Think not lightly of good, saying, “It will not come to me.”

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

Likewise, the wise one, Gathering it little by little, Fills oneself with good.

Dhammapada 9.122
Positive Neuroplasticity

Professional Course

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1 Foundations
What is the Practice of Positive Neuroplasticity?

The deliberate internalization of beneficial experiences

Informally called “taking in the good”
Welcome to the Professional Course

Aims


Deepen embodiment of positive neuroplasticity (PN)

Understand theory and have practical skills

Deepen supportive qualities

Use PN with others, typically in occupational settings

Methods

Internal practice, trying methods with a partner, small group discussion, whole group lecture and discussion

Presumed capabilities to work with others, give and get feedback skillfully, and basic understanding of PN

Questions?
Well-Being

Hedonia

Eudaimonia
Shaping the Course of a Life

Challenges

Vulnerabilities

Resources
Location of Resources

World

Body

Mind
Two Wolves in the Heart
Examples of Inner Strengths?

Understandings
Capabilities
Positive emotions
Attitudes
Motivations
Virtues
Roughly half to two-thirds of the variation in psychological attributes involves non-heritable factors.

A large fraction of a typical person’s mental resources are acquired — learned — rather than innate.
What mental resources do—or could—help you with these challenges?

For yourself or a client: What are some challenges these days? (in the world, body, or mind)

What mental resources do—or could—help you with these challenges?

Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

TIP: If you’re alone, reflect or journal.
In the Garden of the Mind

1. Be with what is there
2. Decrease the negative
3. Increase the positive

Let be. Let go. Let in.

“Being with” is primary – but not enough.
We also need wise effort: releasing & resourcing.
Inner Strengths Are Built From Brain Structure
Four Learning Curves

- Decline

Mental Resources

Time
Four Learning Curves

- No growth
- Decline
Four Learning Curves

1. Decline
2. No growth
3. Linear growth
Four Learning Curves

- **1. Decline**
- **2. No growth**
- **3. Linear growth**
- **4. Exponential growth; learning how to learn**

The graph shows the change in mental resources over time, with four distinct types of learning curves indicated.
How can we increase the conversion rate from positive states to beneficial traits?
Learning Factors

Environmental – setting, social support

Behavioral – activities, repetition

Mental – motivation, engagement
Learning How To Learn
# Types of Mental Learning Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
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<td>Openness</td>
<td>Personal relevance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>Alertness, sense of novelty</td>
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<tr>
<td>View of positive experience</td>
<td>Arousal, enactment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growth/learning mindset</td>
<td>Sense of reward</td>
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<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Emotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy</td>
<td>Granularity of attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-esteem</td>
<td>Interoception</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling supported</td>
<td>Maintenance, repetition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of safety</td>
<td>Meaning, elaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Contextual**
  - Openness
  - Mindfulness
  - View of positive experience
  - Growth/learning mindset
  - Motivation
  - Self-efficacy
  - Self-esteem
  - Feeling supported
  - Sense of safety

- **Engagement**
  - Personal relevance
  - Alertness, sense of novelty
  - Arousal, enactment
  - Sense of reward
  - Emotion
  - Granularity of attention
  - Interoception
  - Maintenance, repetition
  - Meaning, elaboration
Benefits of Mental Learning Factors

Benefits of both types of factors:

- Increase learning from the present experience
- Prime NS for future beneficial experiences
- Heighten consolidation of past experiences

Engagement factors have additional benefits:

- Regulate experience directly
- Increase initial processes of consolidation
- Are under volitional control
Experience-Dependent Neuroplasticity
Your Brain: The Technical Specs

**Size:**
- 3 pounds of tofu-like tissue
- 1.1 trillion brain cells
- 85 billion “gray matter" neurons

**Activity:**
- Always on 24/7/365 - Instant access to information on demand
- 20-25% of blood flow, oxygen, and glucose

**Speed:**
- Neurons firing around 5 to 50 times a second (or faster)
- Signals crossing your brain in a tenth of a second

