

**GG** Greater Good  
**SC** Science Center

Emiliana  
Simon-Thomas, PhD  
Science Director  
Greater Good

# How scientists define happiness

An overarching characteristic of typical feelings and thoughts about life, i.e. subjective well-being

“...the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”

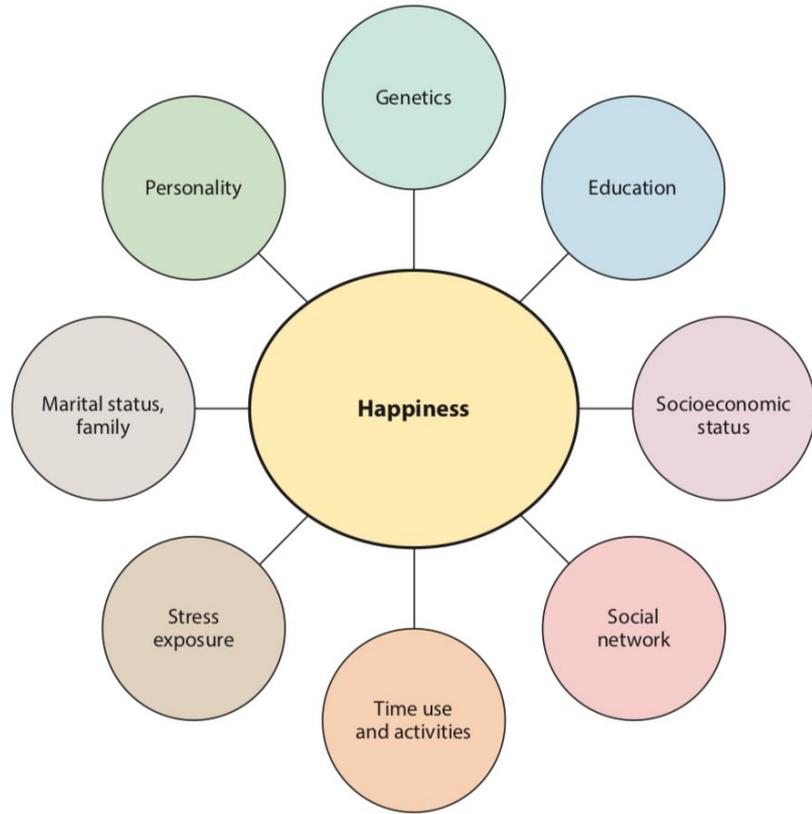
(Lyubomirsky, 2007)

# Happiness is not:

- A fixed trait that we're born with, or without
- A momentary feeling or emotion, e.g. pleasure, amusement, enthusiasm, cheerfulness – nor a constant string of them
- A consequence of acquiring desirable possessions, being entertained, earning status, power or fame, or accomplishing a list of goals.

**Social  
interaction  
plays a role in  
all  
happiness-con  
tributing  
factors.**

(Step toe, 2019)



**Figure 1**

Summary of factors contributing to happiness.

# Social connection promotes mental health

(McWilliams, 2010)

Table 2

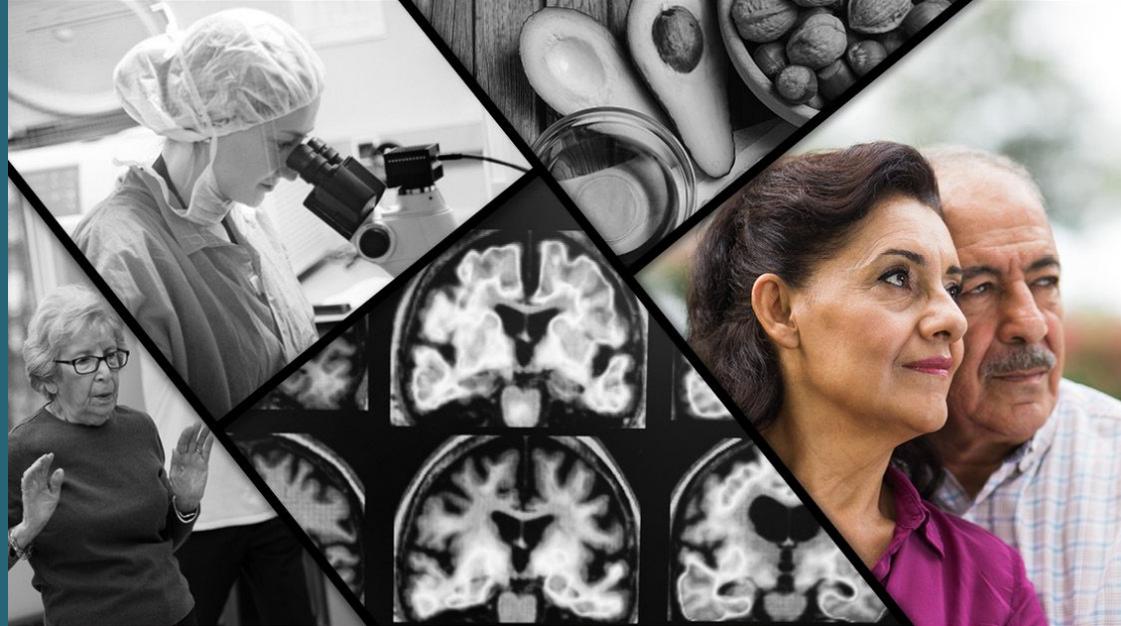
*Associations (Odds Ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals) Between Attachment Ratings and Three Types of Lifetime Psychiatric Disorders*

Attachment ratings	Type of psychiatric disorder		
	Depressive	Anxiety	Alcohol and substance
Secure	0.86 [0.80–0.93]	0.80 [0.74–0.86]	0.82 [0.74–0.91]
Avoidant	1.48 [1.38–1.58]	1.68 [1.56–1.81]	1.51 [1.41–1.63]
Anxious	1.49 [1.33–1.66]	1.67 [1.49–1.88]	1.54 [1.41–1.68]

*Note.* All odds ratios were significant at  $p < .001$ .

