

Positive Neuroplasticity Training

Participant Handbook



Turning Everyday Experiences
Into Lasting Inner Strengths

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POSITIVE NEUROPLASTICITY TRAINING: PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

First Edition

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Think not lightly of good, saying, “It will not come to me.”

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

*Likewise, the wise one, gathering it little by little,
fills oneself with good.*

Dhammapada 9.122



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About the Author

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A summa cum laude graduate of UCLA and founder of the Wellspring Institute for Neuroscience and Contemplative Wisdom, he's been an invited speaker at NASA, Oxford, Stanford, Harvard, and other major universities, and taught in meditation centers worldwide. His work has been featured on BBC, CBS, and NPR, and he offers the free *Just One Thing* newsletter with over 120,000 subscribers, plus the online Foundations of Well-Being program.

Welcome!

Thank you for participating in this training. This Overview describes its purpose, cautions, limits to confidentiality, logistics, and curriculum. If you have any questions about the training, please contact pnt@rickhanson.net

Purpose of Training

This experiential educational program is about how to turn beneficial experiences into lasting inner resources. This is what's meant by "taking in the good." "Beneficial" – and related words like "positive" or "good" – means here that which leads to the well-being and welfare of yourself, and often others as well; "harmful" – and related words like "negative" or "bad" means the opposite. Some beneficial experiences are uncomfortable (e.g., appropriate remorse) and some pleasant experiences are not beneficial (e.g., overeating), but most beneficial experiences feel good.

Potential inner resources include resilience, emotional balance, grit, patience, generosity, positive mood, mindfulness, confidence, feeling cared about, self-understanding, and compassion. In this training, we often refer to these resources as *inner strengths*. We all need strengths like these for managing stress, dealing with life's challenges, and having more to offer others.

In this training, you'll learn the three basic steps of taking in the good:

- **Have** a beneficial experience (either notice or create it)
- **Enrich** the experience (help it last, fill your body, and become more intense)
- **Absorb** the experience (intend and sense that it is sinking into you)

And you'll learn the optional fourth step for reducing negative material in the mind:

Link positive and negative material together in awareness so that the positive soothes and potentially replaces the negative. These four steps give the acronym **HEAL**.



Because of its evolved negativity bias (which helped our ancestors survive), the brain is good at learning from bad experiences but relatively bad at learning from good ones—even though learning from good experiences of inner resources is the primary way to grow them inside yourself. Consequently, this training is *not* about positive thinking or simply having more positive experiences, since these tend to wash through the brain like water through a sieve unless you make a deliberate effort to register them (the primary purpose of taking in the good).

Enduring personal qualities, including inner resources, are encoded in neural structure. This training is about using your mind skillfully to help get these resources into your brain: turning positive mental states into positive neural *traits*. This is a fundamental mental ability that just about anyone can learn to use better, and no background in psychology or brain science is needed to take this training.

Cautions

The Positive Neuroplasticity Training (PNT) is an *educational* program, not psychotherapy nor any other kind of psychological or medical treatment. This training is not recommended for individuals with severe depression, a history of psychosis, or who become flooded with traumatic material when tuning into their experience.

As in any experiential, psychologically oriented program, it is possible that you may have uncomfortable or otherwise challenging experiences. Please tell the teacher if this is happening for you. In this training, it is assumed that you can handle such experiences on your own; if you think you may not be able to do this, you should withdraw from

the training at any time, and you will receive a full refund. Additionally, participants in PNT must be able to behave appropriately in a group setting. For any reason, the teacher reserves the right to withdraw any participant from the training (who will receive a full refund).

People get different things out of educational programs, and the results are largely up to them. Therefore, there is no promise of any particular benefits from this training.

By participating in this training, you agree that you understand these cautions, that you are psychologically capable of participating in this training, and that you can handle any difficult experiences related to it.

Limits to Confidentiality

The teacher will not communicate identifying information about training participants to anyone not in the training (or related staff), and will also ask participants to agree to do the same. It is also fine to say nothing to anyone throughout the training, including sitting out paired sharing activities.

But the teacher cannot control what participants say about each other. Thus there is no guarantee of confidentiality in this training. It is up to you to decide what you want to communicate in it.

Sharing Training Materials

You can share what you learn in this training with others. But please: do not duplicate training materials without permission, nor try to teach this training to others.



Curriculum

PNT consists of class meetings, the readings in this Handbook, and suggested out-of-class practices (we call these “taking home the good”). We also highly recommend *Hardwiring Happiness* by Rick Hanson, Ph.D. as a fundamental text for this training. We presume that PNT participants will have

read this Handbook, and we hope that they are familiar with *Hardwiring Happiness*. This familiarity with background information about the brain and human psychology enables the training itself to focus on experiential methods.



Conclusion

We hope you enjoy this training and get a lot out of it. And please let your teacher know if you have any questions or if there is anything that would make the training a better experience for you.

Class 1

The Essence of Positive Neuroplasticity Training (PNT)

1. Key Points
2. Engaging Your Mind
3. From Knowing to Experiencing
4. Blocks to Taking in the Good
5. Taking Home the Good from Class 1

Key Points

Engaging Your Mind



This class is about how to engage your mind. There are three fundamental ways:

Let Be

- Simply observing thoughts, feelings, etc. without trying to change them

Let Go

- Preventing, eliminating, or decreasing what's negative

Let In

- Creating, maintaining, or increasing what's positive

Negative, bad = what causes suffering and harm for oneself and others

Positive, good = what causes happiness and benefit for oneself and others

The mind is like a garden: you can observe it, pull weeds, and grow flowers.

The Purpose of This Training

This training is about “growing flowers” by turning fleeting experiences into lasting resources *inside your own brain*, such as strength, emotional balance, calm, happiness, confidence, feeling cared about, compassion, mindfulness, and love.

The Three Basic Steps of Taking in the Good



1. **Have a beneficial experience** – Notice one you're already having; or create one, such as by thinking of something for which you feel grateful.
2. **Enrich it** – Stay with it; open to it in your body; enjoy it!
3. **Absorb it** – Intend and sense that the experience is sinking into you like water into a sponge, becoming a part of you.

Using Your Mind to Change Your Brain

In step 1, you *activate* a mental state, and in steps 2 and 3, you *install* it in your brain. This works because “neurons that fire together, wire together”: mental activity changes neural structure.

The Negativity Bias

To keep our ancestors alive in harsh conditions, the brain evolved to look for bad news, overreact to it, and fast-track negative experiences into emotional memory. In effect, your brain is like Velcro for the negative but Teflon for the positive. By tilting toward the positive and helping it stick to your brain, you level the playing field.

Why Take In the Good?