**Connectivity:**
- Average neuron makes ~ 5000 connections with other neurons:
  - ~ 500 trillion synapses
A Neuron

- Dendrite
- Soma (cell body)
- Nucleus
- Axon
- Axon terminal button
- Myelin sheath
A Synapse

Axon Terminal

Presynaptic membrane neurotransmitter released by exocytosis

Mitochondrion produce ATP

Synaptic vesicles contain neurotransmitter

Synaptic Cleft

Postsynaptic membrane has receptors for neurotransmitters

Dendrite of second neuron
Mental activity entails underlying neural activity.
Rewards of Love
Repeated mental activity entails repeated neural activity.

Repeated neural activity builds neural structure.
We can use the mind
To change the brain
To change the mind for the better
To benefit ourselves and other beings.
Neurons that fire together,
wire together.
Major Neural Mechanisms of Learning

(De)Sensitizing existing synapses
Building new synapses
Altered gene expression
Building and integrating new neurons
Altered ongoing activity in a region
Altered connectivity of regions
Altered neurochemical activity
Information from hippocampus to cortex
Modulation by stress hormones, cytokines
Slow wave and REM sleep
Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness.

Neuroreport, 16, 1893-1897.
Learning – changing neural structure and function, proceeds in two stages:

- **Encoding**
- **Activation State**

- **Consolidation**
- **Installation**

- **Trait**
Inner strengths are grown from experiences of them or related factors – activated states – that are installed as traits.
You become more **compassionate** by repeatedly installing experiences of compassion.

You become more **grateful** by repeatedly installing experiences of gratitude.

You become more **mindful** by repeatedly installing experiences of mindfulness.
Most experiences of inner strengths – resilience, kindness, mindfulness, etc. – are rewarding: enjoyable or meaningful.

Their rewarding qualities mark their value and motivate us to gain it.
Without **installation** – without turning passing mental states into enduring neural structure – there is no learning, no change in the brain.

Activation without installation is pleasant, but has no lasting value.

What fraction of your beneficial mental states ever become neural structure?
The same research that proves therapy works shows no improvement in outcome over the last 30 or so years.

Scott Miller
The Negativity Bias

During the 600 million year evolution of the nervous system, avoiding “sticks” was usually more consequential than getting “carrots.”

1. So we scan for bad news,
2. Over-focus on it,
3. Over-react to it
4. Install it efficiently in memory (incl. implicit),
5. Sensitize the brain to the negative, and
6. Create vicious cycles with others.
Velcro for Bad, Teflon for Good

The negativity bias
The brain is good at learning from bad experiences but relatively bad at learning from good ones.

Even though learning from good experiences of mental resources and related factors grows inner strengths.
The Negativity Bias
What are some practical implications for how you do therapy?

Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

What are some key ideas so far – especially about the need for **installation** for lasting learning?
2

The HEAL Process
How to Take in the Good: HEAL

Activation
1. Have a beneficial experience.

Installation
2. Enrich it.
3. Absorb it.
4. Link positive and negative material. (Optional)
Have a Beneficial Experience
Enrich It
Absorb It
Like a Nice Fire
Link Positive & Negative Material
Have It, Enjoy It
This is the fundamental how of “experiential gain” that can be applied to any what – any psychological resource (including the results of healing) that a person would like to grow.

Aspects of Enriching and Absorbing are present in any effective psychotherapy, coaching, human resources training, and mindfulness program.

But systematic, explicit guidance for the installation phase of learning is uncommon.

And there has been no systematic training in the mental factors of emotional, somatic learning.
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

**What are some of the good facts in your life these days?**

As the listener, keep finding a genuine gladness about the good facts in the life of our partner.

