

DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE

The Building Blocks of Happiness

This article was first published in the Summer 2004 EAP Newsletter. As a result of very positive feedback from readers and during live presentations, First Choice Health offers it again as part of a series on managing the stress of modern living.

The top needs turned out to be **autonomy**, **competence** and **connectedness**. Each of these assets contributes positively to a person's self-esteem and sense of well being.

Competence is an internal measure of effectiveness in the roles, tasks and activities that make up your lifestyle. It means you see yourself as having the skills, knowledge and resources to deal with whatever comes your way in most work/life situations. Competence allows us to engage flexibly with the people, challenges and responsibilities demanding our attention. For example, a runner preparing to compete in a marathon would likely be confident about participating in a short road race for charity. Increasing your interpersonal assertiveness might lead to a greater sense of effectiveness - enhancing your resilience at home or at work. Effectiveness, not perfection, is the nature of competence. Envision the areas of life in which you want to experience greater effectiveness.

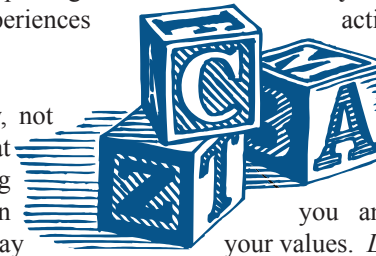
Happiness means different things to different people. Time spent working in the garden or tanning on the beach, mastering a craft or earning recognition at work, strolling along the seashore or exploring a mountain trail – all of these experiences can elicit feelings of happiness.

Happiness is, in many ways, a *choice*—a habit of responding affirmatively and flexibly in a world in which constant change is the price of admission.

Autonomy means that your activities and lifestyle (where you live, what you do for a living) are for the most part freely chosen by you and consistent with your values. *Living autonomously means intentionally deciding where you're going, how you'll get there, and what time you plan to arrive.* Even small gains make a difference when it comes to attitude and energy. Examples are as basic as turning off the television while nobody is actually watching a show, studying a subject that is meaningful to you, enhancing your workspace with plants or artwork, or reprioritizing the timing of a project you are responsible for. Pay attention to the areas of life in which you welcome more autonomy.

The idea that "life is a journey, not a destination" suggests that happiness is more than a fleeting emotion or feeling. Happiness can be thought of as a constructive way of responding to the events, opportunities and challenges of modern living. Periods of sadness and grief are natural chapters of every human life and the experience of happiness varies from person to person, but specific psychological needs are thought to enhance a human being's overall experience of happiness.

Psychologist K.M. Sheldon studied human psychological needs for the purpose of identifying the building blocks of happiness.



WELCOME NEW GROUPS

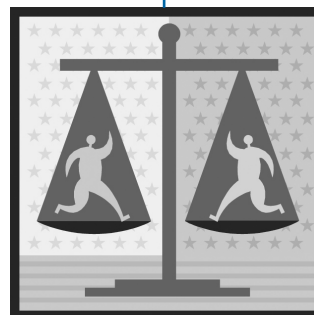
- Alston-Kline, Inc.
- Artisan Consulting Group
- Biogesant
- Bridgeport School District 75
- Cascade Mental Health
- Drs. West & West, P.S.
- Emerald City Development
- Engage EPS Corp.
- Huppins Hi Fi, Photo, Video, Inc.
- Island Dog Sign Company
- Kitsap Mental Health
- Kuukpik Corporation
- Lower Columbia Community Action Council
- Maland Presentations, LLC
- Nationwide Credit Services
- Nature's Path Foods
- Overlake Anesthesiologists
- Perche No. Ristorante Italiano
- Prairie Electric
- QCM Company
- Synology America Group
- Talyst
- Three Rivers Physical Therapy

QUALITY, CONVENIENCE, & RELIABILITY

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. If specific health or medical advice or assistance is desired, the services of a licensed healthcare professional should be sought. The information in the First Choice Health EAP Quarterly Newsletter is not meant to replace the advice or expertise of your physician or healthcare provider. If you are experiencing health problems or contemplating lifestyle changes such as diet or exercise, consult your healthcare provider ahead of time to ensure your well being.