# Social connection begets happiness

*“When the study began, nobody cared about empathy or attachment. But the key to healthy aging is relationships, relationships, relationships.”*



(HSAD, George Valliant, Robert Waldinger)

# How Covid-19 is harming social connection

- Prevailing uncertainty provokes anxiety and worry, which makes us feel less trusting, capable, generous or outgoing
- Shelter-in-place and distancing mandates prevent typical community contact and friendly incidental interaction
- Videoconference contact is not as 'natural' (e.g. stilted, self-conscious), or fulfilling (lacks synchrony)
- Co-quarantining, home-schooling, exaggerated inequality (Who is essential? Who has access?) are interpersonally challenging



# Connecting in the midst of Covid-19

- Prioritize Together Time (e.g. phone, video)
- Capitalize on Positive Events, Actively Listen, Express Gratitude\*
- Small Talk

co-quarantined →

1. Describe **what the person did** that you are thanking them for.
2. **Acknowledge the effort** that went into what they did to benefit you; what did they invest or forego?
3. Explain how the person's actions **benefitted you**.



## Gift of Time

Spend quality time with people you care about.



## Capitalizing on Positive Events

Use good news to strengthen your bonds with friends or family.



## Small Talk

Strike up a brief conversation with a stranger to feel happier



Greater Good  
Science Center

Berkeley  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

# Connecting in the midst of Covid-19

- Random Acts of Kindness (e.g. order/shop/deliver supplies, send photos/letters/art, donate/support local businesses)
- Extend Compassion, Offer Consolation (including meditation)
- Address and Resolve Conflict



## Loving-Kindness Meditation

Strengthen feelings of kindness and connection toward others.



## Letting Go of Anger Through Compassion

To foster resilience, think about a hurtful event in a different way.



## Making an Effective Apology

A good apology involves more than saying "sorry."



## Nine Steps to Forgiveness

A research-backed process for letting go of a grudge.



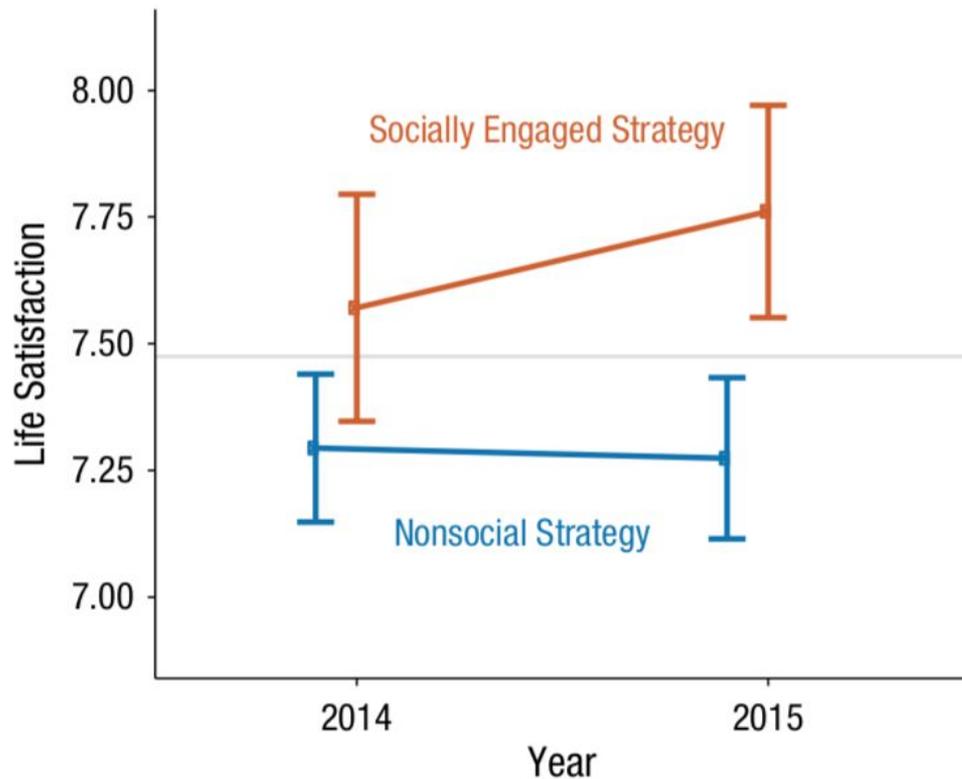
Greater Good  
Science Center

Berkeley  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

# Social connection practices work

(Rohrer, 2018)

b



# Core Insights from The Science of Happiness

1. Knowing about, and investing intention and effort into social connection practices increases happiness.
2. Research-backed social connection practices are freely available, and can be adapted and deployed during Covid-19.
3. While often simple, reaping the benefits of social connection practices to happiness - like any other learning - involves continued investment and practice.