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.
3

Using HEAL
With Others
It’s Good to Take in the Good

• **Development of specific inner strengths**
  – General - resilience, positive mood, feeling loved
  – “Antidote experiences” - Healing old wounds, filling the hole in the heart

• **Implicit benefits:**
  – Shows that there is still good in the world
  – Being active rather than passive
  – Treating yourself kindly, like you matter
  – Rights an unfair imbalance, given the negativity bias
  – Training of attention and executive functions

• **Sensitizes brain to positive: like Velcro for good**
Keep a green bough in your heart, and a singing bird will come.

Lao Tzu
Resources for HEAL

• Intention; willing to feel good
• Identified target experience
• Openness to the experience; embodiment
• Mindfulness of the HEAL steps to sustain them
• Working through blocks
The Four Ways to Offer a Method

- Doing it implicitly
- Teaching it and leaving it up to the person
- Doing it explicitly with the person
- Asking the person to do it on his or her own
Using HEAL in Trainings

• Take a few minutes to explain its rationale and teach it explicitly.

• In the flow, occasionally encourage enriching and absorbing, using natural language.

• Tell people they can use HEAL outside of class to deepen internalization of what they’re learning.

• Don’t use HEAL when it’s inappropriate (e.g., radically choiceless awareness, highly self-critical about any kind of performance).
Synergies of HEAL and Mindfulness

• Improved mindfulness enhances HEAL.

• HEAL increases factors of mindfulness (e.g., executive functions, self-compassion, determination, distress tolerance).

• HEAL heightens learning from mindfulness:
  – The sense of stable presence itself
  – Disidentifying from reactions
  – Deepening centeredness
  – Insight into nature of experience
4
Having, Enriching, and Absorbing Experiences
How to Take in the Good: HEAL

Activation
1. Have a beneficial experience

Installation
2. Enrich the experience
3. Absorb the experience
4. Link positive and negative material (Optional)
Having Beneficial Experiences
Elements of Experience

**Thought**
belief • perspective • expectation • image • memory • idea

**Perception**
sensation (e.g., relaxation, vitality) • sight • sound • taste • smell

**Emotion**
feeling • mood

**Desire**
want • wish • hope • drive • motivation • purpose • dream • passion

**Action**
behavior • posture • knowing how to
The Two Ways To Have a Beneficial Experience

1. Notice one you are already having.
   - In the foreground of awareness
   - In the background

2. Create one.
It is remarkable that there are always beneficial aspects of ongoing experience.

There are always opportunities for internalizing beneficial experiences.
Feeling Basically Alright Right Now

This is a briefer version of a practice we’ll be doing more deeply later on:

• Tuning into the body’s signals that all is well right now

• Aware of breathing going fine . . . the heart beating . . . awareness itself keeps on going no matter what arises . . .

• Letting go of the past, not worrying about the future. Noticing that at least in this moment you are OK.

• Feeling alright sinking into places inside that haven’t . . .
How to Create A Beneficial Experience

Look for good facts in:

1. Immediate situation
2. Current or recent events
3. Stable conditions
4. Your character
5. The past
6. The future
7. Bad situations
8. The lives of others
9. Your imagination
10. Care about others
11. Directly evoke a beneficial experience
12. Produce good facts
13. Share about good facts with others
Most of these involve (1) recognizing **good facts** and (2) having a good experience.

Both are challenging for many people.
Turning a Good Fact Into a Good Experience

• Bring awareness to your **body**.
• Soften and **open**.
• Be a little **active** in your mind.
• Imagine how **another person** might feel.
• Be kind to yourself, and **encourage** a good experience.
Find a partner, pick A and B. Go back and forth about each type of good fact (~90 sec. each), then on to the next type:

1. Immediate situation
2. Current or recent events
3. Stable conditions
4. One’s character
5. The past
6. The future
7. Bad situations
8. The lives of others

TIP: If you’re alone, reflect or journal.
Reflections So Far

You can notice or create a beneficial experience. There are lots of ways to create experiences. Beneficial experiences are usually based on facts. Recognizing good facts does not deny bad ones. Good facts about yourself are facts like any other.
Enriching Beneficial Experiences
How to Enrich an Experience