Every day is full of opportunities to notice beneficial experiences you’re already having or to create some by turning good facts into good experiences, and then take these into your brain and being.

This practice has four main benefits:

1. It builds specific resources inside you, including the key inner strengths that are matched to your external challenges or internal issues;
2. it brings the general benefits of being active rather than passive, and treating yourself like you matter;
3. it sensitizes your brain to the positive, making it like Velcro for good; and
4. it creates positive cycles: when your own cup runneth over, you have more to offer others, which creates more beneficial experiences for you and thus more opportunities to grow your inner resources.



Engaging Your Mind

Introduction

This training involves making deliberate efforts inside your mind. This article creates a context for those efforts, and addresses some common questions. These questions are central concerns for some people, yet for others they are a non-issue. Feel free to read this article as deeply or superficially as you like.

What Are the Primary Ways to Engage the Mind?

Overview

Essentially, there are three fundamental ways to engage the mind:

1. Be with what's there

Experience the experience, feel the feelings, etc. Let contents in awareness – sounds, sights, smells, tastes, touches, and thoughts – come and go without attempting to change them in any way.

2. Prevent, eliminate, or decrease what's (pragmatically) negative

Softening around it, relaxing, intending and helping it to release. Seeing through untrue, negative thoughts; letting go of unhelpful, wrong beliefs. Imagery, imagining that the negative is washing out of you.

3. Create, maintain, or increase what's (pragmatically) positive

Noticing, foregrounding, bringing attention to beneficial “tiles” in the mosaic of experience. Or thinking of things that call up a beneficial experience. And enriching, sustaining, the experience. Staying with it, bringing attention back to it, helping it last.

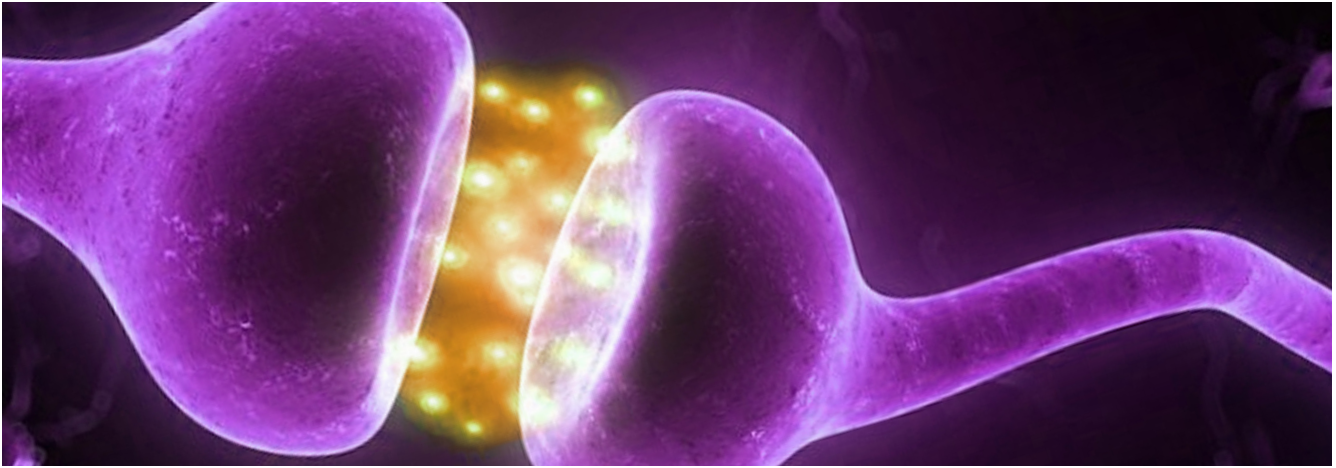


The Mind as a Garden

If we think of the mind like a garden, these three great practices are:

1. Witness the garden.
2. Pull weeds.
3. Grow flowers.

Or, in six words: **Let be, let go, let in.**



“Being with” and “Working with”

To take this a step further, we could call the first practice “being with” and summarize the second and third practices as “working with” the mind.

Being with is more primary than *working with*. You can always be aware of your own experience, the contents of your mind – but sometimes you just can’t release or reduce something that is negative, or receive or increase something that is positive.

Further:

- Simply being aware of the contents of mind helps you step back from it – like getting out of the movie and sitting twenty rows back, watching it – and be less identified with it.
- You can learn things about yourself, increase self-awareness, through exploring your mind without trying to change it any way.
- Sometimes simply being aware of a negative content of mind will enable it to diminish or even release.

Nonetheless, *working with* your mind is a vital part of everyday well-being, effectiveness at home and work, healing distress and dysfunction, personal growth, and – if this is meaningful to you – spiritual practice:

- Awareness alone often does not itself remove negative states or factors of mind, or cultivate positive states or factors of mind.
- It is possible to develop a kind of passivity or inertness with regard to one’s mind

through remaining aware and not making any other efforts inside the mind.

- Making efforts inside your own mind – pulling weeds and planting flowers – gives you a sense of agency, of being an actor, of being the cue ball instead of the 8-ball. This sense of agency, of being a cause instead of an effect, is a good factor in mental health, especially in terms of protecting against slumps in mood.
- As we will see further on, the states and factors in the mind are represented by underlying neural activities and processes. These underlying aspects of the brain are, obviously by definition, *physical*. Effectively negative activities and structures in the brain usually don’t just change for the better on their own; they are built into tissues whose structures tend to persist unless they are actively changed. Similarly, effectively positive activities and structures need to get built into the brain; they usually don’t just develop on their own.

And of course, *being with* and *working with* help each other. We need to work with the mind to enable it to continue to be with, to remain spaciouly aware of, mental contents (especially negative ones). We also need to be with our efforts to pull weeds and plant flowers, and the results of these efforts.

In sum, the great bird of practice needs two wings to fly: both being with and working with the mind.

What Is Awareness?

Awareness is the field in which various contents of mind arise, persist, and pass away.

You can be aware of *being with* these contents of mind, which involves a receptive knowing of them in the present moment with no attempt to influence them.

You can also be aware of *working with* contents of mind, which involves deliberate efforts regarding them, such as decreasing

negative material or increasing positive material.

Awareness is present in both cases, whether you're being with or working with the mind.

As you can see, *being with* the mind is one way to be aware of it, but not the only way. *Working with* the mind is another way, and it is not in conflict with awareness.



What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a *kind* of awareness. It is steady attention, in the moment, not lost in thought, typically with a quality of recollectedness, of presence of mind. One is mindful of various objects of attention.

For example, you can be mindful of a toddler's first lurching steps, of the state of your retirement account, of the shifts of emotion in the mind of a friend during a conversation, and of the taste of coffee.

