



What *is* happiness?

Happiness is something that most people strive for, but many can have a difficult time defining it.

Most of us want to be happy and try to work toward achieving happiness. While the concept seems easy to approach, the deep-rooted nature of what it really means to be happy can be somewhat abstract. Getting into the science of happiness helps answer that question. Arthur Brooks is a Harvard professor who studies happiness. His book, *The Art and Science of Happiness: Build the Life You Want*, takes a deeper look at his research and the puzzle pieces that come together to create a neuroscientific definition of happiness.

When asked to define happiness, most people describe a feeling. However, happiness is much more than that. It's not a destination but rather a direction—a sign that several pieces of a formula have come together successfully. The research Brooks conducts has solidified an actual formula for happiness.

$$\text{Happiness} = \text{Enjoyment} + \text{Purpose} + \text{Satisfaction}$$

Enjoyment

Enjoyment can be defined as pleasure combined with our humanity. Pleasure is something that happens to us and engages a part of our brain called the limbic system. When we combine pleasure with our experiences with others, it moves to a different part of our brain and becomes enjoyment. For example, eating Thanksgiving dinner brings us pleasure by filling our stomach, but the enjoyment comes from consuming it with others and the connections we have with those we care about.

Purpose

We often look for meaning in our lives, but it can be hard to grasp. The paradox of purpose is that it frequently requires suffering. When asked how we find meaning or resiliency, inevitably we talk about challenges or loss. Ultimately, happiness requires unhappiness to build meaning. It's through overcoming challenges that we derive a sense of purpose. Navigating through difficult circumstances can lead to a sense of significance and direction. Embracing the paradox of purpose reminds us that life's struggles are not obstacles to happiness, but rather integral parts of the journey toward a more meaningful existence.

Satisfaction

According to Brooks' research, satisfaction tends to be the most difficult of the elements to achieve. We want to feel it and work to gain satisfaction, but cannot keep it. We set expectations for what we think will help us attain satisfaction: doing a good job, graduating, retiring, etc. Once we achieve those goals, we will finally be satisfied, right? Unfortunately, we know that the feeling of satisfaction wears off over time. Accomplishments feel good in the moment, but once the feeling is gone, we strive for more. That is why this component is the most difficult. The benchmark seems to constantly change with each accomplishment. Each achievement sets a new benchmark. While this inherent drive to progress is a fundamental aspect of human nature, it can also contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction. Managing those desires or wants can help change that relationship with satisfaction.

For additional support on your journey to find enjoyment, purpose, and satisfaction reach out to the EAP.