



## THREE GOOD THINGS

This strategy is suggested in the 11-14 BrainWaves lesson:

### The science behind wellbeing

#### About 'Three good things'

The 'Three good things' exercise is one of the most well-known positive psychology interventions. Devised by Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005, the exercise entails writing down three things that went well for you today (can be small, everyday events) and a reflection/ explanation of why they went well.

The exercise is essentially a reworking of 'counting your blessings'. It is believed that creating a regular gratitude routine can help your brain begin to notice and remember more of the good things that happen in your life. By repeating the exercise regularly, the brain is rewired to scan for positives first.

#### The scientific evidence behind 'Three good things'

In a study by Seligman et al (2005), participants were asked to write down three good things that happened to them each day, for one week. The results showed that this daily activity for adults had a significant impact on reported levels of wellbeing and depression. Moreover, for participants who continued the exercise beyond the suggested one week, it was found that the activity increased happiness and decreased symptoms of depression for up to six months of follow-up.

- Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). [Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions](#). *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410–421. DOI: 10.1037/0003-066X.60.5.410

Similar studies have found that using the 'Three good things' strategy for a week led to lasting increases in happiness in adults:

- Mongrain, M., & Anselmo-Matthews, T. (2012). [Do positive psychology exercises work? A replication of Seligman et al. \(2005\)](#). *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 68(4), 382–389. DOI: 10.1002/jclp.21839

The research into the impact of this strategy for adolescents is however less conclusive.

In a study on 221 young people aged 11-13 years in 2008, Froh et al. stated "*Counting blessings seem to be an interactive intervention for wellbeing enhancement in early*



adolescents”. The study showed that counting blessings was associated with enhanced gratitude, life satisfaction, decreased negative affect and increased satisfaction with their school experience.

- Jeffrey J. Froh et al. (2008) [Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being](#). Journal of School Psychology, Volume 46, Issue 2, 2008, Pages 213-233, DOI: 10.1016/j.jsp.2007.03.005.

However a meta-analysis of intervention outcomes conducted by Renshaw & Olinger Steeves in 2018 indicated that gratitude-based interventions are, as a whole, “*generally ineffective*” and that much more intervention research is warranted into this area.

- Renshaw, T. L., & Olinger Steeves, R. M. (2016). [What good is gratitude in youth and schools? A systematic review and meta-analysis of correlates and intervention outcomes](#). Psychology in the schools, 53(3), 286–305.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21903>

Importantly, frequency of the exercise may have an impact. One study found that students who counted blessings once a week reported greater improvements in wellbeing than those who counted blessings three days a week. In fact, the students who counted blessings three times a week actually experienced a decrease in their wellbeing.

- Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). [Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change](#). Review of General Psychology, 9(2), 111–131.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111>

This may suggest that counting blessings less frequently makes the activity more meaningful and sustainable over the long-term—perhaps because, as the researchers speculate, one becomes numb to the novelty and benefits of counting one’s blessings if it’s performed more frequently.

### Further reading

The Science of Gratitude:

[https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF\\_White\\_Paper-Gratitude-FINAL.pdf](https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/GGSC-JTF_White_Paper-Gratitude-FINAL.pdf)

Try identifying ‘Three Good Things’ each evening to boost happiness:

<https://www.uchealth.org/today/identify-three-good-things-daily-to-boost-happiness/>