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Bringing Balance to Work, Home, and Life

Managing Stress

It's important to realize that your stressors – those things that create stress for you – are yours to recognize and manage.

You have a choice. Rather than waiting for circumstances to change or for someone else to do something about a distressing problem or situation, be aware that how you think about circumstances or events is likely to have an effect on your attitude,

your perspective and on your ability to cope or respond effectively—cognitive habits often influence conscious experience.

The choice is yours, and it really is important to choose wisely! Developing new and different ways of thinking can lead to effective ways of dealing with many kinds of life situations, events and opportunities.

Cognitive Habits Often Influence Conscious Experience

The \$\$\$ and Sense of Caring for Pets

Animal shelters are full of abandoned pets whose needs were not fully considered before they were brought home. Pet ownership is a labor of love, and, just like having kids, there's a financial aspect to every area of that commitment. There are important monetary issues to consider before you bring a pet home:

Are you allergic?

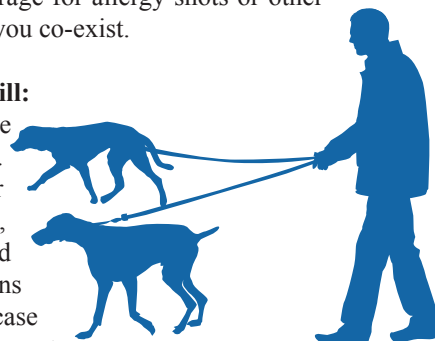
What does sneezing have to do with affording Fido? According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, there are almost 10 million pet owners who have some sort of allergy to their pets. Check to see if you or your kids might be allergic before you bring your chosen animal home—or at least check your healthcare policy for coverage for allergy shots or other medications that can help you co-exist.

Watch that grocery bill:

Annual food costs can range between \$150 and \$400. This isn't an argument for buying generic pet food, but you can manage food costs by clipping coupons and checking stores for case discounts on your pet's gourmet chow. Always confirm with your vet whether you're giving your pet the right amount of food and at the right time. Your vet may also recommend some affordable and healthy alternatives to premium brands.

Your pet's stuff: According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (www.aspeca.org) the average annual bill for toys and treats for a medium-size dog is around \$75. For a cat it's around \$50. This does not account for multiple pet beds, crates, carriers, litter boxes or the occasional piece of couture.

Doctor, doctor: In metro areas, annual vet bills can average \$100



to \$250 just for the basics (usually including an annual vaccination and checkup—no medication). For more serious matters—cancers, joint and bone problems—bills easily run into the thousands. There are pet insurance companies but experts argue whether premiums justify the benefits.

There are affordability alternatives. According to the Humane Society of the United States (www.hsus.org), you can:

- Ask the vet to let you negotiate a payment plan.
- Contact your local shelter to see if there are subsidized veterinary clinics in your community.
- Contact the national club for your animal's breed and see if they have a veterinary assistance fund.
- Ask your vet to submit an assistance request to the American Animal Hospital Association Helping Pets Fund (learn more at www.aahanet.org).

When looks are everything: Grooming is an important element of care for all pets. Principally, ensure that claws are maintained and that overgrown or matted hair doesn't cause skin or infestation problems. Talk with your vet about a proper grooming regimen for your pet, and shop for a groomer based on experience and familiarity with your pet's breed. Grooming rates vary by community and size of the pet. Per-visit rates range from \$20 - \$100.

Daycare, pet-sitting and lodging: Few people can take time out of the workday to go home and walk and play with their pets. Similarly, many people fear taking pets on cross-country trips in cars and planes. That's why daycare and lodging services are so popular—and not financially insignificant. Daily dog-walking services can cost \$20 or more, overnight kennel fees may go over \$30, and pet-sitting services can cost \$50 a day or more. It's always best to get references from local services, veterinary clinics and most importantly, fellow pet owners. Check the Internet site for the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters at www.petsitters.org.