You can be mindful of the passing stream of consciousness without trying to influence it in

any way – this is *being with* the mind – and you can be just as mindful of your efforts to *work with* your mind.

Being with the contents of awareness is not the only way to be mindful, and *working with* that material is not at odds with mindfulness.

In fact, in almost all states of consciousness, we must *work with* the mind at least a little bit to remain mindful. Wise efforts support wise mindfulness.

What Is Open (Choiceless) Awareness?

In the barest forms of *being with* the mind – called open or sometimes “choiceless” awareness – there is sustained presence in each moment with accepting receptivity to whatever appears in awareness. Preferences fall away; one neither grasps after what is pleasant nor resists what is unpleasant. The typical sense of being “I” often becomes minimal, even absent. There is simply abiding; in Zen, sometimes called “just sitting.”

Open awareness is a profoundly valuable expression of mindfulness. But as we’ve seen, it is not the only way to be mindful.

In open awareness, there is only the most minimal effort needed – which can become tiny, almost nonexistent – to remain present and undistracted in each moment. Other than this absolute minimum, there is no *working with* the mind during open awareness practice, and attempts to make deliberate efforts get in the way of open awareness.

Of course, at times before engaging in this practice, it is useful to make deliberate efforts – such as taking in the good – to build up some internal factors so that you can observe your mind with acceptance and not get carried

away by it. These factors of open awareness include understanding, intention, relaxation, warmheartedness, and self-compassion.

And after periods of open awareness, it can be valuable to make some efforts in the mind, such as reflecting on the experience or sensing that some of its fruits – perhaps a greater sense of wholeness or peace – are sinking in to you, becoming a part of you, a resource inside you. Besides the general benefits of these efforts after open awareness, some of them will support open awareness itself the next time you engage it.

More generally, unrelated to open awareness practice, life contains many moments in which we need to make deliberate efforts and engage states of mind other than utterly bare, receptive, choiceless, undirected, open awareness. Open awareness is a practice that informs and benefits one’s life, but it is not *itself* a way of life.

In sum, it is necessary and beneficial to *work with* the mind - to make deliberate efforts - before and after open awareness practice, and even (to the minimal extent necessary) during it. Working with the mind supports open awareness and does not undermine it.



Is It a Problem to Have Goals?

Working with the mind means having goals: you are making a deliberate effort to bring something different into being, such as less anxiety or more confidence.

One concern about goals is that they are dualistic, in the sense that the current condition is seen as different from the goal state. Another concern is that pursuing goals means having desires that will create stress or otherwise lead to suffering.

Regarding the first concern – dualistic thinking – whatever the ultimate cosmic truth of non-dual oneness may be, everyday reality is full of dualisms. For example, there are the distinctions between water and cup, hating or loving others, and causes that lead to more suffering or less suffering. You can both see these dualisms and also understand that they are part of a larger whole.

Regarding the second concern – desires – at all levels in the architecture of the body, the brain, and the mind, there are goal-pursuing, desire-driven processes. To live is to have desires, like avoiding harm, approaching rewards, and attaching to others. As a living creature, you can't not have desires. Even conceptually it is impossible: not having desires is itself a desire!

Given that desires are unavoidable, the only relevant questions are:

- Are your desires (pragmatically) positive? For example, consider positive desires such as the wish that beings (including oneself) not suffer and instead be happy, or the aims of developing greater virtue, steadiness of mind, and wisdom.
- Are you pursuing your desires in (pragmatically) positive ways? For example, can you sustain efforts that feel good to you, don't hurt others, are at most mildly stressful, and avoid harmful self-criticism if they are not successful?



- Are you pursuing your aims . . . without getting attached to the outcome? You can really want something – and still be at peace, fundamentally, with whatever happens.

There is no inherent problem with goals or desires. The key is to have beneficial ones, pursued in beneficial ways, without getting hooked on the results.

And as we'll explore in this training, letting in the results of beneficial aims pursued in beneficial ways often actually leads you to have fewer desires since you have brought so many beneficial states and factors of mind into yourself; they are increasingly "in here" you so you no longer need to pursue them "out there."

Your well-being becomes increasingly *unconditioned*, less and less based on external conditions. Moving in this direction is one of the central goals (!) of this training.

Does Taking in the Good Strengthen a Sense of “I”?

The topic of what in the world “I” is, is a big question that’s outside the scope of this training. So here are just a few, hopefully down to earth comments.

Yes, taking in the good involves making deliberate efforts in the mind, and this can strengthen the sense of being a “chooser” or “inner executive.” It’s wise to be a little careful with this, since if you take it too far, you can end up feeling very separated from others and the flow of life. Try to recognize that any sense of “I am making something happen” is simply another content of mind arising and passing away, no different in principle from any other content of mind, including sounds, sensations, emotions, or thoughts. You are the *whole* body-mind, and the sense of “I” is just a part of that whole.

This said, it’s also true that a solid sense of what’s called “agency” – being a hammer rather than a nail in life – is an important factor in mental health. One of the implicit benefits of taking in the good is to strengthen your sense of agency, which helps protect against the “learned helplessness” that is a risk factor for depression.

Now, it’s certainly possible to take in praise and a sense of accomplishment – but this does not seem inherently to make people more vain or create a big ego for them. In fact, gradually taking in and building up positive states and factors of mind usually helps a person become *less* self-centered and egoic – not more – over time. When someone feels fuller inside – with more sense of peace, happiness, and love – then this person is actually less likely to get all puffed up or arrogant.



From Knowing to Experiencing

The First Step of Taking in the Good (TG)

The first step is to Have a beneficial experience, and there are two ways to do this:

- (1) *Notice* one that's already present, or
- (2) *create* one, usually by bringing to mind a good fact and helping it become a good experience.

But how do we actually do (2), and move from the idea of a good fact to a felt sense of it?

For example, can knowing that you've finished the dishes become a feeling of accomplishment? Can the sight of flowers blooming become a sense of beauty? Can the smile of a stranger warm your heart?

Opening to Experience

Try one or more of these ways to help the concept of a good fact become an embodied beneficial experience:

- Pick a current experience, such as a sensation. Then form an idea about it (e.g., "that feels good"). Notice the difference between an idea and an experience.
- Bring awareness to your body.
- Soften and open, with a sense of receiving the good fact.
- Be a little active in your mind, thinking about aspects of the good fact that tend to elicit a positive emotion, or attitude, or sensation in your body.
- Be aware of any blocks to having a beneficial experience, such as a wandering mind (see the handout, *Dealing with Blocks*); take a moment to accept this block and get to know it; then gently bring your attention back to the good fact.
- Have an attitude of kindness toward yourself – perhaps like an inner voice saying: *Go ahead, this is a real fact, it's alright to feel good about it.*
- Imagine that a friend is encountering the fact you're thinking about. What would be a



natural experience to have? What experience would you wish for him or her?

