhances your quality of life but also fosters a deeper sense of connection, enriching experience and fulfilment in your daily life and in your role as a caregiver.

Implementing techniques such as gratitude journaling, mindfulness meditation, and positive affirmations can significantly improve emotional and mental well-being. Creating safe spaces for open communication and practicing empathetic listening helps build trust and understanding, allowing elderly individuals to feel valued and heard. Engaging in stress-reducing activities and physical exercises supports physical health and emotional stability.

Additionally, by spending quality time with your elderly loved ones, you strengthen your bond and provide essential emotional support. This connection not only benefits them but also brings a sense of purpose and joy to the caregiving role.

There are many inspiring examples of elderly individuals who have embraced their age and found ways to enjoy the journey. Their stories highlight the potential for growth, fulfilment, and happiness at every stage of life.

Overall, these Positive Psychology practices contribute to a holistic approach, where both the caregiver and the elderly individual thrive.

Quiz

1. What is a key benefit of gratitude journaling for the elderly?

- A) Improved physical health
- B) Increased social connections
- C) Enhanced cognitive abilities

2. Which practice is most associated with reducing anxiety in the elderly?

- A) Goal setting
- B) Strength-based activities
- C) Mindfulness meditation

3. What is the primary focus of positive affirmations?

- A) Enhancing physical strength
- B) Boosting resilience and optimism
- C) Improving memory

*Correct answers: 1- B, 2-C, 3-B

I am strong

I am capable

I am resilient

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