Adapted from the Financial Planning Association®

www.FirstChoiceEap.com 1-800-777-4114 info@FirstChoiceEap.com

What People Are Saying About First Choice Health EAP

“The EAP saved my life. If it had not been for your service, I would have died in my addiction.”

“My EAP counselor has been and continues to be an excellent resource for me – thanks!”

“Between your customer service team and the counselor I was connected to, it has helped me a lot!”

“I appreciated the supportive attitudes when I spoke to customer service by phone. Great advice!”

“Your service was prompt, unrushed and helped me find a new perspective. I have recommended your services.”

“First time used! EAP was a helpful resource in a confusing and difficult situation.”

“Great job! Thank you for the help and for taking the time to understand my concerns.”



Skill Building for Children and Teens

During vacations and holidays, parents of school-aged children – and especially children with special needs – seek meaningful activities to fill their schedules. Many parents see scheduled breaks as a time for catching up on academic skills through tutoring or one on one instruction. Other parents view vacation as a time for their children to be free of the stress associated with school and learning activities. There is no single correct answer. It all depends on the child and his or her needs.

Breaks are great times for older students to do volunteer work. Volunteer opportunities for teens are often listed in the newspaper. Red Cross has a youth volunteer program – as do many hospitals. Other opportunities exist in nursing homes, senior centers and summer camps. Volunteering has many advantages including enhancing self esteem, job sampling and providing structured experience that can be listed on resumes or for future job applications.

Elementary Age Learning Activities

- Explore a reading program at the library.
- Use a children's cookbook to read and follow directions to make favorite foods.
- Encourage your child to read the newspaper. Some newspapers have special pages for children.
- Read to your child and talk about the book or stories.
- If possible, have your child read books that could be used for reports during the school year.
- Improve vocabulary by learning three new words a week. Post the words on the refrigerator and talk about them each day.
- Older children could write in a journal each day. Encourage two or three sentences.

Swimming lessons, camps of all kinds and music lessons are also great options. These activities focus on areas of development that might be neglected due to the demands of the school year. When selecting activities,



make sure that the leaders or teachers of the activity have some understanding of your child's needs. If your child needs time to process information, tell the activity leader how this is handled at school or at home.

Adapted from the Learning Disabilities Association of America

(‘Happiness’, continued from page 1)

services volunteer or a coach. It can be as simple as having dinner or intentional conversation with your family or friends on a regular basis. Whether the reason for your connection to others is professional, social, educational, recreational or family, your participation is what opens the window of opportunity to the experience of happiness and well being.

Abraham Lincoln once observed that “people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” While that wisdom

Secondary Age Learning Activities

- Encourage reading of any type. Reluctant readers might enjoy books on tape to listen to as they read.
- Many parents obtain the required reading list for the next grade's English class and have their child read at least some of the books ahead of time.
- Encourage vocabulary improvement using “Word a Day Calendars.”
- Read about places that the child or teen will visit on vacation and encourage writing about them in a letter or journal.
- Figure mileage to various locations using a map scale.
- Go to www.math.com for a variety of math review activities.
- Go to www.bibliomania.com for free online books, stories and poems.
- Use computer programs or ACT or SAT preparation books to prepare for ACT or SAT testing.

may not always apply, it seems true that - in spite of challenging times or difficult circumstances - most of us have ongoing opportunities to choose happiness as a primary attitude or outlook.

First Choice Health EAP makes it convenient to meet with a counseling professional to discuss the conflicts and demands of modern living and identify strategies for enhancing autonomy, effectiveness and connectedness in your life.

Things to Know About Sleep

- Adequate sleep has been shown to increase resilience to colds and the flu.
- Getting enough sleep helps in the battle of the bulge (inadequate sleep is linked to weight gain).
- Proper sleep helps people recover more quickly from exercise and injury.
- Getting forty winks seems to benefit the skin.
- Sufficient sleep is necessary for hav-

- ing full and consistent energy during waking hours.
- Research shows that better sleep leads to better memory.
- A person's moods tend to be higher and more consistent with proper sleep.
- The amount and quality of sleep influences the human sex drive.
- Being rested is a primary ingredient in managing stress effectively.