Try It Out

Be aware of the key elements of an experience (also see Key Points #2): thoughts, perceptions, emotions, desires, and actions. Then bring to mind a simple good fact, like a recent task you completed, and use one or more of the methods just above to encourage this knowing to become one or more of these elements of experience.

Be aware of the transition from idea to experience. In effect, help yourself *learn* how to encourage that transition, that kindling of the fuel of concept into the fire of embodied experience. Consider young children: knowings quickly become feelings and other aspects of experience. The movement from idea to experience is natural, innate – all you have to do is to give it a little support and then let it unfold.

You can also use one or more of the methods above to gently encourage the positive experience that *activated* in the first step of TG to be enriched in the second step. Explore what it's like to keep opening, softening, receiving ... to let the experience become even richer in its sensations and emotions ... perhaps fuller and more intense ... bigger in your body and mind ... even a mild or subtle experience – perhaps gratitude, caring, peace, or well-being – can pervade your mind. Enjoy!

Blocks to Taking in the Good

Blocks Are Normal

In life, when we want to do something beneficial – something that brings happiness and benefit to oneself, and often to others – we frequently come up against various *blocks*. It's the same with taking in the good. Blocks are common. They're not bad or wrong – but they do get in the way. What works is to be aware of them, explore them so you know what they are, and then decide for yourself if it's better for you to give over to them – or to keep trying to take in the good. With practice and time, blocks usually fade away. Meanwhile, try the suggestions below for dealing with them.

Blocks to Any Inner Practice

- **Distractibility** – Watch your attention and bring it back when it wanders.
- **Out of touch with experience** – Explore and get used to simple pleasant sensations.
- **Leery of bringing attention inward** – You are safe enough to be less vigilant; you can pull attention out of experience if it gets uncomfortable.
- **Over-analyzing, pulling out of the experience** – Bring attention back into your body.

Blocks Specific to Taking in the Good (TG)

- **It's hard to receive, even a good experience** – Inhale or swallow and sense that it's OK to let something in; notice that receiving actually feels alright and doesn't hurt you.
- **Concern you'll lose your edge** – Building up inner resources will aid your success.
- **Fear you'll lower your guard** – Resources make you stronger; you can still be careful.
- **Idea that feeling good is disloyal or unfair to those who suffer** – Your suffering will not lessen theirs; your growing well-being could help lift theirs; you matter, too.
- **Belief you don't deserve to feel good, or that seeking to feel good is vain or sinful** – It's moral to seek the welfare of *all* beings; “all beings” includes *you*; when your own cup runneth over, you have more to offer others: put on your own oxygen mask first.
- **Not wanting to risk disappointment** – Know that disappointment is unpleasant but not overwhelming; consider what's greater,

the cost of occasional disappointment or the benefits of feeling good and building up resources inside, then make your choice.

- **As a woman, socialized to make others happy, not yourself** – Your needs and wants have the same standing as theirs; you have to nurture yourself to care for others.
- **As a man, socialized to be stoic and not care about feelings** – You need to refuel or you'll be running on empty; building up inner “muscles” makes you stronger, not less.
- **You've been punished for being energized or happy** – You're with different people today than those in childhood; notice the people who like it when you feel pretty good.
- **Good things in you have been dismissed** – What's good about you is real; feel the realness of your good qualities; sticking up for yourself today helps heal the past.
- **Positive experiences associate to negative ones** – Notice this; return attention to the positive experience; focus on particularly sensate and enjoyable aspects of it.
- **“What's the point in feeling good, bad things will still happen”** – Increasing your inner resources will help you and others when bad things do happen.
- **Payoffs in not feeling good** – What's better for you: those payoffs ... or feeling good?
- **Not wanting to let others off the hook** – Your pain punishes you more than them.
- **TG is craving that leads to suffering** – TG is compassion in action; by internalizing good experiences, you don't need to reach for them outside you.

Class 1 - The Essence of Positive Neuroplasticity

- Each day, be aware of the three ways to engage the mind: *letting be*, *letting go*, and *letting in*.
- Notice the *negativity bias* in yourself or others, such as an over-focus on what's unpleasant and under-focus on what's pleasant.
- Enjoy experiences of physical pleasure, such as pleasant sights, sounds, tastes, touches, and smells. Turn these mental *states* into beneficial neural traits through the three steps of taking in the good: *have* a positive experience (notice one that is already present or create one), *extend* it (help it be embodied, lasting, and more intense), and *absorb* it (intend and sense that it is sinking into you).
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	Be aware of letting be, letting go, and letting in	Notice the negativity bias	Have a physical pleasure	Enrich this beneficial experience	Absorb this beneficial experience
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Your Notes

Class 2

Having, Enriching, and Absorbing Beneficial Experiences

1. Key Points
2. Seeing the Good in Yourself
3. Taking Home the Good from Class 2

Key points

Elements of Experience

An experience can include one or more of these elements:

- Thoughts – inner language, images, recollections, beliefs, expectations, perspectives
- Perceptions – sights, sounds, tastes, smells, sensations
- Emotions – passing feelings and lasting moods; happiness, worry, love, depression

- Desires – wishes, wants, hopes, intentions, craving, clinging, grasping, aversion
- Actions – facial expressions, speech, postures, movement, freezing, inclinations

Any one of these aspects of your experience can be “taken in.” Some might be especially valuable for you, such as the feeling of gratitude if you’re disappointed, or the sensation of relaxation if you’re anxious.

Activating Positive Experiences

This class explores ways to activate a positive experience. To build up inner resources (or *traits*) like resilience, emotional balance, happiness, mindfulness, or compassion, we need to start with positive mental *states*.



15 Ways to Activate a Positive Experience

Notice a positive experience that you are already having:

1. in the *foreground* of attention
2. in the *background* of awareness

Create a positive experience by:

- looking for good facts:
3. in your immediate *situation*
 4. in current or recent *events*
 5. in enduring *conditions*
 6. in your own *character*
 7. in your *past* (including events, conditions, and your character)
 8. in *future* events
 9. in *reframing* facts to recognize what is good about them
 10. in *the lives of others* that you could feel glad about
 11. in your *imagination*
 12. *caring about others*, wishing them well, making contributions to them
 13. *directly evoking* a positive experience
 14. *producing* good facts
 15. *sharing* about good facts and your experience of them with others

5 Ways to Enrich an Experience

You can strengthen the encoding of experience into neural structure through increasing:

1. Duration – helping it last, protecting it, creating sanctuary for it, coming back to it
2. Intensity – opening to it, letting it pervade your mind, dialing it up
3. Multimodality – increasing elements of experience, especially sensing in your body
4. Novelty – looking for what is fresh, new; “don’t know mind”
5. Salience – seeing what’s personally relevant; why would it help you to take this in

How to Absorb an Experience

Enriching an experience is like taking a thin soup and turning it into a rich luscious broth; absorbing an experience is like taking that rich broth into a super-absorbent sponge rather than having it slowly seep into some styrofoam.

