Handout 8.3

Strategies for Increasing Happiness

1. Strengthen your closest relationships.
   
   Remember that your personal relationships have the greatest impact on your level of personal happiness. Thus, nurture your relationships with your family and friends. Spend quality time with the people who matter the most to you. Consciously strive to accept others for what they are, rather than becoming critical or angry with them for what they aren't.

2. Be more social and outgoing.
   
   People who are outgoing and sociable are happier than people who are not (Pavot & others, 1990). One way to become more outgoing is simply to act more outgoing. Smile and say hello to your classmates and neighbors or join a group that shares your interests. If you're shy or find it difficult to join a group on your own, try volunteer work. Another pair of hands at a shelter for the homeless, food bank, or community center is always welcome.

3. Keep busy doing things you enjoy.
   
   Happy people are often too busy to be bored. Rather than bemoaning the boredom of life, generate a list of activities you enjoy, then incorporate at least one of them into each day. Taking a short walk, phoning an old friend, listening to music, and other simple activities can boost your spirits.

4. Engage in activities that you find personally meaningful.
   
   Choosing a career or a line of work that you think is important and meaningful will enhance your chances of long-term happiness. If you're fundamentally unhappy in your present career, try to train yourself for a new one. If that's not practical, look for ways outside your job to engage in meaningful pursuits, such as volunteer work, hobbies, or community involvement.

5. Develop positive, optimistic thinking patterns.
   
   As simple as it sounds, you're more likely to experience happiness if you engage in optimistic and pleasant thoughts. Make a list of the positive things in your life and, at least once a day, review that list. A few moments of reflection on the positive elements that already exist in your life can improve your perspective on life.

   Worrying about the future and dwelling on negative past events are significant causes of unhappiness. But rather than simply worrying about your problems, focus your thoughts on concrete actions that will help you deal more effectively with the problem.

How effective are these simple suggestions? In Fordyce's happiness-training program, participants were instructed to change their everyday behavior by applying just one suggestion per day. Using that simple strategy, the majority of the participants significantly increased their happiness (Fordyce, 1983).