• **Duration** – 5+ seconds; protecting it; keeping it going

• **Intensity** – opening to it in the mind; helping it get big

• **Multimodality** – engaging multiple aspects of experience, especially perception and emotion

• **Novelty** – seeing what is fresh; “don’t know mind”

• **Salience** – seeing why this is personally relevant
Absorbing Beneficial Experiences
Two Aspects of Installation

**Enriching**

*Mind* – big, rich, protected experience

*Brain* – intensifying and maintaining neural activity

**Absorbing**

*Mind* – intending and sensing that the experience is received into oneself, with related rewards

*Brain* – priming, sensitizing, and promoting more effective encoding and consolidation
Absorbing an Experience

- Intend to receive the experience into yourself.
- Sense the experience sinking into you.
  - Imagery – Water into a sponge; golden dust sifting down; a jewel into the treasure chest of the heart
  - Sensation – Warm soothing balm
  - Give over to it; let it change you.
- Be aware of ways the experience is rewarding.
The good life, as conceive it, is a happy life. I do not mean that if you are good you will be happy; I mean that if you are happy you will be good.

Bertrand Russell
Being for Yourself

• Bring to mind someone you are for. Find a sense of caring, support, being loyal, standing with someone as an ally. Know this stance toward someone.

• Apply this stance, this feeling, toward yourself.

• Recognizing your difficulties and burdens. Recognizing injustice applied to you. Recognizing the impacts on you.

• Finding determination that you not be mistreated, that you cope with challenges, that you be truly happy, having a good life as best you can.
Pick a partner and choose an A and B.
Once finished, find another partner and repeat.

TIP: If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

A: Take your partner through the first three steps of HEAL.
B: Tell your partner about an important beneficial experience for you.
B: Tell your partner what worked well in what they did.

Take it in! Then switch roles.
Blocks to Internalizing Beneficial Experiences
Reflection on “Blocks”

Blocks = mental factors that reduce, derail, inhibit, or defend against mental activities that would be beneficial for a person.

Blocks are not bad. They are normal, a means of coping, often a “solution” that once made sense but is now a “problem.”

1. Explore the benefits, payoffs, functions, purpose of the block. “Join with the defense.”

2. Then see if there might be better ways to accomplish the same purpose.
Blocks to Any Inner Practice

- Distractibility
- Out of touch with experience
- Uncomfortable bringing attention inward
- Over-analyzing, pulling out of the experience
Blocks to Taking in the Good

- It’s hard to receive, even a good experience
- Concern you’ll lose your edge; fear you’ll lower your guard
- Idea that feeling good is disloyal or unfair to those who suffer
- Belief you don’t deserve to feel good
- Not wanting to risk disappointment
- As a woman, socialized to make others happy, not yourself
- As a man, socialized to be stoic and not care about feelings
- You’ve been punished for being energized or happy
- Good things in you have been dismissed
- Positive experiences associate to negative ones
- “What’s the point in feeling good, bad things will still happen”
- Payoffs in not feeling good
- Not wanting to let others off the hook
- TG is craving that leads to suffering
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

What could help the client with these blocks?

For a client: What are some blocks to developing key psychological resources?

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.
Helping Others
Enrich and Absorb
Enrich It
Factors of Enriching

- **Duration** – 5+ seconds; protecting it; keeping it going
- **Intensity** – opening to it in the mind; helping it get big
- **Multimodality** – engaging multiple aspects of experience, especially perception and emotion
- **Novelty** – seeing what is fresh; “don’t know mind”
- **Salience** – seeing why this is personally relevant
What questions do you have about:

Duration?
Intensity?
Multimodality?
Novelty?
Salience?
Absorb It
Two Aspects of Installation

**Enriching**

**Mind** – big, rich, protected experience

**Brain** – intensifying and maintaining neural activity

**Absorbing**

**Mind** – intending and sensing that the experience is received into oneself, with related rewards

**Brain** – priming, sensitizing, and promoting more effective encoding and consolidation
Absorbing an Experience

• Intend, sense the experience is sinking into you.
  – Imagery – Water into a sponge; golden dust sifting down; a jewel into the treasure chest of the heart
  – Sensation – Warm soothing balm

• Give over to the experience; let it change you

• Let go of resisting, grasping, clinging: “craving”
Pick a new partner and choose an A and B. Once finished, find another partner and repeat.