Just like taking a mental snapshot of a beautiful sunset, you can make your brain’s memory systems “stickier” by intending and sensing that the experience is sinking into you as you sink into it.

Some people visualize or sense the experience sifting down into them like soft golden dust or gentle rain, soaking in like a water into a sponge, placed like a jewel in the treasure chest of the heart, warming them like a cup of hot cocoa, or easing hurt places inside like a golden soothing balm.

Others simply have a knowing that the experience is becoming a part of them, a resource inside they can take with them wherever they go.

Just find whatever works for you.

Seeing the Good in Yourself

Why See the Good in Yourself?

Acknowledging your good qualities creates a vital beneficial experience that supports a healthy sense of worth, lifts mood, helps heal old feelings of inadequacy or shame, and balances self-criticism. It's a matter of justice: you are telling the truth about yourself much as you would tell the truth about a friend. But facing this truth – that you are fundamentally a decent and capable person – is often challenging. That's why it's important to stick up for yourself and really **take in** both the experiential sense of your good qualities and the conceptual knowing that they're real.

The Friend Test

Consider a friend. Certainly, he or she has some good qualities. Like fairness, talents and skills, grit, and a warm heart. Neither halo nor heroics are needed to have good qualities; we all have some! Would you recognize them in your friend? If you overlooked, minimized, or denied them, would this be a good way to treat someone? Well, turn it around: can you see your own good qualities? Why would it be good to see good in your friend but bad to see it in yourself? The Golden Rule is a two-way street: we should also treat ourselves as we would treat others.

Identifying Good Things about Yourself

Now take some time to recognize some of the good in yourself. Over an hour or a day, observe virtues or character strengths in yourself such as endurance, patience, determination, decency, empathy, compassion, honesty, or perspective. Also notice various abilities, even seemingly simple ones like cooking a meal, working a spreadsheet, or navigating a tricky conversation. These are facts, not fiction. If negative thoughts tug at you – *But I'm not always this way ... and there are bad things*



about me – that's normal; just be aware of it and bring your attention back to the facts of your virtues, strengths, and abilities.

Consider what a friend appreciates, likes, or loves about you. Or imagine that you are observing the life of someone just like you: What does he or she draw upon to get through a tough day? What gets contributed to others? What is honorable and admirable about this person? Or imagine the fairest and most loving being in the universe whispering in your ear, telling you about your own goodness.

Really try to let yourself admit the *truth* of your virtues, strengths, and abilities. Pick one or two of these, and take a few moments to get an experience of it, and then sense it sinking into you. Also open to feeling good about this quality of yours – perhaps some gladness, ease, and confidence – and then sense this good feeling sinking into you. Deepest of all, see if you can take in the sense that you are a fundamentally good person.

Notice the effects of recognizing your own worth on your energy, mood, and behavior. And see how these effects on you become benefits for others as well.

Class 2 - Having, Enriching, & Absorbing Beneficial Experiences

- Each day, *notice* beneficial experiences already present in awareness (in the foreground or background).
- Also look for ways to *create* new beneficial experiences by recognizing good facts and letting this knowing become an experience.
- Recognize good *facts about yourself* - such as good intentions, strengths, talents, and virtues – and let this knowing become a beneficial experience, such as a sense of the good quality itself or a sense of comfort, confidence, or pride that you have this quality. Try to push through any reluctance to see these good qualities in yourself or to feel good about them.
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	Notice beneficial experiences already present in awareness	Create beneficial experiences by recognizing good facts	Recognize good qualities in yourself	Enrich a beneficial experience	Absorb a beneficial experience
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Your Notes

Class 3

Linking Positive and Negative Material

1. Key Points
2. Three Needs and Two Ways of Meeting Them
3. Key Resource Experiences
4. The 4th Step of HEAL: Linking
5. Taking Home the Good from Class 3

Key points

Three Needs and Two Ways of Meeting Them

To simplify, the brain evolved in three layers, each one focused on a deep need:

- Reptile (brainstem) – *Avoiding* harms for safety
- Mammal (sub-cortical limbic system) – *Approaching* rewards for satisfaction
- Primate/human (cortex) – *Attaching* to others for connection

Experiences have a “hedonic tone” – their quality of being unpleasant, pleasant, heartfelt, or neutral. Unpleasant experiences tend to activate the Avoiding system, pleasant ones activate the Approaching system, and heartfelt experiences activate the Attaching system.

When we experience that all three core needs are met – for safety, satisfaction, and connection – the brain defaults to its sustainable, homeostatic resting state. This *Responsive* mode is our home base, the “green zone,” in which the body refuels and repairs itself, and – in terms of our three core needs – the mind experiences peace, contentment, and love.

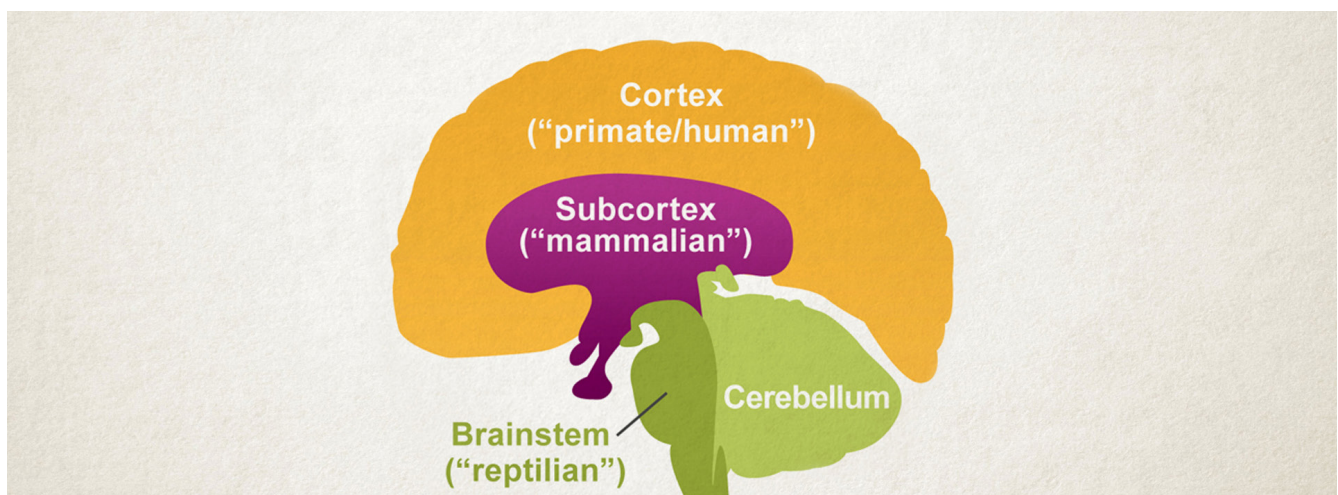
But when we feel a sense of deficit or disturbance in one or more of our three core

needs – pain or threat, loss or frustration, rejection or loneliness – the brain shifts into its *Reactive* mode, the “red zone,” in which bodily resources are burned quickly for immediate survival, and the mind experiences fear, frustration, and heartache. While the Reactive mode may have short-term benefits, there is always a cost, and its chronic activation is not good for oneself, relationships, or our planet.

