

# Creating Happiness

To be happy and less stressed, be creative.

In his article on the importance of creativity in our lives, philosopher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says there's a direct link between creativity and happiness. That's because research shows that being creative stimulates the brain's pleasure centers.

Not only does being creative make us happy, it's a natural way to fight stress, to build confidence, and to learn more about ourselves and the world around us. The more we exercise the creative, right-half of our brain, the greater our ability to find creative solutions to difficult problems in our work or personal lives.

To cultivate creativity in your life, try the following.

**Use creativity training techniques.** Just as weight training makes a person stronger, creativity training can make a person more creative. Come up with as many uses as you can for a white paper bag. A chef's hat? A comet catcher? A lunch bag (of course)? Now push yourself to find 50 more. The technique is called brainstorming, and it's only one of many ways to exercise the creative side of your brain. To learn more techniques, type "creativity" into your favorite search engine or look for books on creativity at the library.

**Express yourself.** Find a way to express yourself through writing, painting or

doing a craft. But don't overlook other forms of expression such as restoring an antique car, gardening or solving a difficult math problem. Csikszentmihalyi says that whenever we lose track of time doing something just for the love of it, we're in a heightened sense of creativity that he calls "flow." Flow, he says, is an ultimate human experience that refreshes and makes us happy.

**Unlearn ways that stifle creativity.** James Higgins, author of *Escape from the Maze: Nine Steps to Personal Creativity* (New Management Publishing, 1997), says that to be creative, we should look beyond certain rules in life that stifle creativity. For example, place someone in a maze, and s/he will likely walk the corridors in search of an exit. After all, isn't that the *rule* one is supposed to follow when in a maze? But what about digging a hole and tunneling out, Higgins asks? Or pole vaulting? Or calling a friend with a helicopter so you can be lifted out? To unlearn ways that stifle creativity, look at the rules you follow, then look beyond them.

**Change your environment.** A new environment can give you a different, more creative outlook on something, such as a difficult problem. One software company encourages whole departments to take a movie break when

they're stuck on an especially vexing challenge. The employees carpool to the theater to see a movie with the understanding that no one will talk or think about the problem until they return to the office. Once back, managers say employees are so rejuvenated, they often solve the problem immediately.

**Have creative things around you.** Books of poetry, art, photography or architecture and other reflections of creativity can inspire your own creativity. But it's not enough just to have these resources around — you must turn to them for inspiration. Higgins says that people who believe that their lives have become routine and dull should make use of the many resources that can inspire passion and creativity.

**Identify times when you are most creative.** Just before a deep sleep and after a good workout are naturally occurring creative moments. A workout increases the flow of oxygen to the brain and leads to other physiological changes that encourage an active mind. And just before a deep sleep is a period of highly creative dream-like brain activity.

Sources: M. Csikszentmihalyi: "Happiness and creativity," *The Futurist*, S/O 1997. J. Higgins: *Escape from the Maze: Nine Steps to Personal Creativity*. (New York, NY: New Management Publishing, 1997).

## Common Relationship Mistakes

- Expecting that s/he will change.
- Hoping that s/he won't change.
- Assuming that your partner knows what you want and need.
- Believing that the relationship will fulfill all of your social, intellectual or personal needs.
- Trying to be the kind of person your partner expects instead of being yourself.
- Viewing conflict in a relationship as something that should be avoided.
- Not understanding that feelings of love and passion change with time.
- Expecting that your partner shares your priorities, goals and interests.
- Expecting that your partner will never make a mistake.

Source: University of South Florida

# Raising an Ethical Child

Four out of five teens at the top of their class admit having cheated. Worse yet, most who cheated said it was “no big deal.”

Here are some steps parents can take to ensure their child makes ethical choices in life.

*Define your family's values.* Find opportunities to make it clear to your child what you value. Use stories from your past or of family heroes. Explain that these are the standards for your family no matter what other families might decide.

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## *If you want an ethical child, be an ethical role model.*

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*Include ethics in your parenting lesson plans.* Describe a situation in which the child could make an unethical choice, and ask what the child would do. Being asked to cheat on a test would be a good example. The child will probably say what you want to hear, but lessons like these are a chance to reinforce what you believe.

*Be a responsible, moral parent.* When you return a lost purse or wallet, when you obey a traffic law even though other drivers don't, when you help a stranded motorist or find refuge for a lost pet, you're giving your child the best ethical instructions/he could possibly receive. If you want an ethical child, be an ethical role model.

Adapted from *Metro Parent Magazine*

# A Self-Test for Alcohol or Other Drug Problems

Interviews with people who've been treated for alcohol or other drug problems show that a somewhat predictable pattern of behavior develops over time. Some of these behaviors are more serious than others. For instance, drinking and driving is far more dangerous than drinking alone at home. All such substance-related behaviors point to an overriding concern — that alcohol or other drugs may be gradually taking control of the person's life.

The 15 questions that follow could indicate a loss of control to alcohol or other drugs. One “yes” answer is reason to be alert to the possibility that alcohol or other drugs have become a problem. The likelihood that the problem is serious increases with each succeeding yes. Answer all questions with complete honesty. To be anything but honest on a self-test is a form of denial, and denial is another sign that alcohol or other drug use has become a problem.

- Do you frequently use alcohol or other drugs by yourself?
- Has your tolerance increased? In other words, do you have to use more of the substance to reach your desired high?
- Do you find it hard to cut back on your drinking or drugging even though you've promised yourself that you will?
- Are you experiencing problems at work or school because of your substance use?
- Do you find you're using alcohol or other drugs more regularly, such as every weekend or every time you're with friends?
- Do you turn to alcohol or other drugs to get away from problems at home or on the job?
- Is there a history of alcoholism or drug addiction in your family?
- Have you ever tried to control your drinking or drug use by changing jobs, moving or ending a relationship?
- When you're drinking or drugging, do you do things that you later regret?
- Do you sometimes drink or use drugs for several days at a time?
- Are you purposefully mixing drugs, such as using marijuana or cocaine with alcohol?
- Have you been in trouble with the law because of your drinking or drugging?
- Has someone close to you ever mentioned that you get drunk or high too often? Did this annoy you?
- Do you believe that you have to drink or use drugs in order to have a good time?
- Have you ever had a black-out (having no recollection of what happened) while you were drinking or drugging?

If you have concerns about your relationship with alcohol or other drugs after taking this self-test, talk to someone in the Employee Assistance Program.

Addiction is a treatable disease. And someone with a substance abuse problem can learn new ways of controlling his/her drinking or drug use. All it takes is one call.



The Federal Consortium EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, training and consultation to federal employees and agencies throughout the United States. For administrative details about the program, call Doug Mahy, Federal Occupational Health, at 214-767-3030. To visit us on the Web, go to [www.foh.dhhs.gov](http://www.foh.dhhs.gov).

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