

LESSON 17

HAPPINESS AND WELL-BEING

SUMMARY

People have always aspired for a long, dignified and meaningful life. However, the stresses in contemporary life are increasing in such a way that it is becoming difficult to cope with them. The hectic pace of life, environmental factors, and increasing greed are making people's lives more and more stressful. These factors influence our life style and combine to create serious health hazards. Keeping this in view efforts are being made to achieve health and well-being for all.

The study of this area involves many subjects such as psychology, medicine, sociology, anthropology etc. Much concern is shown nowadays for the study of the factors influencing health, well-being, quality of life, healthy life style, and happiness.

Concepts of Happiness and well-being

Happiness and well-being are important. Both of these bring about the positive feelings of joy, satisfaction, pleasure and pleasantness.

The term 'well-being' includes many aspects such as, happiness, energy, leisure, peace with oneself, contentment and sensitivity to environment. It involves not only happiness and pleasure but also

experiencing/feeling satisfaction in life, presence of positive feeling or affect (e.g. interest, love, surprise, pleasure) and the absence of negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress). Well-being is a matter of how one experiences and interprets one's life conditions. It has been found that material prosperity is positively related to life satisfaction to some extent. But indefinite increase in material prosperity does not lead to significant life satisfaction.

A. Factors Influencing Well-being

Nutrition - Sufficient calorie intake is necessary for good health. We should eat a balanced diet of carbohydrates, proteins, fats and vitamins.

Exercise - It has a positive effect on mood. People who exercise regularly are able to control stress and enjoy high quality of life. Lack of exercise can lead to headache, high blood pressure, diabetes, backache, irritability, anxiety and depression.

Sleep - Adequate sleep is required to rejuvenate and refresh both the mind and body. Sleep deficiency leads to irritability, anxiety, depression and disturbed thinking.

Recreation: We also need to relax and enjoy life. Indulging in certain activities, personally important to us, give us joy, fulfilment,

satisfaction and act as a diversion from the hectic life.

Yoga and meditation: These activities bring discipline and peace in life. In addition, there are many health-related benefits which make a person fit and active.

Having friends and maintaining relationships - Friends and other people provide support and give opportunities to develop network, cooperation and enriching social life.

Optimism, resilience and hope - Optimism refers to being positive while resilience is the ability to be strong in difficult times. Having these positive attitudes makes a person effective and productive.

Routine - Routines help establish healthy habits that bring structure to our lives. The positive effect of routine is that it provides a sense of organization, control and responsibility to the person.

B. Happiness, Well-Being and Need Satisfaction

Happiness is not only an emotion but refers to living a good life, experiencing well-being and enjoying good quality of life. Happiness and well-being can be attained through many ways.

Material resources: Money, clothing and housing, provide us with the possibility to satisfy our basic needs. We must satisfy both our primary and secondary needs to be happy.

Cognitive competence: The ability to search and find what we need is also important. Thus, we must be knowledgeable, intelligent, and open to learning.

Subjective competence: When we believe in our problem-solving capacity, we have faith in our self and our abilities to achieve our goals.

Fulfilment of our biological and psychological needs is essential. Since need satisfaction provides us with fulfilment it leads to happiness and comfort. Contentment (Santosh) has been considered important for experiencing happiness. Continuous striving for attaining newer and newer goals pushes us toward a perpetual state of dissatisfaction and discomfort.

C. Characteristics of Happy People

Mental and physical health - People who are physically and mentally healthy are happier than those who suffer from poor health.

Psychological characteristics - Happy people believe that they are in control of the situation, are resilient and confident and open to learning experiences. Generally happy people are found to have high self-esteem, get along with other people, feel more in control of events in life, and, are optimistic that they can achieve their goals.

Good personal relations - Happy people interact socially and fulfil social needs of sharing, bonding and in return get support from them in time of need.

Life events - Happiness is correlated with happy events, such as, promotion, winning an essay competition, parenthood or marriage. Research has indicated that happiness is more important than wealth. There is a strong correlation between happiness and self-esteem, extraversion, optimism, self-management skills, good personal relations, progress towards goals, spirituality and religious beliefs. Therefore, happiness is closely related to different aspects of the individual and behaviour.

Self-Actualization and Mature Personality

Self-actualization refers to the development of the individual up to his or her full potential. Self-actualization provides us with the motivation to grow and expand.

As we are nurtured in our social world, we come to learn social and moral values. Values help us to give direction and help us evaluate the world to make effective decisions and successful adjustments. Love and respect for self, others and nature, being problem centred and not self-centred, openness to learning, having a purpose in life are some significant aspects to imbibe in life.

Recognizing strengths of self-actualized individuals



Characteristics of Self-actualized Individual

Self-monitoring or examining own behaviour in relation to self and others.

Self-acceptance, self-esteem and confidence in self

Effective communication skills.

Positive attitude: coping with failure and learn from mistakes.

Purpose in life or finding meaning in what they do.

Set realistic goals and try to achieve them to the best of their ability and skills.

Flexibility or changing according to the demands of the situation.

Belief that setbacks are temporary and short-lived and not going to last for ever.

Relate to others and have deep relationships with others.

17.4 Developing Positive emotions

Negative emotions are important for survival yet often they create disturbance and interrupt the natural flow of life. Positive emotions are desirable to sustain life activities. They make us feel good, soothe us and provide a sense of comfort.

Positive Emotions

They 'broaden' our thinking, physical and social resources, and help 'building' reserves to draw upon at times of stress and strain. Over time the influence of positive emotions helps because –

Influences of positive emotions

- Attention and thinking are broadened and deepened which in turn builds our coping strategies.
- Positive emotions repair the negative effects of negative emotions.
- Enhances mental health and well-being: we show alertness, enthusiasm, determination and energy.
- Helps build personal resources for interaction with others: we make new friends; we share and bond with them.
- Build optimism, tranquillity and resilience.
- People who show positive emotions are more likely to feel loved.
- Happy people are more effective and successful in their work.

Ways to Promote Positive Emotions

Promoting positive emotions

- Do relaxation exercises such as meditation and yoga.
- Find positive meaning in life – reframe negative events and view in a positive light.
- Find happiness and satisfaction in daily life activities.
- Pursue realistic goals so that you get a sense of achievement.
- Undertake activities which you love doing.
- Focus beyond self and help others as this makes you a happier person.
- Show gratitude
- Nurture your spiritual self

Evaluate yourself

1. Suggest ways to promote the development of positive emotions.
2. Discuss factors that influence the happiness and well-being of an individual.