



Positive Relationships

Instructor Manual

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This module covers information related to interpersonal relationships and draws from the positive psychology research specific to relationships. Ultimately, this module could help students create healthier relationships, by teaching them about positive relationship deposits and how to increase them in a relationship. In addition to discussion questions and activities, there are many practical applications based on the information covered in this module. This instructor's manual and accompanying PowerPoint presentation highlight relevant applications for students' own relationships.

Learning Objectives

- **Relevant APA Learning Objectives (Version 2.0)**
 - Describe key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology (1.1).
 - Develop a working knowledge of psychology's content domains (1.2).
 - Describe applications of psychology (1.3).
 - Engage in innovative and integrative thinking and problem solving (2.3).
- **Content Specific Learning Objectives**
 - Understand some of the challenges that plague close relationships today.
 - Become familiar with the concept of positive emotional deposits.
 - Review some of the research relevant to positive emotional deposits.
 - Describe several ways people make positive emotional deposits.

Abstract

Most research in the realm of relationships has examined that which can go wrong in relationships (e.g., conflict, infidelity, intimate partner violence). I summarize much of what has been examined about what goes right in a relationship and call these positive relationship deposits. Some research indicates that relationships need five positive interactions for every negative interaction. Active-constructive responding, gratitude, forgiveness, and time spent together are some sources of positive deposits in one's relational bank account. These kinds of deposits can reduce the negative effects of conflict on marriage and strengthen relationships.

Class Design Recommendations

This module can be taught in two (50-75 minute) class periods or in one pared-down (50-75 minute) class period. The Noba PowerPoint is structured for the two-class version of the material, with activities and videos throughout. For the topics below, refer to the Noba PowerPoint presentation.

An Example of a Two-Class Period Lesson

1st Period (50-75 min)

- Introduction
 - Overview
 - The importance of positive relationships
 - Warmup activity
- Positive Relationship Deposits
 - Accumulated positive deposits
 - Conflict management
- The Magic Formula

- Opportunities for Positive Deposits
 - Capitalization and Active-constructive responding
 - Capitalization and active-constructive responding activity
- Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT)
 - One-minute paper

2nd Period (50—75 min)

- Results of one-minute paper
- Opportunities for Positive Deposits
 - Gratitude
 - Gratitude letter activity
 - Video
 - Forgiveness
 - Video
 - Spending Time in Meaningful Ways
- Conclusion
- Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT)
 - Chain letter activity

An Example of a One-Class Period Lesson (50-75 min)

- Introduction

- Overview
- The importance of positive relationships
- Positive Relationship Deposits
 - Accumulated positive deposits
 - Conflict management
- The Magic Formula
- Opportunities for Positive Deposits
 - Capitalization and Active-constructive responding
 - Gratitude
 - Forgiveness
 - Video
 - Spending Time in Meaningful Ways
- Conclusion
- Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT)
 - One-minute paper

Module Outline

- **Introduction:** With so many marriages ending in divorce, high rates of infidelity in relationships, and friends sometimes acting disloyal, how can we expect to establish and maintain positive relationships? This module highlights research that may help individuals in their personal relationships.
- **The Magic Formula (or magic ratio):** Is there a magic formula for happy relationships? Some research has found that happier couples have 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction. So, the “magic formula” may be 5:1.