We have no choice about our three needs, the structure of the brain, and its Responsive and Reactive settings. Our only choice is how we go about meeting our needs: in the green zone or the red zone?

Key aims of a good life – peace, contentment, and love – are also key methods: Each time you take in an experience of peace, contentment, and love, you strengthen its neural foundations.

Taking in the good brings you home to the Responsive mode. Then you handle challenges from the green zone – even when the world and other people are flashing red.



Key Resource Experiences

If you have scurvy, you need vitamin C, not iron. In the same way, external challenges and internal issues need inner strengths that are matched to them. The Avoiding, Approaching, and Attaching systems give us a framework for identifying the “key resource experiences” that will help the most.

When you identify an external challenge or internal issue – let’s say, needless worry – ask

yourself: What resources inside me could help with this? What would make a difference? Then activate and install the particular experiences that would build those strengths inside you. For example, feeling more protected and relaxed could reduce worrying, so you could really try to *have* experiences of protection and relaxation (by noticing or creating them) and then *enrich* and *absorb* them.

The 4th Step of HEAL: Linking

We all have negative material, both from the present, and especially built up from the past; there is nothing inherently shameful or embarrassing about having negative material; it just means you are a normal human being. While negative material is active in the mind, its neural substrates start associating with the neural substrates of whatever else is in awareness. Then, when it gets reconsolidated back in storage, it takes with it some of these associations. In the optional 4th step, you hold both positive and negative material in awareness, so that the positive gradually eases, brings perspective to, soothes, and even replaces the negative.

To do the 4th step, you must be able to hold two things in mind at the same time, not be hijacked by the negative, and keep the positive more prominent in the foreground of awareness. Therefore, **do not use this method on your own for trauma.** (Many trauma therapies use some kind of Linking, but they do so with a skilled counselor in a safe container.)

The positive material that will have the most impact is whatever key resource experience is a kind of targeted antidote for the negative. For example, in terms of the three systems, feeling protected or strong antidotes fear (Avoiding), feeling glad or successful antidotes disappointment (Approaching), and feeling included or loved antidotes heartache (Attaching).

In the 4th step, there are three levels of engaging the negative: (1) be aware of just the idea of the negative material; (2) have a more felt sense of the negative; or (3) sense or imagine that the positive material is contacting the negative, going into it, soothing and easing it. You could also sense that younger parts or layers of your psyche are receiving the positive material. If you get hijacked by the negative, drop it entirely and rest only in the positive; when you’re ready, if you want, you can bring the negative material to mind again. Then, at the end of the 4th step, let go of the negative and rest only in the positive for however long you like.

You can enter this 4-step process from a positive experience. Or you can enter from a negative experience. In terms of the three great ways to engage the mind:

- 1) Be with the negative : observe it , accept it, explore it
- 2) Release the negative : only when it feels right and as best you can, relaxing, venting
- 3) Replace the negative with something positive, through Taking In The Good

Class 3 – Linking Positive and Negative Material

- Each day, look for opportunities to center yourself.
- Be aware of your core needs and how you go about meeting them.
- Hold both positive and negative material in your mind. .
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	Center yourself Be on your own side	Be aware of your needs for safety, satisfaction, and connection	Be aware of Responsive and Reactive approaches to these needs	Link positive and negative material	Take in a key resource experience that will help you these days
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Your Notes

Class 4

Growing Strengths for Safety

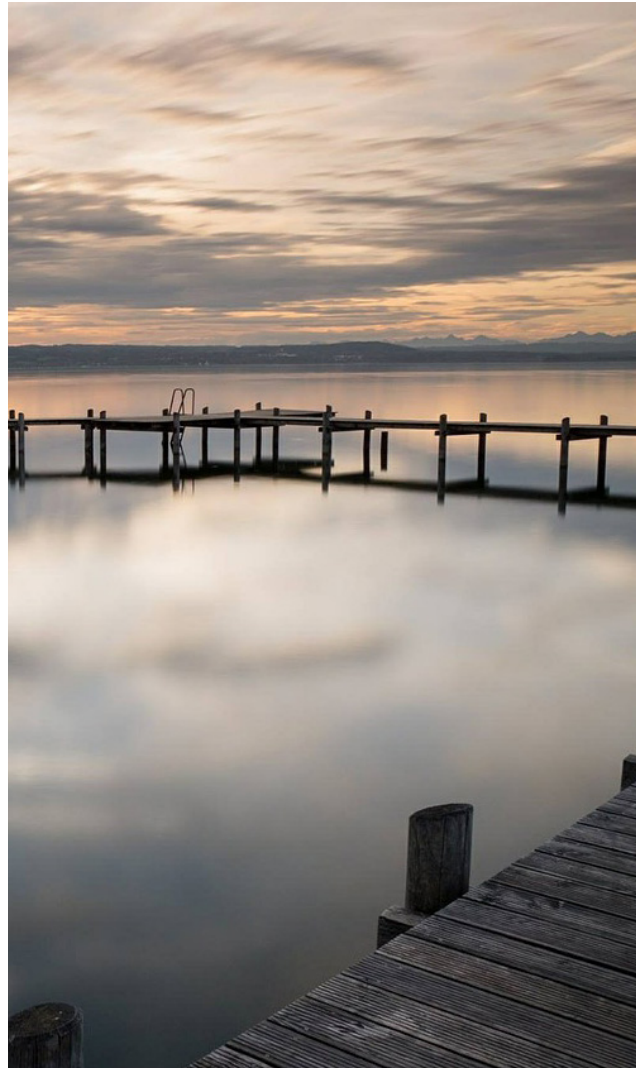
1. Key Points
2. Being Peace
3. Self-Compassion
4. Unnecessary or Excessive Anxiety
5. Reactive vs. Responsive Pursuit of Safety
6. Taking Home the Good from Class 4

Key points

Being Peace

This class is about the *Avoiding harms* system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us be safe by handling actual or anticipated pains and threats. Much of the time the Avoiding system activates unnecessarily or excessively.

