

## Mindsets for Happiness and Success



### OPTIMISM

A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity and the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.

### Let's TALK about LIFE

The single most important thing we can do for our children is talk to them about life. At dinner, at breakfast, eating burgers in the car, or sipping hot cocoa before bed. Decades of research has shown that children who eat 3 to 4 times a week with their parents are 3 times less likely to get involved with drugs, alcohol, or smoking. They do better in school, have higher self-esteem, and stronger relationships with their parents. With the little time busy parents have, we might as well talk about what's important. All it takes is 10 minutes a day.

LET'S TALK conversation starters have been strategically designed in a specific sequence to help children (and parents) learn the

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twelve most important mindsets that lead to happiness and success. They are based on decades of research and the literature from hundreds of experts who study happiness and success. In the same way that we learn to walk, play a musical instrument, speak a new language, or dance the salsa, we also build mindsets through repetition. By repeating new, similar thought patterns over and over again during a 30-day period, we actually rewire certain ways of thinking into our brains. Eventually it becomes a habit that we continue without any effort. LET'S TALK is designed for ages five and up. Feel free to adapt the questions to what you know your children are able to understand and can relate to.

### OPTIMISM Intro - 1

Good and bad things happen to us every day, and we don't always know why. If it's something good, we don't question it. We assume that we earned it or deserved it - unless we are pessimists and tell ourselves that we were just lucky. If it's something that we're NOT so happy about, we immediately make up stories in our minds to explain WHY it happened. Even though these stories are not necessarily realistic, or based on fact, we usually believe them. These stories are important because they pave the path to happiness and success or they can lead to frustration, failure, hopelessness, insecurity, anxiety, and depression. Martin Seligman, the father of Positive Psychology and author

Introduction for Parents

### OPTIMISM Intro - 2

of *Learned Optimism*, has spent over three decades researching optimism. In his book, *The Optimistic Child*, he claims that the self-esteem movement did NOT alleviate the rise in anxiety and depression and has probably played a large role in creating it. Seligman lays out the details of a very successful program he developed with colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania. The Penn Prevention Program was designed to safeguard children against depression and build resilience. The first step is to your help children understand the difference between optimism and pessimism and how those mindsets affect behavior and life choices. The second step involves learning how to

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### OPTIMISM Intro - 3

think of multiple reasons WHY something has happened. Victims will blame others, take no responsibility, and learn nothing from the experience. Pessimists and depressed people will blame themselves entirely and, believing nothing they do matters, throw themselves into a hopeless state and give up. Optimists, on the other hand, will assume that what happened might not be about them. They will also realistically evaluate the situation and ask themselves if they did something to create the negative results and is there something they could do to change that. In other words, they look for solutions. And when you look for solutions, you find them.

Introduction for Parents

### Days 1, 2, 3 - Gloomy Greg & Hopeful Holly

The first step to learning how to think more positively is to understand how differently optimists and pessimists think and behave. Below is a great example of two people reacting to the same situation (rejection at the school dance) in two completely different ways. Read on Day 1 and reference for questions on Days 1, 2, and 3. .

Greg: Hey, Cindy, do you want to dance?  
Cindy: No thanks, I'm tired.  
Greg: [*thinks to himself*]: Way to go! I'm such a loser. Why did I even bother to ask her to dance? I never have any fun at these things. I should have known she'd say no. She's popular and I'm a geek. No one's ever going to dance with me. I always get shot down. I'm just never going to be cool enough. I don't know why I even bothered coming to the dance. They're always really boring. [*Greg sits down and looks very sad*].

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Holly: Do you want to dance?  
Joe: No thanks.  
Holly: [*thinks to herself*]: Ugh! That's embarrassing. I hate it when that happens. I guess Joe isn't into dancing this evening. I'll try to ask someone else. [*speaks to Sammy*] Hey, Sammy, how about a dance?  
Sammy: No thanks, Holly.  
Holly: [*thinks to herself*]: Oh man. Another no. I'm in a rut. Maybe I wasn't friendly enough. Okay, I'll give it another shot, but this time I'll smile nice and big, and I'll be real friendly. [*speaks to Fred, with big warm smile*] Hi Fred. Are you having a good time?  
Fred: I can't believe this is the smelly old gym. They really made it look cool.  
Holly: Yeah. I heard that Mr. Rothera spent a whole week getting it to look like this. I like that shirt. Is it new?  
Fred: Oh, thanks. Yeah. I just got it this weekend at that new store.  
Holly: Yeah, I heard about it. I like this song. Do you want to dance?  
Fred: Oh, okay, sure.

### Days 4, 5, 6 - The Pizza Pie and Reasons WHY

According to Martin Seligman, Learned Optimism is not about repeating positive thoughts, ignoring reality, or telling yourself everything is wonderful when it's not. It's about being realistic and truthful about what actually happened and who is to blame. It's also about taking responsibility for your role in a negative situation and looking for possible solutions.

Tyhema, one of the seventh graders in Seligman's PENN Prevention Program, came up with a wonderful way to think about problems and solutions.

Read Tyhema's description below and discuss the questions listed on the cards for Days 4, 5, and 6.

"I learned to think of each problem like a pizza pie.

My job was to make each slice equal to one of the things that caused the problem to happen.

Like when I get into a fight with my brother, instead of just thinking that it's all his fault or all my fault, I have to try to think up all the reasons why we started fighting. It's like I have the pizza in my head, and I figure out how many slices to cut it into.

It was really hard to do at first, 'cause I would think of just one reason and that would be it. But now I can come up with lots and lots of reasons and that's good, because then I don't blame myself or my brother too much.

