



THIS EMOTIONAL LIFE™

Premiering January 4-6, 2010 on PBS
pbs.org/thisemotionallife



Watch. Learn. Connect.
Viewer Discussion Guide

Pursuing Emotional Health And Happiness

Human emotions are like a roller coaster. In the course of our lives, we experience highs and lows, good days and bad. For many, the harder days can be very long, and for some, they seem endless. Others, meanwhile, are able to find strength and even thrive in the face of fear and adversity.

How can we all lead more emotionally healthy and fulfilling lives? What's the secret—and is there a secret—to happiness? What is the science behind our smiles? On a daily basis, our ability to navigate our lives and relationships with others—family, friends, co-workers, and lovers—is a masterpiece of human choreography that requires attention and care. And as scientists now know, social relationships—more than any other factor—are the key to our emotional well-being.

THIS EMOTIONAL LIFE **A Unique Television & Interactive Experience**

This Emotional Life is a groundbreaking television and Web experience that invites people on a journey of discovery about the newest, most useful information on emotional well-being. The centerpiece of the project is a three-episode documentary series that will premiere nationally on PBS on January 4, 2010. The six-hour series presents real-life stories and the latest science behind happiness and emotions, navigated by host Dr. Daniel Gilbert, Harvard psychologist and author of the bestselling book, “Stumbling on Happiness.” The TV series is accompanied by a Web site that includes in-depth information and resources, and exclusive videos only available online at www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife.

A GUIDE TO THE SERIES

January 4 – Episode 1: “Families, Friends & Lovers”

How and why are relationships central to our emotional well-being? In this episode, the story of a young boy adopted from a Russian orphanage illustrates how child-caregiver attachments beginning in the very first days of life lay the groundwork for future relationships. Also, new parents struggle with a newborn baby, a couple grapples with a troubled marriage, a grown man learns to thrive with Asperger's syndrome, and more—all demonstrating the importance of social connections and relationships.

January 5 – Episode 2: “Facing Our Fears”

Some emotions—such as anger, sadness, and fear—may be seen as obstacles to happiness. This episode explores where these “negative emotions” come from, how they are important to our lives, and why, for many of us, they sometimes require

attention and management. The stories include a woman whose inability to control her temper is jeopardizing her relationships, and a teenager trying to overcome depression. Veterans and their families struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and search for treatment.

January 6 – Episode 3: “Rethinking Happiness”

Why does happiness seem so hard to achieve for many of us? What is it? Why is it important? This episode features stories of people facing hard situations: job loss, a cancer diagnosis, the death of a child, an accident, and common struggles of everyday life, as well as remarkable stories of resilience, such as a Vietnam veteran who survived for years as a POW. Understanding how some people can bounce back after they experience disaster sheds light on how all people can lead more fulfilling, happier lives.

How to Use This Discussion Guide

This Emotional Life and its Web site include informal lessons and tips for many people struggling with their own emotional issues and journeys to find happiness. This discussion guide is designed to facilitate a conversation in a large or small group about one or several of the topics in the shows—to ignite honest, informed conversations about our emotional well-being and our journeys toward happiness. You can also just read it by yourself as a way to enrich your viewing experience and provide additional meaning. No matter how you choose to use this guide, we invite you to watch the series and visit www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife for more information on these topics, and to explore a number of ways you can learn more, continue the conversation and find help and resources for yourself, your family, and your friends.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Throughout the series, we learn about the value of forming and maintaining social relationships. Take this opportunity to identify others in your community who may share an interest in a particular topic addressed in the series.



