10 WAYS TO
Create Joy
RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW
Each one of us can benefit in many ways from adding more joy into our daily lives. It’s not just about feeling happier. Although joy and happiness are linked, the latter tends to be fleeting whereas joy is both longer-lasting and more nuanced. Joy is a complex, layered experience that we feel deep inside of ourselves when something resonates with us in a positive way.

If you can’t immediately discern the difference between happiness and joy, there is a simple way to think of it. Happiness starts on the outside and goes in. For example, when you eat something that tastes good, you might momentarily feel happy. Joy, on the other hand, starts on the inside and flows outward. Joy can still be sparked by eating something you love, but the joy isn’t just in the taste; it’s in the memories the taste evokes, the full sense of abundance that you feel, and the deeper connection you feel to the earth when noticing how it nourishes you with food.

Happiness comes and goes. Joy requires us to be deliberate. Joy asks that we pause so that we can recognize its depth. We have to let it sink in, feel it inside of our skin.

When we really process all of that, then it tends to flow back out of us. Pause for a moment and think about someone you know who radiates joy. You’ll probably recognize that the person is not merely happy, although they may have happy moments. In fact, you likely know that they experience all kinds of feelings, including ones that are not so pleasant. Yet still they radiate a deep sense of joy.

We want to help you learn, and experience, positive feelings that run deeper and last longer than simple happiness. You can learn to be more intentional about creating and sustaining a sense of joy in your life. It can start with happiness because some feelings of joy do originate there. However, there are many different ways to develop a deep sense of joy. Learning to find and embrace varied paths to joy will allow you to truly experience it in your life.
The Types of Smiles and What They Mean for Joy

Before we offer our suggestions for ways to begin adding more joy to your life, we want to walk you through a thought exercise. Think for a moment about the wide variety of different types of smiles that a person might have in a day, a week, a month, a year. Sure, technically a smile is any small movement of a few facial muscles that allow the corners of the mouth to turn up. But the actual experience of a smile can range from a tiny forced hint of those upturned corners, all the way to a broad, toothy grin.

Humans smile in dozens, if not hundreds of different ways.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW

- An obligatory smile, like when you smile at a joke that’s not funny just to be socially polite
- A laughing smile, when you’re genuinely humored and can’t keep it inside
- A shocked smile, such as when you’re greeted by a pleasant surprise
- A wistful smile, that happens when remembering something or someone fondly
- A proud smile, when you’ve accomplished something awesome
- A sexy smile, as you flirt with a person you’re interested in

A smile, it turns out, is not just a smile. At any given time, you might find yourself smiling out of relief, gratitude, contentedness, a sense of mischief, a feeling of nostalgia, or as a result of many other feelings. Think about how you embody each of these different types smiles. Ask yourself what the smile looks like, where you feel it in the rest of your body, how you react to others when they smile in that way.

For example, a parent who sees their child beaming with pride might, in turn, feel provoked to beam right back. In an instant, the parent is connecting that moment with all the other moments leading up to now that allowed this experience of pride to happen. In the parent’s brain, their mirror neurons are firing and they can feel in their body something similar to the pride their child is feeling in their own body. Imagine what this smile looks like and feels like for this parent. Now imagine someone reminiscing about a previous relationship. Even though they’re sad that they are no longer with this person, they still have fond memories of the two of them together, and they like to revisit those memories from time to time. Imagine what that smile looks like and feels like for this person.

These examples demonstrate two very different types of smiles, born of vastly different experiences and feelings that live deep within the person. Connecting to that depth of emotional wisdom is what joy is all about.
10 Ways to Create Joy

As you go through this list, remember that joy takes time. To authentically experience joy, you have to give the experience some time and attention. When you genuinely engage in the tasks on this list, you will no doubt notice the corners of your mouth turning up. Recognize this. Pay attention to the subtleties of feelings and sensations. Create some space for all of that to sink in.

The experiences themselves can take just a moment, but give yourself 3-5 minutes (or longer if you can) to reap the benefits of your joy exploration. We’re aiming for full-body, immersive joy here. The kind of joy so real that you radiate it outward to others. You deserve nothing less.

1 | Channel your Childhood Self
2 | Sing a Song
3 | Practice Gratitude
4 | Appreciate Touch
5 | Swell with Pride
6 | Crack Yourself Up
7 | Go to your Happy Place
8 | Recall the Effects of Kindness
9 | Plan for the Future
10 | Connect with Someone you Love

Happiness is just happiness. Joy is meaningful. Let’s find ways to cultivate joy in your life, right here, right now.
Channel your Childhood Self

Children experience an immense amount of joy, in part because they have a near-constant sense of awe and wonder for the world around them. They attend to their senses and indulge them as they take in their surroundings. Research indicates that children smile approximately ten times more throughout the day than adults do. Turn to them for guidance. Pause and take in your surroundings, imagining that you are seeing them through the eyes of your childhood self.