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

B: Tell your partner about an important beneficial experience for you.

A: Take your partner through the first three steps of HEAL.

B: Tell your partner what worked well in what they did.

Take it in! Then switch roles.
7

Key Inner Resources
Our Three Fundamental Needs

- safety
- satisfaction
- connection
Needs Activated by...

Safety
- Unpleasant
- Pain
- Threat

Satisfaction
- Pleasant
- Opportunity
- Loss

Connection
- Heartfelt
- Attraction
- Rejection
Needs Met by Three Systems

Safety
Avoiding harms

Satisfaction
Approaching rewards

Connection
Attaching to others
The Evolving Brain

Cortex ("primate/human")

Subcortex ("mammalian")

Brainstem ("reptilian")

Cerebellum
Needs Feel Met: Responsive Mode

When we feel basically safe — not disturbed by threat — the Avoiding system goes Responsive, with a sense of peace.

When we feel basically satisfied — not disturbed by loss — the Approaching system goes Responsive, with a sense of contentment.

When we feel basically connected — not disturbed by rejection — the Attaching system goes Responsive, with a sense of love.
The Responsive Mode is Home Base

In the **Responsive “green zone,”** the body defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of refueling, repairing and recovering.

The mind defaults to a sustainable equilibrium of:

- **Avoiding** Peace
- **Approaching** Contentment
- **Attaching** Love

This is the brain in its homeostatic **Responsive, minimal craving** mode.
Can You Stay in the Green Zone When:

- Things are unpleasant?
- Things are pleasant?
- Things are heartfelt?
# Resources for Avoiding Harms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Weakness</td>
<td>Strength</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helplessness</td>
<td>Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freezing</td>
<td>Action, venting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflated threats</td>
<td>Accurate appraisal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alarm</td>
<td>Protection, calming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>Relaxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dread</td>
<td>Feeling alright now</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confusion, overwhelm</td>
<td>Make a plan</td>
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<td>Irritation, anger</td>
<td>Big picture, peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenge</strong></td>
<td><strong>Resource</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I don’t have</td>
<td>What I do have</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scarcity</td>
<td>Enoughness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disappointed, sad</td>
<td>Gratitude, gladness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frustration, failure</td>
<td>Accomplishment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bored, numb</td>
<td>Pleasure, excitement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Loved and loving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving up</td>
<td>Aspire, lived by good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivenness</td>
<td>Already satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Resources for Attaching to Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Resource</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left out, excluded</td>
<td>Belonging, wanted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequacy, shame</td>
<td>Appreciated, respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignored, unseen</td>
<td>Receiving empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td>Friendship, caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>Recognize it hurts you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envy, jealousy</td>
<td>Self-compassion, take action, good will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling stifled</td>
<td>Skillful assertiveness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Needs Don’t Feel Met: **Reactive Mode**

When we feel **unsafe** – disturbed by **threat** – the Avoiding system goes Reactive, with a sense of **fear**.

When we feel **dissatisfied** – disturbed by **loss** – the Approaching system goes Reactive, with a sense of **frustration**.

When we feel **disconnected** – disturbed by **rejection** – the Attaching system goes Reactive, with a sense of **heartache**.
The Reactive Mode is Leaving Home

In the **Reactive “red zone,”** the body fires up into the stress response: fight, flight, or freeze; outputs usually exceed inputs; long-term building projects are deferred.

