BEST POSSIBLE SELF FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Difficulty: MODERATE | Frequency: 1X/DAY | Duration: 15 MINS

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Sometimes our goals in life can be elusive, especially when it comes to creating the kinds of relationships that we feel good about. But research suggests that building optimism about the future can motivate people to work toward that desired future and thus make it more likely to become a reality.

This exercise asks you to imagine your relationships going as well as they possibly could, then write about this best possible future. By doing so, research suggests that you'll not only increase your happiness but pave the way for stronger and more fulfilling connections.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes per day for two weeks.

HOW TO DO IT

Take a moment to imagine your life in the future, and focus specifically on your relationships. What is the best possible romantic, social, and family life you can imagine? This could involve, for example, having a supportive partner, good relationships with your children or parents, and a close group of friends. Think about what your best possible relationships would look like *for you*.

For the next 15 minutes, write continuously about what you imagined about these best possible future relationships. Use the instructions below to help guide you through this process.

1. It may be easy for this exercise to lead you to examine how your current relationships may not match the relationships you'd like to have in this best possible future. You may be tempted to think about ways in which achieving the relationships you want has been difficult for you in the past, or about financial/time/social barriers to developing these relationships. For the purpose of this exercise, however, we encourage you to focus on the future—imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make these desired social connections happen.
2. This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about having a better relationship with your parents, for instance, describe exactly what would be different in the ways you relate to each other; if you think about having a partner or new friend, describe how they interact with you, what you might do together, and so on. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you'll get out of it.
3. Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don't worry about grammar or spelling.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006). How to increase and sustain positive emotion: The effects of expressing gratitude and visualizing best possible selves. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 1*(2), 73-82.

People who completed the Best Possible Self exercise daily for two weeks showed increases in positive emotions right after the two-week study ended. Those who kept up with the exercise even after the study was over continued to show increases in positive mood one month later.

Huffman et al. (2014). Feasibility and utility of positive psychology exercises for suicidal inpatients. *General Hospital Psychiatry, 36*(1), 88-94.

Psychiatric patients hospitalized for suicidal thoughts or behaviors reported increased optimism and decreased hopelessness after completing the Best Possible Self for Relationships exercise.

WHY TO TRY IT

By thinking about your best possible future relationships, you can learn about yourself and what you want in your relationships. This way of thinking can help you restructure your priorities in life in order to reach these goals. Additionally, it can help you increase your sense of control over your relationships by highlighting what you need to do to achieve your goals.

SOURCES

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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.