How would you have experienced this setting at the age of six? What about at eight or ten or fifteen? What would you have noticed first? How would your attention move about in the space? For example, if you’re waiting at the bus stop, try to get a sense of what your childhood self would have found interesting, amusing, mesmerizing, or funny. What would have been at your eye level? Would you have delighted in the whir of cars going by or carefully studied the clothing of the other people at the bus stop? Would you have been most likely to pet the passing dog, imagine yourself on the zooming skateboard going by, or not notice much at all as you indulged in your daydreams? Follow these thoughts, noticing where you feel the feelings in your body.

Pay attention to what brings you the most delight. Take the time to make that feeling more than skin-deep.

See if you connect to something about the experience from your past. Maybe you remember your childhood self seeing these same things. Perhaps the feeling evokes another memory. Or maybe you suddenly notice a scent or sound that resonates deep within you. Find the thing that brings you the kind of joy that makes you break out into a big childish grin, then spend a few minutes sitting in that joy.
Sing a Song

Everyone has a favorite song or two that lights up something bright and energetic deep inside them. You might have even thought of one just as you read that statement. Usually, these songs are interwoven with a memory or a series of memories from a particular time in life. We often connect with music especially deeply in our teens and twenties, so if you find that your song comes from that time in your life, rest assured that is very common. Perhaps it’s a song you danced to with your friends, or that you sang aloud on the open road, or one that you scribbled its lyrics inside your locker door, or is a theme song from an awesome movie.

Wherever it comes from, you know the song. You know all of the lyrics, even though it’s been years since you first heard it, and maybe it’s even been years since you last heard it.

Get ready – it’s time to bring joy into your life with that song. Depending on where you are in this moment, choose an option that is most reasonable:

• Close your eyes and sing the song in your mind.
• Imagine yourself in the crowd while the band is singing this song live in concert.
• Tap out the rhythm of the song on your desk or steering wheel.
• Hum or whistle the tune of the song.
• Write down all of the lyrics that you remember.
• Download the song and listen to it on repeat as you go for a walk.
• Sing the song as loud as you possibly can.

Let the feelings associated with those lyrics, that tune, those beats wash over you, just like they did when you first heard it. The musicians or lyricist would love to know that this song creates such an impact for you. Maybe you even want to write them a note saying so. Alternatively, share the song on social media or play it over the phone for someone who will also appreciate it. Celebrate the joy of music, and live in that joy, knowing that our brains are hard-wired to respond to music in this profound way.
Practice Gratitude

Yes, it sounds cliché, but here's the reason you hear about gratitude so often in the context of joy: it's very effective. Perhaps you've tried it yourself a time or two. If you haven't found deep joy in the practice in the past, then you might simply need to tweak how you embrace it.

You can start by sitting down with a blank page. If you don’t have paper, typing this on your device can work as well. Think of one single thing that you feel grateful for. It can be a small thing; you’re grateful that you caught the early train or that your dog is feeling better after a few days of low energy. On the other hand, it might be something big: you’re grateful that your parent received good lab results after a trying illness or that you have just gotten a promotion at a job that you love. Big or small, we’re going to take a moment for reflection and expansion.

After you’ve identified that one thing, now comes the important part.

Emotional depth comes from the details, the specifics, so you’re going to be as specific as you can about the gratitude you feel. Why does this thing stand out to you? What are all the reasons you are grateful for this thing? What matters most to you about it? Why is it meaningful to you? What would happen if you didn’t have/do/feel that thing? When you think about this thing, where does the feeling live in your body? Write until you feel it settling inside you, and once you get there and know that it’s real, hang out there for a while. You won’t regret it. Then spend a few minutes sitting in that joy.
Touch plays a significant role in our sense of well-being. When you're deliberate and thoughtful about it, you can get the full benefits of appreciating the benefits of touch. Taking the time to attend to your body and indulge your sense of touch is a direct route to joy.

There are so many small ways in which you can drop into joy through your body including:

- Press gently on an acupressure point.
- Identify a muscle that feels tensed and massage it out or stretch it out.
- Press the arch of your foot into a tennis ball or the leg of your desk chair or something comparable.
- Give yourself a foot massage.
- Lightly touch the skin on your hands, face, or forearms.
- Massage your scalp.
- If it’s hot where you are, go wash your hands with cold water and/or splash cold water on your face. If it’s cold where you are, use warm water instead.
- Hug a close friend or partner, allowing yourself to appreciate their embrace.