Even when there is a real challenge to avoid, it's common to approach it from the brain's *Reactive* setting, rather than its *Responsive* one, which feels bad plus disturbs relationships and one's own mental and physical health. Taking in key resources helps you manage pains and threats in the brain's Responsive mode, or at least buffer the impact of the Reactive mode and leave it quickly. Then you'll be increasingly grounded in a sense of strength and peace.



Self-Compassion

Compassion is the wish that a being not suffer, usually along with feelings of sympathetic concern. Our compassion is sincere even if we cannot relieve the suffering. Self-compassion simply applies this attitude toward oneself. It requires that

we are touched by our own suffering and are able to step outside of it to see that it is part of the human experience. It is different from wallowing in self-pity; in fact, research shows that self-compassion makes us stronger, more resilient, and more responsive.

Unnecessary or Excessive Anxiety

Our ancestors needed to avoid two kinds of mistakes: 1) Thinking there's a tiger in the bushes when there isn't one, and 2) thinking there's no tiger when actually one is about to pounce. The cost of the first mistake was needless anxiety, but the cost of the second one could be death.

So the brain evolved to make the first mistake a thousand times to avoid making the second mistake even once. This “paper tiger paranoia” makes us overestimate threats, underestimate opportunities, and underestimate inner and outer resources.



Reactive vs. Responsive Pursuit of Safety

The Reactive mode of the Avoiding system involves:

- disturbing and depleting bodily systems
 - a mind full of fear and anger
 - actions of fight, flight, freeze, or appease.
- In an emergency, this approach might be necessary, but there are always costs.

In contrast, the Responsive mode of the Avoiding system involves:

- sustainable use of bodily resources;
- feeling threatened is contained in mindful awareness;
- actions come from calm strength, judiciousness, and compassion for oneself and others.

To stay in the Responsive mode, take in the sense of having resources – e.g., abilities, strengths, money, allies, goodwill, protections – and imagine Responsive ways to engage a current challenge, such as feeling already strong, peaceful, fed, grateful, grounded in a basic well-being, connected, cared about, or loved. Take in your imagined sense of a Responsive approach so that your brain will be inclined to deal with challenges in this way.

Class 4 – Growing Strengths for Safety

- Each day, have an experience of self-compassion.
- Be aware of unnecessary or excessive anxiety, and take in feeling protected and having resources (e.g., strengths, allies, money).
- Pick a challenge – a situation, relationship, or risk – that you could feel threatened, anxious, or angry about. Next, imagine yourself dealing with this challenge in Responsive ways. Then, take in this imagined experience, such as how you would feel in your body, your perspectives and priorities, your guidance to yourself, your use of resources, and the potentially positive results.
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	Have self-compassion	Be aware of needless anxiety	TG the sense of being protected	TG the sense of being alright right now	Imagine a Responsive approach to a challenge, then TG this approach
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Your Notes

Class 5

Growing Strengths for Satisfaction

1. Key Points
2. Being Contentment
3. Liking and Wanting
4. Encouraging Motivation
5. The Fullness of This Moment
6. Taking Home the Good from Class 5

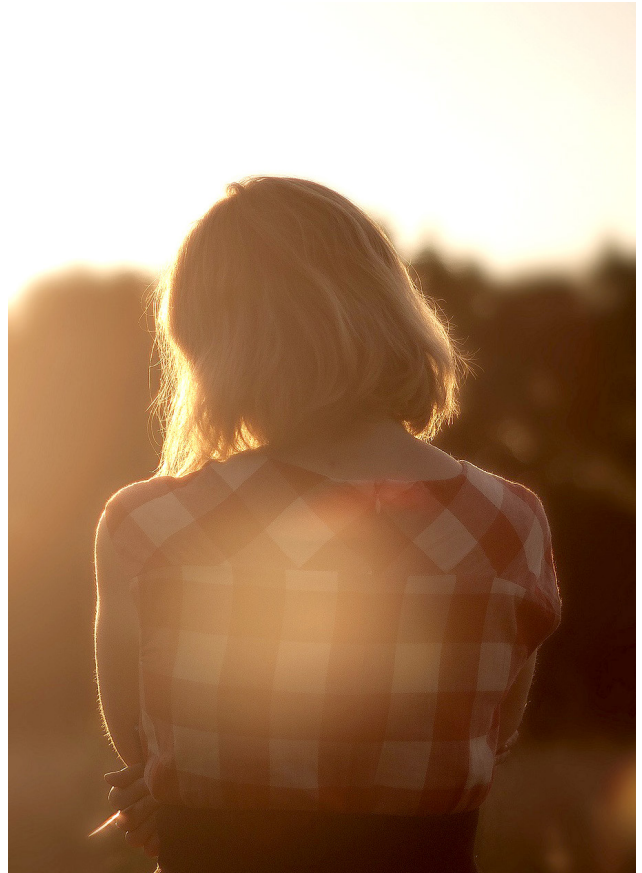
Key points

Being Contentment

This class is about the *Approaching rewards* system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us be satisfied by managing opportunities and losses. When the Responsive mode of this system is activated, we are engaged with life with passion and purpose, grounded in a sense of being already basically contented, fed, fulfilled, and happy. In this mode, we pursue wholesome ends in wholesome ways; we aspire without attachment.

But when the Reactive mode of this Approaching system kicks into gear, the body burns resources chasing goals at an unsustainable pace, the mind is colored by frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and drivenness, and our aims are often harmful to ourselves and often others.

Key resource experiences for the Approaching system include gladness, gratitude, enoughness, beauty, accomplishment, pleasure, and fulfillment. When you take these in, you feel better, plus build up resources inside for an unconditional contentment.



Liking and Wanting



It is possible to like something – such as the taste of apple pie when you are already over-stuffed from eating – while not wanting it. And it's possible to want something – such as pulling the lever on the slot machine for the umpteenth time, without liking it. It is said that liking without wanting is heaven, while wanting without liking is hell.

In practical terms, this means staying in the green zone – in the Responsive mode – even when things feel really unpleasant, pleasant, or heartfelt.

Encouraging Motivation

It really helps to learn to want things that are good for you that you don't naturally want. This is the essence of motivation. A powerful way to strengthen motivation is to associate rewards with whatever you'd

like to encourage. Before doing it, imagine the rewards that will come to you and others; while doing it, really take in its rewards; after doing it, recall again the felt sense of its rewards.

