

Recording script E5: Happiness

- Amy: Hey, Matt, are you coming out tonight?
- Matt: I'd love to, Amy, thanks, but I've got too much work. I need to get this psychology assignment in by Thursday.
- Amy: Oh, what's it on?
- Matt: Happiness, or specifically, the things that make people happy.
- Amy: Wow, that's a big area. How are you approaching it?
- Matt: Well, I've been looking on the Internet to see what various experts have to say on the subject.
- Amy: Did you find anything interesting?
- Matt: Well, yes, I did.
- Amy: Like?
- Matt: Like, for example, there's a professor at Nottingham University, a guy called Richard Tunney, and he suggests that the more close friends we have, the happier we are. And if you see these friends regularly, go out with them and so on, well, that's even better.
- Amy: I'd have thought that was fairly obvious.
- Matt: I guess so. The next one is a bit more interesting, though. Martin Seligman, a professor of psychology at an American university, conducted a happiness experiment with his students.
- Amy: What did he do? Give everyone huge amounts of cash and then see how much they smiled? That would help, wouldn't it?
- Matt: Well, perhaps it would. For a short while, anyway. No, what he did was tell half his students to take part in fun activities, like play video games or going to the cinema, and the other half to do good things.
- Amy: Good things?

- Matt: You know, like visiting elderly people at a care home, or some other kind of voluntary work. And it was those students who reported a more lasting feeling of happiness.
- Amy: That's interesting.
- Matt: Then there's George Vaillant, a psychiatrist and professor at Harvard Medical School. He's spent the past 60 years studying people.
- Amy: So, I guess he probably knows a bit about them.
- Matt: He certainly does. According to him, the thing that really makes people happy is having something to aim for, you know, a goal in the future.
- Amy: Right, so I can say 'By the time I'm 30, I'm going to be a millionaire,' and that will make me happy.
- Matt: Ah, but Vaillant has a warning here. You need to be realistic. It's no setting yourself impossible goals, because, well ...
- Amy: Because you'll only make yourself unhappy trying to achieve them.
- Matt: Exactly.
- Amy: So, does anyone mention anything that people normally assume brings happiness? Like a healthy bank account, or an expensive house, something more, er, material?
- Matt: Funnily enough, those things aren't mentioned much. Here's another interesting one, though. Melanie Hodgson, she's a professor at Westbrook University, claims that people are happier when they're getting ready to go on holiday.
- Amy: Oh, I love that. Sitting on a beach, relaxing, sightseeing...
- Matt: No, not the actual holiday itself, which professor Hodgson says can sometimes be quite stressful...
- Amy: That's true, they can.
- Matt: ... but the things you do leading up to it. Deciding what you're going to take with you, what you're going to see and do, packing your case, that kind of thing.

Amy: I get it. Yes, I can see how that would work.

Matt: I've also found one of those personality tests on the Internet. You know, answer these questions to find out how happy you are.

Amy: Oh, those. They're a bit of waste of time, aren't they? I did one on 'How healthy are you?' and the results were completely wrong.

Matt: But they're quite good fun though, aren't they?

Amy: Well, yes, especially if you do them with friends. I think it's important that you shouldn't take them seriously, though.

Matt: That's true.

Amy: Anyway, why should I do a test that tells me how happy or healthy or successful I am? I mean, I already know the answers, don't I? So, I'm not likely to get any surprises, like, oh, according to this test I'm happy — I didn't expect that!

Matt: OK, I take your point. So what makes you happy?

Amy: Oh, I don't know. Spending time with people I know and like, I guess. I need people around me.

Matt: Me too. But I need time on my own, as well.

Amy: That doesn't really bother me. I grew up in a big family, so I'm used to someone always being in the room. If I wanted to be alone, to get away from people, I had to go out for a walk or something. I still do that occasionally. In fact, that's one thing that makes me happy — a long walk in the countryside. And the advantage is that you're getting some exercise too, which is something I don't usually do.

Matt: But you go running, don't you?

Amy: Sometimes, but only because I feel I have to. Anyway, back to your assignment. You've got all the information you need ...

Matt: Not quite. I need to do a bit more research first.

Amy: OK, so you'll be off to the library, then?

- Matt: I would if I knew I could find something useful, but you know how disorganized it is there. It's impossible to find that what you want, especially when it comes to psychology books.
- Amy: Oh, I know.
- Matt: No, give me a computer and the Internet any day.
- Amy: Well, good luck with that. If you get bored and want a break, you know where to find me.
- Matt: Thanks, but if you don't get this done, I'll be in trouble.
- Amy: Why don't you email Tony? He did a similar assignment last year, so he might have a few suggestions.
- Matt: That's a good idea. Have you got his email address?
- Amy: Sure, give me a moment while I look it up.
- Matt: Thanks.