Notice how each of these different sensations makes you feel, not just on the outside but deep within. If you feel a reduction in tension or more relaxation in your muscles, see how that translates into feeling more peaceful inside. If your skin feels tingly, let that tingly sensation run down your spine and recognize that it likely causes you to smile the tiniest of smiles. Pay attention to the experiences that give you the most joy and know that you can tap into that at any time.
Swell with Pride

You have done so many wonderful things in your life that you can be proud of. Think about a time that you worked really hard at something you achieved. You might recall an experience from when you were a small child or one that happened just this year. Now you’re going to dig deeper into that experience.

Think of this as if you’re writing the hero’s tale of this story, and you are the hero. If you feel self-conscious to think about it in this way, or you’re worried that you sound self-centered, try to put those thoughts out of your mind for the next few minutes. You can get the glory and still be a good person. In fact, in a hero’s tale, the hero gets the glory because they earned it.

Use these prompts to help you write the story in your mind.

• What steps did you have to take to achieve that goal?
• What were some of the barriers?
• What did you learn about yourself as you overcame those barriers?
• Did you ever feel like you couldn’t do it, and what shifted that made it possible?
• What positive qualities of yours did you use to achieve success in this goal?
• How did you feel when you realized that you had finally succeeded?
• Who did you tell about your achievement?
• Who celebrated this success with you?
• What was the look on their face when you told them or when they watched you achieve it?
• How did it feel to watch them taking joy and pride in your success?

As you move through this exercise, observe how you are rekindling those feelings right now, as you recall them from the past. Connecting present to past is part of how we internalize the feeling of joy, which is what you are rightfully doing in this moment. Allow those feelings of pride, purpose, and accomplishment live in you and radiate out of you.
Crack Yourself Up

Think back to a specific time that was over-the-top, right-out-of-a-sitcom hilarious. Perhaps it was funny when it happened, or maybe it was embarrassing or even frightening and has only gotten funny with time. Let the experience come back to you, with an eye towards the hilarity of it all.

Begin at the very beginning and re-tell yourself the whole story of what happened. If you’ve ever told the story to someone else, think about the parts where they laughed so hard that you had to pause the story. Or the times you laughed so hard that you had to take a moment to try and compose yourself. Those are obviously the good parts. Make sure to spend a lot of time getting those details just right.

Imagine that there is a TV exec who is about to decide whether or not this story could be a sitcom pilot. Make the story so great in the re-telling that it has to be aired. Go through each step of the story, exaggerating the funniest parts. Laugh out loud if you are moved to do so.

If you’ve told this story to someone before, perhaps you might want to call them up and reminisce again. If you haven’t shared the story, now is a great time to do so.

There is nothing so wonderful as sharing a memory with someone.

Especially if it’s the kind of memory that gets you both laughing so hard that you can barely catch your breath.
Go to your Happy Place

Yes, that’s a cheesy phrase, but stick with us here. What is your happy place? What’s the first place that comes to mind when asked that question? The reason it’s good to ask it in a cheesy way is that sometimes the answer itself is cheesy. Of course, your ideal happy place might be a beautiful island worthy of a magazine spread. But it’s just as likely that it’s something much humbler. It might be sitting on your couch in your oldest pair of pajamas with your cat at your feet. It might be an imaginary place that you’ve never told anyone about. It’s your happy place and it will give you joy if you let it so don’t let anyone else’s vision of happiness crowd yours out of your mind.

Once you’ve got your happy place in mind, it’s time to go there. And just as before, your aim is to experience it in great detail. Use your five senses to guide you. If the place is a real place, remember some of the smells you noticed when you were there. If the place is made-up, daydream long enough for those smells to come into your mind. When you inhale deeply, what do you feel on the tip of your nose just before the smell reaches you? What sounds exist in this place that you don’t hear in your everyday life? Where do the sounds come from? Are there any tastes associated with this place? When you’re there, in reality or in your mind, what textures, forms, and colors do you see? How does the air or your clothing feeling on your skin there?

Your idea of paradise is yours and yours alone. It gets to be whatever you want it to be.

If you want to share it with someone, you can. But sometimes it’s nice to keep things pristine, just for yourself. It’s up to you. Going there in your mind gives you the opportunity to focus, and connect with, only those things that are meaningful to you about a particular place. When you make that connection to those values, preferences, and wishes, you stir up feelings of joy.
Recall the Effects of Kindness

What is a kindness that you have offered someone recently? Let’s examine that experience from the first to the last moment, including recognition of how it continues to exist for you in your mind and body. This exercise isn’t about bragging, although you might feel pride or satisfaction about what happened. That is wonderful if you do feel those things. You might also feel modest or humble. That’s okay, too. You can feel many feelings at the same time. Your goal is to connect with those feelings and make them real in this moment.