Oh, and then I can figure out which slices I can change and which I can't do anything about. Like with my brother, I can stop teasing him 'cause that makes him mad. But I can't do anything about his getting into trouble with my mom. When that happens, he gets in a real nasty mood, and if I'm around, he sometimes takes it out on me. Now I just stay out of his way when he's nasty."

### Gloomy Greg & Hopeful Holly - 1

Read the card titled **Gloomy Greg & Hopeful Holly** (provided on page 2), twice, and discuss the differences you see between Greg and Holly in terms of their attitudes and their behavior.



Day 1

### Gloomy Greg & Hopeful Holly - 2

Going back to the optimist and the pessimist that were rejected at the school dance, talk about how their thinking, decision-making, and behavior make each of them feel in the end?



Day 2

### Gloomy Greg & Hopeful Holly - 3

Based on what happened to the optimist and the pessimist at the school dance, which person would you rather be? Why? Which would you rather have as your best friend? Why?



Day 3

### The Pizza Pie and Reasons WHY - 1

Read the card titled **The Pizza Pie and Reasons WHY** (provided on page 2) and discuss how it might be useful to come up with different reasons why something unpleasant happened.



Day 4

### The Pizza Pie and Reasons WHY - 2

In the Pizza Pie story, what reasons for fighting with his brother was the storyteller able to control or do something about? How do you think that made him feel?



Day 5

### The Pizza Pie and Reasons WHY - 3

In the Pizza Pie story, what would happen if the storyteller decided the fighting was all his brother's fault, that none of it was his own responsibility?



Day 6

### You did poorly on a math test - 1

You are disappointed that you did so poorly on a math test that you thought would be easy. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 7

### You did poorly on a math test - 2

Going back to your surprise at doing poorly on a math test you thought would be easy, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you have control over - and what could you do differently so that it doesn't happen again?



Day 8

### Your friend doesn't text back - 1

You sent an important text to a best friend who doesn't respond right away - which is unusual. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 9

### Your friend doesn't text back - 2

Going back to the friend who didn't respond to your text right away, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and what could you do, or think, differently so you don't feel bad?



Day 10

### You're not invited to the party - 1

You weren't invited to a big party that some of your friends are going to. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 11

### You're not invited to the party - 2

Going back to not being invited to the big party that your friends will be attending, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and could you do or think anything different so that you feel better?



Day 12

### You were late and didn't call - 1

Your parents are upset because you were late getting home and didn't call to let them know. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 13

### You were late and didn't call - 2

Going back to your getting home late and not calling your parents, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and what could you do differently so that it doesn't happen again?



Day 14

### You're not elected President - 1

You were sure you would be elected president of the class - but you were not. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 15

### You're not elected President - 2

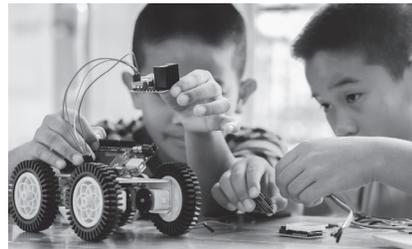
Going back to the election you lost for president of the class, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and is there anything you could have done to change the outcome?



Day 16

### You missed the project deadline - 1

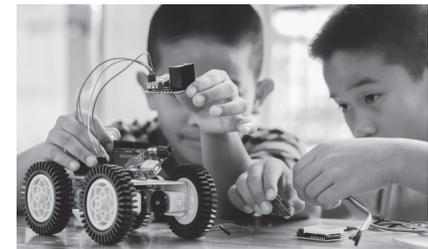
You didn't get a school (or work) project done by the deadline. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 17

### You missed the project deadline - 2

Going back to the school project you didn't get done on time, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over, and what could you do differently so that it doesn't happen again?



Day 18

### Your best friend has new friends - 1

Your best friend starts spending more time with some new friends and leaves you out. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 19

### Your best friend has new friends - 2

Going back to your best friend spending more time with his/her new friends, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and is there anything you could have done to change the outcome?



Day 20

### Your mom is irritable with you - 1

Your mom is unusually irritable and gets mad at you for doing nothing. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 21

### Your mom is irritable with you - 2

Going back to your mom being unusually irritable and getting mad at you for nothing, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you have control over - and is there anything you could have done to improve the situation?



Day 22

### Your team lost because of you - 1

You think the referee mad a bad call against you in a soccer game and your team lost because of it. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 23

### Your team lost because of you - 2

Going back to the bad call the referee made, against you, that caused your team to lose, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and what could you do or think to improve the situation?



Day 24

### Your sister shared your secret - 1

You heard at school that your sister shared a secret she had promised never to tell anyone. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 25

### Your sister shared your secret - 2

Going back to your sister sharing a secret she promised to keep to herself, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and what could you do differently so that it doesn't happen again?



Day 26

### Friends make fun of your idea - 1

You want to try out for the school play, but your friends make fun of the idea when you bring it up. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 27

### Friends make fun of your idea - 2

Going back to your friends making fun of your desire to try out for the school play, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over - and is there anything you could do to improve the situation?



Day 28

### Your dad's not paying attention - 1

You're telling your dad about something important and he's paying more attention to his phone. What are 4 to 6 reasons WHY that might have happened? Include some that are your fault and some that are not.



Day 29

### Your dad's not paying attention - 2

Going back to your dad paying more attention to his phone than what you were saying, what are some of the reasons WHY - that you might have control over? What could you do differently so that it doesn't happen again?



Day 30