



The Importance of Practicing Gratitude and Celebrating Small Victories

(excerpts from Mental Health First Aid USA on November 17, 2022)

While it is nice to count your blessings during the holidays, practicing gratitude for the big and small things in your life can benefit your life all year round. **Research has shown that consciously practicing gratitude can reduce feelings of stress and anxiety.** In fact, studies have found that a single act of thoughtful gratitude produces an immediate 10% increase in happiness, and a 35% reduction in depressive symptoms. These effects disappeared within three to six months, which reminds us to practice gratitude over and over.

Practicing gratitude is also great protective factor. The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) curriculum defines a protective factor as “something that decreases the chances of a person being adversely affected by a circumstance or disorder.” This protection can help in a variety of circumstances, including mental health challenges like depression and anxiety, or substance use challenges.

Gratitude and celebration can also help you tend to your emotional wellbeing. The MHFA curriculum lists out the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) eight dimensions of wellbeing: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social and spiritual. Each aspect of your wellbeing is equally important, and practicing gratitude is just one way you can tend to your emotional wellbeing on the journey to care for your whole self.

You can begin to practice gratitude by thinking of what you’re thankful for—like family and friends, your home, a beautiful sunny day, art, your physical abilities, music—rather than being consumed by what is going wrong. Writing these thoughts down or saying them aloud can even help you stay positive during difficult times.

Another important aspect of practicing gratitude is celebrating small victories. We often get caught up in celebrating large accomplishments—a new job, getting married, buying a house, etc. And while these things are certainly monumental and should be celebrated, it is equally important to celebrate the small moments of life. Sometimes, simply getting out of bed on a bad day can be cause for celebration! But more often, our daily lives are full of distractions and stress, and we let our small achievements go unnoticed, even internally. Think about the past few days—what have you accomplished that went unnoticed? Did you cook a delicious meal, start a new book or chat with a loved one? Take a moment now to celebrate that, to express gratitude. Perhaps you might write it down in a journal.

The internet is constantly showing us what new and better thing we don’t have that we should. Social media leads us to constantly compare ourselves to others. The news ‘primes’ our minds to expect the worst... so we subconsciously watch for it in our everyday lives.

Gratitude reminds us of the gifts we have.

Gratitude assures us of the gifts we are.

Gratitude helps us look for the good in our everyday lives.

Joy follows!

Practice gratitude—and help your family practice, too!

Start a journal or regular conversation at meals about what you’re thankful for!

Thankful
Grateful
Blessed