Think back to a moment before your kind action, when you knew you were going to do it. What motivated you to do this nice thing? What effect did you hope your action would have? How did you feel inside as you prepared for it?

Now imagine, or remember, the look on the person’s face as they experienced your gift of time, resources, or energy.

How did they feel receiving this kindness?
How did they feel about receiving it from you specifically?
What did it mean to them to experience such kindness?

Lastly, what story do you tell yourself about this act of kindness? How have you filed that experience away within you? Does the story incorporate all the feelings you just experienced as you went through those questions? What would need to change about the story in order for it to better reflect the full picture of what actually happened, for you and the other person? Now that the story is more complete, and does a better job of accounting for all the genuine feelings that occurred, make room for those feelings. As you do that, imagine the look on the other person’s face as they experienced your kindness. Let that look settle upon you, as the giver of that experience. You have offered wonderful things to the world and it is joyful to re-live those times.
Plan for the Future

We can potentially experience joy during any phase of an experience. There is certainly joy to be found in the moment. You can also find or create joy in reliving memories of moments, as you’ve done in some of the previous exercises. Now you’re going to work towards experiencing the joy of positive anticipation, and you can do that through initiating or expanding upon a plan for the future.

Your plan should be for something positive and also realistic. What is something you want to do that you truly believe is possible to accomplish and you are fairly certain it will bring you joy when it happens? Here are some examples, to help you get the wheels turning:

- Doing something special with a friend
- Paying off a debt
- Taking a vacation to a special place
- Achieving a milestone in your career
- Completing a creative project
- Making a big purchase

An important part of joy is not just feeling it now but believing wholeheartedly that you will continue to experience joy in the future, come what may. So, as you elaborate on this plan, you will want to reflect on both how amazing it will feel when you achieve it and how purposeful, committed, and proud you get to feel as you take the steps towards making it happen.

You might start planning this project in your mind. Alternatively, you can enjoy a more immersive experience by more fully engaging in the planning. Add specific deadlines on your calendar, makes notes on index cards, pull out your calculator to crunch some numbers, download a new app to help keep you on track, whip up a spreadsheet, jot notes on post-its to leave around your house, etc.

Remember that, as you plan, you want to be sure you’ve got two parallel tracks going - one for working on logistics, and one for letting yourself feel the positive emotions associated with the realities and eventualities of the plan. In this way, you are teaching your brain to anticipate joy. You are telling it what future occurrences are likely to be joyous for you. In the future, when you experience those positive feelings, they will resonate with you more deeply and be easier to access as joyful memories later on.
Connect with Someone you Love

The people in our lives are one of our biggest and most important sources of joy. All too often, we take them for granted. We get wrapped up in the daily details of life and forget to notice how wonderful we feel about the people that we love. Pause for a moment and get in touch with one of your favorite people. Don’t wait until it’s a “better time;” do it right now.

You can reach out to people in so many ways. Text, email, voice message, call, video chat, write a letter, send a message through social media, or visit the person you care about. Tell them that you’re thinking about them. Go further than that and tell them exactly what makes them special in your life. As you do, really savor what it is that you appreciate about them. It might be a favorite memory or a quirky habit you love or their steady presence in your life or the way that they make you laugh at the smallest of things. Whatever it is, enjoy it in your mind and share it with them.

Don’t worry about whether they’re busy or you’re interrupting them or it’s not the best time of day.

For this one moment, don’t let any worries get in the way of you honoring the importance of that person in your life. If you still have hesitations, just think about how you would feel to get a message like the one you’re about to send, even if it’s in the middle of a workday, or at midnight, or while you’re working on a stressful project. It would still feel good, right? Of course. So, don’t deprive your favorite person of having that experience. And don’t deprive yourself of connecting deeply in this authentic way. Even when it’s brief, making time for a loved one almost always bring us closer to joy if we look for it.
Find Your Joy

These ten exercises are just a few of the ways that you can start developing and sustaining joy in your life. We focused on examples that you can truly practice right in this moment, no matter where you are. As you work to implement these suggestions, you’ll find that you start to lengthen your own list of ways you personally find and cultivate joy.

People derive joy from so many sources. We tune in to our senses, connect with our community, engage in spiritual practices, give back to others, spend time in nature, make and view art, celebrate traditions and rituals, mark the passing of time, and notice the details of life, just to name a few. We hope this is merely a step in your journey to bring more joy to your life.

As you work to implement these suggestions, you’ll find that you start to lengthen your own list of ways you personally find and cultivate joy.