The mind fires up into:

- **Avoiding** Fear
- **Approaching** Frustration
- **Attaching** Heartache

This is the brain in its allostatic **Reactive, craving** mode.
Coming Home, Staying Home

Meeting your core needs brings you home to the **Responsive** “green zone.”

Taking in the good Responsive states grows Responsive traits. In a wonderful cycle, these traits promote good states – which can strengthen your Responsive traits.

Responsive states and traits help you stay Responsive when the world is flashing red.
Pet the Lizard
Feed the Mouse
Hug the Monkey
Coming Home

Peace
Contentment
Love
Questions for Identifying Resources

• What would have made all the difference in the world – in your childhood, first job, last relationship, etc.? (Focus on the experience of state or trait that would have resulted from better relationships, settings, events.)

• What does your heart still long for?

• What’s happening inside you when you are in a really good place?

• What’s happening in the mind of someone you know who handles your issue well?
Find a new partner, pick an A and B.

A’s guide B’s: What is a challenge? What is a key inner strength that could help? How could you have and take in experiences of it in your life?

A’s guide B’s through HEA steps for this strength.

B’s tell A’s what worked.

TIP: If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

Switch roles.
Find a new partner, pick an A and B.

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

A’s guide B’s: What is an internal issue? What is a key inner strength that could help? How could you have and take in experiences of it in your life?

A’s guide B’s through HEA steps for this strength.

B’s tell A’s what worked.

Switch roles.
Using Positive Material to Address Negative Material
Link Positive & Negative Material
What is “negative material?”

Painful, harmful thoughts, perceptions, emotions, desires, and actions

Foreground of awareness

Background of awareness

Unconscious
How Linking Works

• Activated negative material associates to whatever is also present in awareness.

• When negative material leaves awareness, these associations are reconsolidated in memory.

• This means that positive material can soothe, ease, put in perspective, and even replace negative material.

• Examples: pain held in spacious awareness; telling a friend about a problem; self-compassion for an upset; feeling cared about alongside feeling hurt.
Conditions for the Link Step

• Divided awareness; holding two things at once

• Not hijacked by negative; if so, drop negative

• Positive material is more prominent in awareness.
Degree of Engagement with Negative

- The **idea** of the negative material
- A **felt sense** of the negative material
- The positive material **goes into** the negative material

Throughout, the positive material remains more prominent in awareness.
Skills with the 4th Step

• Be on your own side; you want the positive to win. Perhaps imagine inner allies with you.

• Be resourceful. It’s OK to be creative, even playful.

• If the negative gets too strong, drop it; return to positive.

• Get a sense of receiving the positive into the negative.

• End with just the positive.

• Start with positive or negative material.
Find a new partner, pick an A and B.

Role play one partner explaining to the other one: What is Linking and how to do it?

A’s set up the roles, and begin.

B’s tell A’s what worked. Then say what was not so clear to you.

TIP: If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

Switch roles.
Same partner. A’s guide B’s explicitly through HEAL, especially Linking. Keep it real.

First, B’s briefly describe the positive and negative (mild to moderate) material.

Then do HEAL as a direct guided practice, 5 min.

B’s say what worked. And any suggestions.

TIP: If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

Switch roles.
The Tip of the Root

In the fourth step of TG, you could try to get at the youngest, most vulnerable layer of painful material.

The “tip of the root” is commonly in childhood. The brain is generally more affected by the negative experiences that occur in early childhood than by ones occurring later in life.

Prerequisites:

1. Understanding the need to get at younger layers
2. Compassion and support for the inner child
3. Capacity to “presence” young material without flooding
Pick a new partner. Take turns, with one partner guiding the other one.

This is a longer, naturalistic exploration, 20 min. each way.

Try to get at key aspects of the negative material plus key mental resources that could help.

Do HEAL informally or formally along the way.

Debrief a few minutes.

Switch Roles.

