Cultivating Hope & Optimism In Treatment

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Goal & Objectives

• **Hope/Optimism**
  • Understand the role of positive emotions in promoting health and wellness
  • Learn features of optimism and pessimism that may be amenable to intervention
  • Be able to explore the value of different methods for enhancing optimism in your practice
Positive Psychology
Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000)

• Focus on human strengths and potentials instead of on problems and remedies
• “The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (p.5).
Positive Psychology
(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

• At the subjective level involves studying:
  • Well-being, Contentment, & Satisfaction (past)
  • **Hope & Optimism** (future)
  • Flow & Happiness (present)
Positive emotions

- More than the absence of negative emotions
- Joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love

- Emotions trigger “specific action-tendencies”  (Frigda, 1986)
Optimism is grounded in the connection between mind and body; and all the sensations, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors therein.
My thought...

Diet coke...

My Body’s Response: Mmmm, mouth-watering deliciousness
My Feeling: Pleasure
My thought…

Tobacco spit…

My body’s response: Yuck! I recoil.
My feeling…disgust!
Optimism
(confidence)

  “A mood or attitude associated with an expectation about the social or material future—one which the evaluator deems as socially desirable, to his [or her] advantage or pleasure” (p. 18).

Pessimism
(doubt)

- Webster’s Dictionary
  “An inclination to emphasize adverse aspects, conditions, and possibilities or to expect the worst possible outcome.”

Realistic Optimism
(Peterson, 2000; Schneider, 2002)

- Optimism as “positive illusion,” NOT delusion (Taylor, 1989)
  - People tend to view themselves positively (unless anxious or depressed)
  - Illusions responsive to reality; delusions are not
- Optimism as “biology of hope” (Tiger, 1979)
  - An integral part of human nature
  - Developed along with our cognitive capacities
  - An “evolved psychological mechanism” with evolutionary value (Buss, 1991)
    - Easy to think; easy to learn; easy to teach
Dispositional Optimism: An Individual Difference

• “The global expectation that good things will be plentiful in the future and bad things scarce” (Carver & Scheier, 1981)

• When faced with impediments to goals, optimists persist and pessimists give up.
Higher Dispositional Optimism Associated with  
(Carver et al., 2009)

1. Lower rates of postpartum depression
2. Greater postsurgical satisfaction after coronary bypass surgery  
   a) Higher quality of life even 5 months later
3. Lower distress and greater resilience for breast, and head and neck, cancer patients
4. Lower depression and greater well-being among Alzheimer patient caregivers
5. Pessimism predicted distress for people receiving negative notifications for in vitro fertilization (optimism not a predictor)
Coping with Illness
(Carver et al., 2009)

- Optimists
  - Less fatalism, self-blame, & escapism
  - Accepting reality (cancer dx)
  - Viewing dx in positive light
  - Use humor

- Pessimists
  - Use cognitive avoidance to cope
  - Fewer problem-focused coping strategies
  - Denial and mental disengagement to cope
  - Resignation hastens death
Measuring Optimism

- Life Orientation Test-Revised
- Multicultural Issues (Carver et al., 2009)
  - Mixed results
  - “Optimism and pessimism seem to relate to life outcomes in same general way across cultures” (Chang, 2002 as cited by Carver et al., 2009)
- More research needed
Optimistic and Pessimistic Explanatory Styles (Hirsch, et al., 2009; Seligman, 2002)

Tendency to make attributions about prior negative events:

• **OPTIMISTIC-External, specific, & transient:**
  - **External**
    - “We had a crisis in the clinic so I couldn’t get the case notes read.”
    - “There are too many emails!”
  - **Specific**
    - “Professor Zetzer is unfair.”
    - “This presentation is useless.”
  - **Transient**
    - “Diets don’t work when you eat out.”
    - “You haven’t talked to me lately.”

• **PESSIMISTIC-Internal, global, & stable:**
  - **Internal**
    - “I am disorganized.”
    - “I have no self-control with email!”
  - **Global**
    - “All professors are unfair.”
    - “Presentations are useless.”
  - **Stable**
    - “Diets never work.”
    - “You never talk to me.”
Explanatory Style for +/- Events
Influenced by Attributions of:
(Seligman, 2002)

- **Permanence**
  - Pessimistic:
    - Bad events have permanent causes
      - “I always/I never” and abiding traits
    - Good events have temporary causes
      - Mood, luck, or effort
  - Optimistic:
    - Bad events have temporary causes
      - “I sometimes/lately I…” or ephemera
    - Good events have permanent causes
      - Traits/abilities/talents
Explanatory Style for +/- Events Influenced by Attributions of: (Seligman, 2002)

- **Pervasiveness**
  - Pessimistic style leads to helplessness across multiple domains:
    - Bad events caused by pervasive factors
    - Good events caused by specific factors
  - Optimistic leads to resilience; helplessness limited to one domain:
    - Good events enhance all activities
    - Bad events constrained to one part of their lives
Optimistic Explanatory Style Associated with:

- Good health and longevity
- Effective problem solving
- Decreased depression
- Faster recovery from depression
- Less suicidal ideation compared to pessimistic explanatory style

(Hirsch, et al., 2009)
Increasing Optimism & Hope
(Seligman, 2002; Snyder, 2000)

- **To Build Optimism**
  - Distance self from past negative outcome
  - Recognize and dispute pessimistic thoughts

- **To Build Hope**
  - Concentrate on reaching desired future positive goal-related outcomes
Building Optimism
(Seligman, 2002)

- Recognize pessimistic thought
- ABCDE
  - Adversity (activating event)
  - Beliefs (automatic)
  - Consequences (of belief)
  - Disputation (of routine belief)
  - Energization (successful disputation!)
Techniques

• Search for evidence
  • What evidence do you have for that belief?

• Alternative explanations
  • Scan for all possible causes, especially those that are:
    • Changeable, specific, nonpersonal
Techniques

- Implications - decharacterize
  - Ask, “What are the implications?”
  - How likely is the worst-case scenario?

- Usefulness
  - Detail all the ways you can change the situation in the future
  - Even if the belief is true now, is the situation changeable?

- Keep a disputation record
Pandora’s Box

(Snyder, 2000)

- Prometheus stole fire from gods
  - Zeus sent a maiden with a dowry jar—Pandora
  - She was given strict instructions not to open the jar
  - Curiosity led her to open the jar—out came plague of gout, colic, spite, envy, revenge. She slammed the lid shut—only hope remained.

- Hope gotten a bad rap from Sophocles, Nietzsche, Plato, Euripides, Francis Bacon, Benjamin Franklin:
  - “He that lives on hope will die fasting”
“Deep within the core of hope is the **belief** that things can change. No matter how awful or uncertain they are at the moment, things can turn out better. **Possibilities exist.** Hope sustains you. It keeps you from collapsing into despair. It **motivates** you to **tap into your own capabilities** and inventiveness to turn things around. It **inspires you to plan** for a better **future.**”
Hope Theory
(Rand & Cheavens, 2009; Snyder, 1994)

• “The perceived ability to produce pathways to achieve desired goals and to motivate oneself to use those pathways” (R&C, p. 323)

• “The overall perception that one’s goals can be met” (Snyder, 2000)

You Need:
• Goal-Oriented Thoughts
• Pathways to Achievement
• Agency Thoughts
Hope
Thoughts
Pathways
(developmental lessons of correlation or causality)

Agency
(developmental lessons of self as author of causal chains of events)

Emotion
Set
Outcome
Value
Agency
Thoughts
Pathways
Thoughts
Stressor
Goal
Attainment
or Non-
Attainment

Emotions

Learning History
Preevent
Event Sequence

Surprise Event
Benefits of Hope
(Snyder, 2000)

- Higher hope associated with
  - Higher standardized achievement test scores but not intelligence tests
  - Higher GPAs
  - Better athletic performance
  - More positive comments about yourself
    - Low on hope have more negative comments about self
- Feel challenged by goals
  - Lower on hope defeated/demoralized
Benefits of Hope
(Snyder, 2000)

• Higher feelings of self-worth
• Better coping skills
• Higher levels of pain tolerance
• Better adjustment to spinal cord injury and adolescent burn injuries; fewer harmful recovery behaviors; less depression
• Less perceived pain and greater endurance for pain (cold-presser test; Snyder, 2000)
• For cancer patients, better coping w/ disease
Measuring (Trait) Hope
(Snyder, 2000; Snyder et al., 1991; 1995)

• Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991)
• Total Hope Score ranges from 8 to 64
• Average score for college students is 48
• Psychotherapy clients and vets with PTSD have lower scores
• Two factors
  • Pathways and Agency
• High vs low Hope Scorers
  • Maintain motivation when goals blocked
  • Set more difficult goals and meet them
  • Perceive goals as positive challenges
• Scores predict coping, well-being, psychological health
Interviewing for Hope
(Lopez et al., 2000)

- General
  - When you experience difficulty reaching a goal do you think it is because you have used the wrong strategy or because you lack the talent or ability?
- Goal Queries
  - How do you go about setting goals?
- Agency Queries
  - On a scale of 1 to 10, how motivated are you to work towards your desired outcome?
- Pathway Queries
  - If the original pathway to your goal doesn’t work, how easy it is for you to make other plans to reach the same goal?
- Barriers Queries
  - When you are faced with a difficult problem, how do you react?
Hope Therapy
I think I can—I think I can—I think I can—I think I can.”

Up, up, up. Faster and faster and faster and faster the little engine climbed, until at last they reached the top of the mountain.

Down in the valley lay the city.
The Little Engine that Could

“I thought I could. I thought I could. I thought I could.
I thought I could.
I thought I could.”
Plan an Experiment
Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul.
And sings the tune
Without the words,
and never stops at all.

*Emily Dickinson*
US poet (1830 - 1886)
More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.

Woody Allen, My Speech to the Graduates
US movie actor, comedian, & director (1935 - )

Optimist? I think not!