

CAPITALIZING ON POSITIVE EVENTS

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/DAY** | Duration: **5 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

When people close to us—friends, family members, significant others—tell us about positive things that happened to them, these moments have the potential to make us feel significantly closer to one another—depending on how we respond. This activity offers tips for responding in a way that has been shown to nurture positive feelings on both sides of the relationship and to increase feelings of closeness and relationship satisfaction.

TIME REQUIRED

At least 5 minutes. Try to make time for this practice at least once per week.

HOW TO DO IT

Ask a friend, family member, colleague, romantic partner, or other acquaintance to tell you about a good thing that happened to them today. It does not matter what type of event or how important it was, as long as it was a positive thing that happened to them and they feel comfortable discussing it. Try to be mindful of your timing—it may be hard for someone to talk about a good experience if they are having a bad day. You can also use this exercise to respond when someone spontaneously tells you about a good experience.

As they share, listen and try to respond in an “active-constructive” manner, meaning that you:

- To the best of your ability, make good eye contact. This shows that they have your full attention and that you are interested in what they have to say.
- Express positive emotion by smiling, or even cheering (if appropriate!).
- Make enthusiastic comments—e.g., “That sounds great,” “You must be so excited,” or “Your hard work is definitely paying off.”
- Ask open-ended questions to find out more about the positive parts of the event. Questions about who, what, when, where, or why can help sustain your conversation. For example, if the person tells you about receiving recognition at work for a project they completed, you could ask for more details about the project, what aspects of the project they feel especially proud of, and how it felt to be recognized for it.
- Comment on the positive implications and potential benefits of the event. For example, “I bet this means you have a better chance of getting a promotion this year.”

Many people, when they first hear about this exercise, worry that when they try to do it, their responses will sound phony or scripted. However, once they start, many people report that it feels natural and easy to do.

One strategy is to pick a specific aspect of the event that sticks out to you and begin by commenting on that: “You seem really happy about what your boss said—tell me more.” Or, “It must have been satisfying to do so well on something you worked so hard for.”

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Gable, S. L., Gonzaga, G., & Strachman, A. (2006). [Will you be there for me when things go right? Social Support for Positive Events](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91, 904-917.

During a laboratory-based interaction, heterosexual romantic partners who responded to each other's news of positive events in an active-constructive style, similar to Capitalizing on Positive Events, reported greater relationship well-being and were less likely to break up in the next two months. Participants were mostly white or Asian/Pacific Islander.

Hovasapian, A. & Levine, L. J. (2018). [Keeping the magic alive: Social sharing of positive life experiences sustains happiness](#). *Cognition and Emotion*, 32(8), 1559-70.

Students experienced more positive feelings about a good grade when they shared it with someone and that person recognized how important it was. The majority of participants were female and Asian, Latino, or white.

Who Has Tried The Practice?

Additional research has engaged members of other groups:

- [Both European American and South Korean undergraduate students](#) increased in well-being after doing this practice, although South Koreans are less likely to share positive events.
- For [pairs of male or female best friends in Algeria and Slovakia](#), those who received positive responses to capitalization attempts had higher well-being and happiness.
- Cisgender and mostly Caucasian [gay men in New York City](#) who shared positive experiences related to their sexual orientation reported lower levels of negative emotion if they received supportive responses.

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

WHY TO TRY IT

The people close to us need our support when things go right, not just when they go wrong. Providing encouragement for another person's positive event can not only increase the satisfaction they derive from that event, but it can also make them feel loved and cared about. Talking about a positive event together creates a shared positive experience that can enhance overall relationship satisfaction.

SOURCES

Adapted from Gable, S. (2012) Capitalizing on Positive Events. In J.J. Froh & A.C. Parks (Eds.), [Activities for Teaching Positive Psychology: A Guide for Instructors](#). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.

This practice is part of [Greater Good in Action](#), a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at UC Berkeley and [HopeLab](#).