**TIP:**
If you’re alone, reflect or journal.
How was that?
What went well?
What questions do you have?
Inner Resources Matched to Challenges
Safety
Reflections on Fear

- Fear is normal. Avoiding harms is fundamental.
- Much anxiety is unnecessary and unreasonable.
- We tend to overestimate threats and underestimate opportunities and resources.
- People can be afraid . . . to give up fear.
- Remember that you can give up unnecessary anxiety and still remain appropriately cautious, watchful, and strong.
Calming the Visceral Core

• A brief explanation of heart rate variability

• Relax.

• Gently lengthen exhalations . . . As long as or longer than inhalations . . . Then letting breathing be soft and natural.

• Bring attention into the chest and area of the heart.

• Be aware of heartfelt feelings . . . Perhaps love flowing in and flowing out in rhythm with the breath.
Feeling Strong

- Bring to mind times that you felt strong, determined, enduring . . . Focus on feeling strong . . . Take in this experience.

- Imagine experiencing strength while dealing with a challenge . . . Let the sense of this sink into you.
Find a partner. A’s guide B’s explicitly through HEAL, especially Linking. Keep it real.

**TIP:**
If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

For yourself or a client, B’s describe positive and negative (mild to moderate) material related to safety.

Then do HEAL as a direct guided practice, 5 min.

B’s say what worked. And any suggestions.

Switch roles.
Satisfaction
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring this question:

What are some of the things you have accomplished in your life? (Including lots of seemingly small things)

Take in your partner’s recognition of you.

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.
• Focus on the sense of having received so much already . . .

• Get a sense of the fullness in the present moment . . . So much texture, so many sensations, sights, thoughts, feelings . . . Almost overwhelming, why seek anything more . . .

• Find a contentment in the moment as it is, moment after moment . . . Not wishing it to be different than it is . . . Drivenness and grasping and discontent falling away . . . Already satisfied.
Connection
Self-Compassion

Compassion is the wish that beings not suffer, with warm-hearted concern. Compassion is sincere even if we can’t make things better.

Self-compassion simply applies this to oneself.

To encourage self-compassion:

1. Get the sense of being cared about.
2. Bring to mind beings you care about. Find compassion for them.
3. Shift the compassion to yourself.
“Anthem”

Ring the bells that can still ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in
That’s how the light gets in

Leonard Cohen
Find a partner. A’s guide B’s explicitly through HEAL, especially Linking. Keep it real.

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

For yourself or a client, B’s describe positive and negative (mild to moderate) material related to connection.

Then do HEAL as a direct guided practice, 5 min.

B’s say what worked. And any suggestions.

Switch roles.
Applications of the HEAL Process
Implicit HEAL in Therapy

- Creating space for beneficial experiences
- Drawing attention to beneficial facts
- Encouraging positive experience of beneficial fact
- Drawing attention to key aspects of an experience
- Slowing the client down; not moving on
- Modeling taking in the good oneself
Teach the method

– Background helps about brain, negativity bias
– Emphasize facts and mild beneficial experiences.
– Surface blocks and work through them.
– Explain the idea of “risking the dreaded experience,” noticing the (usually) good results, and taking them in.
Explicit HEAL in Therapy

• Do HEAL with client(s) during a session
  – Reinforcing key resource states and traits
  – Linking rewards to desired thoughts or actions
  – When learning from therapy has worked well
  – When realistic views of self and world come true
  – Good qualities in client
  – New insights

• Encourage HEAL between sessions
  – Naming occasions
  – Identifying key beneficial facts and experiences
Promoting Client Motivation

• During therapy and between sessions, HEAL:
  – Key resource experiences
  – When learning from therapy works well
  – When realistic views of you, the world, etc. come true
  – Good qualities in yourself
  – New insights

• Can be formalized in daily reflections, journaling
HEAL and Trauma

• **General considerations:**
  – People vary in their resources and their traumas.
  – Often the major action is with “failed protectors.”
  – Respect “yellow lights” and the client’s pace.