- Become a fan of *This Emotional Life* on Facebook and share thoughts about series topics:
www.Facebook.com/ThisEmotionalLife



- Visit www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife for a list of recommended support groups by topic area and zip code



- Look for others in your neighborhood with similar interests at www.MeetUp.com



- Share these resources with others—send your friends and family to our Web site and help us grow this important effort

If you are planning a group gathering, you may think about inviting a local expert to participate, such as:

- **An expert or professor** from a nearby college or university (in psychology or a similar field)
- **A parenting or grief expert** from an organization or social services group
- **A local representative** from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org

Discussion Topics

EARLY ATTACHMENT & PARENTING CONNECTIONS “Families, Friends & Lovers” Episode

We begin our emotional journeys in the very first days of life, and these lifelong journeys start with the quality of our attachments to parents and caregivers. Research shows that secure attachments formed between babies and their parents and caregivers during the earliest days and years of life influence their ability to form other social relationships throughout their lives. Early attachment includes consistent and loving responses to babies’ needs, reciprocal responses to babies’ emotions (a smile returns a smile, for example), physical touch and comfort, and ready and quick responses to cries. If a child has an insecure attachment, she may be impulsive, lack self-confidence, and have difficulty relating to others throughout life. It is literally the foundation to a healthy emotional life, and teaches the basic skills of trust and empathy that are crucial to trusting relationships in the future.

TAKING ACTION:

The This Emotional Life team is taking action in the area of early attachment—and you can take part. We’re developing a multimedia toolkit to help new parents understand the importance of attachment—and to teach parents how to build secure attachments with their children. Learn more about how you can help us get these kits to your friends, your family, and the members of your community.

Go to <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/attachment> to find out more.

How would you characterize the “parenting style” used by your parents or caregivers? Do you think your own style of parenting is influenced by this “personal history”? How?

What are some specific things you do as a parent/caregiver to ensure secure attachment with your child? Are there areas think you could improve?

We know that community and peer support is very valuable for new parents. Did you connect with other parents when your children were born? How did you find the groups or people? Did they help?

GRIEF & LOSS “Facing Our Fears” Episode

Grief is a natural, active process during which we experience intense feelings, revisit memories, and adjust to life after an illness, a traumatic event or the loss of a loved one. There is no one “right” way to grieve and no timetable—and the ups and downs during grieving can be unpredictable. The support of family and friends is more important than ever during times of grief and loss.

TAKING ACTION:

Millions of our neighbors are dealing with the loss of loved ones. While each person is dealing with the experience in his or her own specific way, social support is always necessary.

*Go to the This Emotional Life Web site for tips on how you can help a friend or loved one experiencing grief and loss:
www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/grief-loss/helping-yourself-others.*

Think about the grief you’ve experienced in your life. What are some of the ways people were helpful – through both words and actions? What was not helpful for you? What did you need that your friends and family did not or could not provide?

What are some ways you think you can help a person experiencing grief and/or loss?

What have you learned from others’ experiences with grief that might help you support someone experiencing grief in the future?

DEPRESSION

“Facing Our Fears” Episode

Depression is a mental illness, not a choice—it’s a complicated condition that affects a person’s mood, ability to perform work or other functions, and physical health. Any one of us can be genetically wired to be more likely to experience depression, and it can strike at any time in our lives. But like other illnesses, it is treatable with therapy or medication, and often both, although what works is different for each person. Depression is not just ordinary sadness experienced by all of us at some points in our lives, but a persistent condition that impacts many aspects of a person’s life. Some research shows that chronic exposure to stress can be linked with depression—and this becomes a continuous cycle since the brain may become more vulnerable to stress over time. Catching depression in its early stages may be a promising strategy for intervention.

TAKING ACTION:

Discover the power of peer support. Quickly find a support group chapter in your area by visiting the This Emotional Life Web site at www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife.

You can also learn more about helping those in your area from the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA): www.dbsalliance.org.

Have you experienced depression in your life? What did you do to cope? What would you do differently if facing a similar challenge in the future? How would you direct others in your life to cope or seek help?

In your own life, does knowing about other family members with depression or mental illness help if you are experiencing something that you suspect might be depression?

Or does it feel like a kind of a pre-determination that you, too, will face depression? Does this knowledge encourage you to be more vigilant and maybe even more likely to seek professional help?

Many well-known actors and writers in the series talk about their battles with depression and other emotional issues. What impact—if any—does it have on you when you hear about famous people struggling with depression, addiction, or other emotional problems?