The Fullness of This Moment

Your nervous system is continually flooded by information coming into it from your body and environment. So the brain filters out most of this information, and even what gets through the filters into awareness is still so much that the spotlight of attention lights up only a small fraction of everything in awareness.

This gives you a great opportunity, any time you want, to open your attention to everything flowing through awareness, which gives you such a sense of fullness and enoughness that it can feel almost overwhelming. SO many sounds, sights, thoughts, sensations, emotions, images, plans, etc. are streaming through: there is SO much here already in each moment of experience. Who could want for anything more?!



Class 5 – Growing Strengths for Satisfaction

- Each day, be aware of “antidote experiences” – positive experiences that are particularly helpful for certain negative material.
- Practice TG-ing resource experiences related to the Approaching rewards system of your brain. These experiences include gladness, gratitude, enoughness/fullness, contentment, success in attaining goals, satisfaction, and fulfillment.
- Try the 4th step of TG, holding both positive and negative material in your awareness so that the positive gradually eases, balances, soothes, and even replaces the negative.

	TG experiences of beauty	TG gladness and/or gratitude	TG the fullness and enoughness of this moment	Do TG steps 1 – 3 on feeling accomplished or successful	Try step 4: “antidoting” feelings of frustration or disappointment
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Your Notes

Class 6

Growing Strengths for Connection

1. Key Points
2. Being Love
3. The Tip of the Root
4. Feeling Worth
5. Feeling Already Connected
6. Taking Home the Good from Class 6
7. General Practices

Key points

Being Love

This class is about the *Attaching to others* system of the brain, the one that evolved to help us meet our need for connection through empathy, compassion, language, kindness, generosity, parent-child bonds, romantic love between mates, networks of friends and kin, and the cooperation and altruism necessary to sustain “the village it takes to raise a child.”

Over the past several million years, the survival benefits of love, broadly defined, have been a major – and perhaps the primary – driver of the evolution of the brain. Today, this Attaching system helps us feel related to people around the world, and helps us span great divides of language and culture.

In its Responsive setting, the Attaching system is grounded in a sense of already feeling cared about, and naturally inclined toward empathy, compassion, friendliness, inclusion, and a wide circle of “us.” On the other hand, in the Reactive setting, there is a background sense of grievance, envy, resentment, dismissal, prejudice, hostility, anger, even hatred, and a tendency to identify with a small circle of “us” at odds with a vast circle of “them.”



The Tip of the Root

One of the most powerful uses of the HEAL process, especially its Linking step, is to connect beneficial experiences with the more vulnerable, fundamental, and often younger layers of one’s negative material. The brain is designed to learn especially from negative experiences, and especially from the ones in childhood. So it is natural to be still affected by things that happened many years ago.

To help beneficial experiences get down to the “tip of the root,” understand the benefits of getting at these deeper layers. Have

compassion and support for the younger parts of yourself, and make sure you are able to be in touch with these parts without being overwhelmed or flooded.

Then use the various methods of the Linking step to sense and feel that the beneficial experience – often a kind of antidote to the deep negative material, such as feeling cherished can antidote feeling abandoned as a young child – is sinking down into these vulnerable places, giving them what they always and understandably needed.

Feeling of Worth

As people feel confident in their worth, they tend to become more modest, humble, and less contentious with others. (Obviously, there are some exceptions.) Not internalizing experiences of worth tends to increase narcissism and ego.

For us as the most social species on the planet, a primary source of this sense of worth is experiencing that you are **of worth** – that you are included, appreciated, liked, and

loved – to other people. It is normal and OK that a major opportunity to develop a healthy sense of worth is to feel valued by other people. It is not either/or: you can **both** feel respected by others and respected by yourself.

The sense of worth is a counter to the feelings of inadequacy and shame that many of us have – which are typically rooted in experiences involving other people.



Feeling Already Connected

In every moment, we are already connected to our own bodies, to other people – both known and unknown – and to the web of life and to the whole material universe. Tuning into this ongoing reality of connection, and resting in the felt sense of it, is a continually accessible way to feel part of everything, not alone.

Class 6 – Growing Strengths for Connection

- Practice TG-ing resource experiences related to the Attaching to others system of your brain. These experiences include feeling connected, seen, included, appreciated, valued, liked, wanted, cherished, and loved.
- Try the 4th step of TG with the “tip of the root” – the deeper, more vulnerable, and often younger layers of negative material.
- In the columns below, mark each day that you did the practice. (You can add marks if you did it more than once.)

	TG feeling already connected	TG feeling cared about	TG feeling of worth	TG feeling liked and/or loved	Try step 4: “antidoting” rejection, low worth, and/or feeling unloved
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

General Practices

- Use this form to build on this training. Customize the last column, such as dividing it to list two or three key experiences (e.g., feeling alright right now) or practices (e.g., gratitude just before sleeping) you want to focus on.
- Any beneficial experience is good to take in. Also notice or create those experiences that really address a personal need, such as feeling protected soothing worry, or feeling appreciated helping to ease feeling inadequate.
- Try the 4th step of TG, holding both positive and negative material in your awareness so that the positive gradually eases, balances, soothes, and even replaces the negative.

	TG beneficial experiences you're already having	Create beneficial experiences and TG them	TG key resource experiences	Do the 4th step of holding both positive and negative in mind	Try step 4: "antidoting" rejection, low worth, and/or feeling unloved
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Your Notes

Resources



Resources for Avoiding Harms - Resourcing Safety

Challenge	Resource
■ Weakness	■ Strength
■ Helplessness	■ Agency
■ Freezing	■ Action, venting
■ Inflated threats	■ Accurate appraisal
■ Alarm	■ Protection, calming
■ Tension	■ Relaxation
■ Dread	■ Feeling alright now
■ Confusion, overwhelm	■ Make a plan
■ Irritation, anger	■ Big picture, peace

Resources for Approaching Rewards - Resourcing Satisfaction

Challenge	Resource
■ What I don't have	■ What I <u>do</u> have
■ Scarcity	■ Enoughness
■ Disappointed, sad	■ Gratitude, gladness
■ Frustration, failure	■ Accomplishment
■ Bored, numb	■ Pleasure, excitement
■ Grief	■ Loved and loving
■ Giving up	■ Aspire, lived by good
■ Drivenness	■ Already satisfied

Resources for Attaching To Others - Resourcing Connection

Challenge	Resource
■ Left out, excluded	■ Belonging, wanted
■ Inadequacy, shame	■ Appreciated, respected
■ Ignored, unseen	■ Receiving empathy
■ Lonely	■ Friendship, caring
■ Resentment	■ Recognize it hurts <u>you</u>
■ Envy, jealousy	■ Self compassion, take action, good will
■ Feeling stifled	■ Skillful assertiveness

Your Notes

Your Notes