• The first three steps of HEAL are generally safe. Use them to build resources for tackling the trauma directly.

• Use the Link step to address peripheral features and themes of the trauma.

• With care, use Link to get at the heart of the trauma.
In Couples, Benefits of HEAL

- “Installs” key resources that support interactions (e.g., self-soothing, recognition of good intentions)
- Dampens vicious cycles
- Helps partner feel seen, credited for efforts
- Increases the sense of the good that is present
- Reduces clingingness, pursuing, or reproach that the other person withdraws from
Using HEAL with a Couple

• Basic steps (often informal):
  – Attention to a good fact
  – Evoking and sustaining a good experience
  – Managing blocks
  – Awareness of the impact on one’s partner
  – Debriefing, often from both partners

• Pitfalls to avoid:
  – Seeming to side with one person
  – Unwittingly helping a person overlook real issues
  – Letting the other partner pile on
Pick a partner, choose A and B (A’s go first).

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

**Take turns talking about using HEAL with 2-3 different adults.**
Using HEAL with Children
Uses for Children

• Registering curricular skills and other resources
• Motivation for learning; associating rewards
• Seeing the good in the world, others, and oneself – and in the past, present, and future
• Seeing life as opportunity
• Feeling like an active learner
• Developing child-specific inner strengths
Adaptations for Children

- Kids gain from HEAL – particularly mistreated, anxious, spirited/ ADHD, or LD children.

- Style:
  - Be matter of fact: this is mental/neural literacy.
  - A little brain talk goes a long way.
  - Be motivating: name benefits; “be the boss of your own mind.”
  - Down to earth, naturalistic
  - Scaffold based on executive functions, motivation, and need for autonomy.
  - Brief, concrete
Occasions for HEAL with Kids

- Explicit training in positive neuroplasticity
- Natural rhythms in the day (e.g., start of class, after a lesson or recess, end of day)
- When working with an individual child
- When dealing with classroom issues
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Wrapping Up
Pick a partner and choose an A and a B (A’s go first). Then take turns, with one person speaking while the partner mainly listens, exploring these questions:

**TIP:** If you’re alone, reflect or journal.

What did you get out of this training personally?

How do you hope to apply it professionally?
In the Days Ahead

• Make taking in the good an informal daily habit.

• At the end of any formal practices – meditation, exercise, journaling, prayer, yoga, walking the dog – take a few moments to take in the benefits,

• Know what your current “vitamin C” is – and look for opportunities to feel it and internalize it,

• Reset to “deep green” – in peace, contentment, and love – every day.
Societal Implications of Positive Neuroplasticity

• For most of the time our human and hominid ancestors have lived, it was not possible to meet the core needs of everyone. But now the resources and know-how exist to do this. How we handle this unprecedented opportunity will be the central theme of this century.

• Improving external conditions is vital – but not enough. Many affluent people dwell in anxiety and anger, frustration and drivenness, and hurt and ill will.

• Repeatedly internalizing Responsive experiences develops a “green brain” that is harder to manipulate with threats and fear, greed and consumerism, and “us” vs. “them” rivalries. A critical mass of “green brains” will bring a tipping point that changes the course of human history.
Coming Home

Peace

Contentment

Love
Think not lightly of good, saying, “It will not come to me.”

Drop by drop is the water pot filled.

Likewise, the wise one, Gathering it little by little, Fills oneself with good.

Dhammapada 9.122
Suggested Books

See RickHanson.net for other great books.

Key Papers – 1

See RickHanson.net for other scientific papers.


Key Papers – 2


- Hanson, R. 2008. Seven facts about the brain that incline the mind to joy. In *Measuring the immeasurable: The scientific case for spirituality*. Sounds True.


Key Papers – 4


Where to Find Rick Hanson Online

Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence
www.rickhanson.net/hardwiringhappiness

Personal website: www.rickhanson.net
Wellspring Institute: www.wisebrain.org

youtube.com/drrhanson  facebook.com/rickhansonphd