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER—PTSD

“Facing Our Fears” Episode

After experiencing a traumatic event, it is natural to feel distress and upsetting feelings. In many cases, the lingering emotional effects go away after a few months, but when they persist for many months and cause difficulties in many aspects of life—from work to sleep to interactions with others—it is symptomatic of posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Common situations that can lead to PTSD include witnessing or experiencing terrible injury or danger to a loved one, as well as rape, assault, and war. Dealing with PTSD can be especially difficult for those who experience it, not only because of the emotions themselves, but because of the very nature of what caused the emotional trauma in the first place; recovery often means thinking about and re-living these terrible experiences.

TAKING ACTION:

Since 2001, the United States has deployed 1.5 million troops to Iraq and Afghanistan. Long separations, repeat deployments, and high operational tempo have made these current wars particularly stressful to service members, and many come home dealing with PTSD.

Military families can use your help. Contact Blue Star Families to be a part of our community’s “reintegration support” network for both returning soldiers and military families: www.bluestarfam.org.

Have you ever experienced a traumatic event that led to anxiety, fear, depression, or sleeplessness? How did you deal with the situation? Did you know what it was?

What are some important things to do for a person you love—or yourself—if a traumatic experience has led to suspected PTSD?

An interesting new form of therapy for PTSD involves asking the sufferer to tell and re-tell the story of the traumatic experience. What do you think about this idea?

The Keys to Emotional Well-being: Resilience & Happiness

RESILIENCE

“Rethinking Happiness” Episode

Our emotional lives include events and experiences that may not be of our choosing—an unexpected family trauma or disability, an accident, an illness or event, or change of circumstances. Scientists who have studied incredible stories of resilience identify several key ingredients: hope and optimism, creativity, ability to solve problems, a moral compass, and a life mission and purpose. And some remarkable true stories show that a seemingly downhill path is not necessarily a final destiny—mental resilience can be an important tool to change a negative life circumstance. Some research suggests that resilience is a “psychological resource” made up of positive emotions like joy, hope, forgiveness, and gratitude—and a resource we can cultivate in our daily lives to make us stronger and lead us to find greater happiness.

Why is the idea of a “life purpose” important to resilience? What would you say is your “life purpose”—and do you think you are following it? If not, how does this impact your life?

Why are creativity and problem-solving important to building resiliency? Do you have a job or other outlet in which you are able to exercise some creativity—or mastery over solving problems? How does this affect your life?

What is the connection between resilience and happiness? What are some ways you might work on your own resiliency skills day by day? Identify some people in your life, community, or even people you hear about in the news, who demonstrate resiliency skills—and think and talk about the traits you think they demonstrate and share.

LIVING A MEANINGFUL LIFE

“Rethinking Happiness” Episode

According to the many scientists and real stories in the series, there is no one formula that determines a person’s happiness—although there are key elements that may pave the way. Crucial ingredients include healthy social attachments, the importance of positive thinking and emotions, living in the present moment, being creatively engaged, forgiveness, and resilience. And some research shows that happiness is a form of emotional health that needs daily attention and actions to build up our emotional strength, which is an important component of the foundation of happiness.

What control do you have over your own happiness? In what ways? What do you think about controlling negative thoughts and replacing with positive ones? Would this make an impact, and what are the challenges towards putting that idea to work in your own life?

If social connections and relationships are important keys to happiness, what changes can you consider in your own life in order to create more—or better—connections? What role does empathy play here?

Showing gratitude, having a mission or purpose in life, and altruism, or giving back to others through volunteering and other means, are all explored in the series as related to happiness. How can this apply in your own life?

www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife

Visit *This Emotional Life* online to:

Be inspired by short videos of real people's experiences

Be entertained by celebrities talking about their journeys with happiness

Connect with others dealing with emotional health issues

Find out where to get help for yourself and loved ones

Read blog postings from mental health experts

Explore subject areas addressed in the documentary:

Family, Friends & Lovers

Adolescence
Attachment
Bullying
Grief and Loss
Postpartum Mood Disorders
Intimate Relationships

Facing Our Fears

Addiction
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
Anger
Autism
Bipolar Disorder
Borderline Personality Disorder
Depression
Eating Disorders
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Stress and Anxiety

Rethinking Happiness

Altruism
Connecting with Others
Creativity and Flow
Forgiveness
Happiness
Humor
Meditation
Resilience



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