- **Positive Relationship Deposits:** Negative events have more impact on us than positive events, and we can count on negative events happening occasionally. So, how can we increase our positive interactions to counteract those negative feelings? Using the metaphor of a bank account, consider making regular positive *deposits* to help buffer the negative parts of relationships.
- **Common Opportunities for Daily Positive Deposits:** The module describes how to create more positive relationship deposits with capitalization and active-constructive responding, gratitude, forgiveness, and spending time together in meaningful ways.
 - Building Intimacy Through Capitalization and Active-Constructive Responding
 - This section discusses how to build intimacy through capitalization and active-constructive responding. Intimacy is a close bond with another person. **Capitalization** is when you seek out someone to share good news with. **Active-constructive responding** is when that person responds positively—being authentic, enthusiastic, and supportive. Capitalization and active-constructive responding are related to more positive relationships.
 - *Figure 1* in the module illustrates 4 different types of responding. The most socially beneficial response is active and constructive responding that is enthusiastic and supportive. Passive and constructive is understated support. Active and destructive responding is pointing out the negative. Passive and destructive responding is ignoring the event.
- **Gratitude:** Expressing gratitude to your relationship partner is a good way to build up positive relationship deposits.
- **Forgiveness:** Forgiving your partner is a way to increase commitment and relationship satisfaction.
- **Spending Time in Meaningful Ways**
 - Spending time with your partner can be a way to build up positive relationship deposits. Further, doing novel, interesting activities with each other is more helpful for your relationship than doing routine activities.
 - The self-expansion model states that we want to expand our sense of self; our intimate relationships are a way to do that. Further, doing novel, interesting things helps expand ourselves.

- **Accumulated Positive Deposits and Conflict Management:** Having positive interactions with your partner can help buffer the negative effects of conflict.

Difficult Terms

Accumulated positive deposits

Active-constructive responding

Capitalization

Positive deposits

Self-expansion model

Lecture Frameworks

Overview: This material can be presented with a combination of direct instruction, videos, and activities. The suggested warmup activity gets students to focus on how important our interpersonal relationships are to us. Two activities help students practice ways to increase positive interactions in their relationships. Two short videos help students further understand the material. In addition, there are a few suggestions for ways students can practically apply this information to their own lives, as well as a concluding activity that has students develop a plan to help improve their relationships. Students will likely find this information interesting and helpful.

- **Introduction and Warmup:** One way to start discussing this module is to highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships in our lives and the benefits we get from our close relationships, especially when they are positive. Have students answer these two questions: (1) What do relationships add to our lives? and (2) How do you establish and maintain positive relationships in your life? The Noba PowerPoint helps guide you through a speed-dating activity to get students to generate answers to these questions.
- **Positive Relationship Deposits and the “Magic” Formula:** Using the metaphor of a bank account, you can discuss how positive relationship deposits are important in relationships, buffering the negative effects of conflict. The idea is to put more “deposits” (i.e., positive experiences) in your relationship bank account than you have withdrawals (i.e., negative experiences). The module suggests that the ideal ratio of positive to negative events in a relationship is 5:1. This makes sense, as negative events are more psychologically impactful

than positive events, an effect known as the negativity bias. People in unhappy marriages tend to have more negative than positive interactions, and people in the happiest marriages have an 8:1 ratio (see Fitness & Williams, 2013 for a review).

- **Opportunities for Positive Deposits:** The module discusses 4 ways to increase our positive relationship deposits: (1) capitalization and active-constructive responding, (2) gratitude, (3) forgiveness, and (4) spending time in meaningful ways. Present this material with a combination of direct instruction, videos, and activities.
 - *Capitalization and active-constructive responding:* Present the material with direct instruction, and then follow up with an activity (described in the Activities/Demonstrations below) that pairs students up and has them practice both capitalization and active-constructive responding. Conclude this section with a discussion of ways for students to apply these techniques to their own lives with the suggestion they share positive events daily and engage in active-constructive responding.
 - *Gratitude:* This material can be presented with a bit of direct instruction, an activity, and a video. The activity (described below in Activities/Demonstrations) has students rate themselves on the Satisfaction With Life Scale before and after writing a gratitude letter. The video discusses the gratitude letter, and has examples of people who have written them, as well as data showing how writing the letter increases positive emotions, especially if the writer reads the letter to the recipient.
 - *Forgiveness:* This material can be presented with direct instruction and a video. The video discusses forgiveness and its relationship to happiness. Conclude this section with the suggestion that students apply the information to their own life by writing a forgiveness letter.
 - *Spending time in meaningful ways:* This topic can be presented via direct instruction. Conclude the section with the practical advice that students do novel, interesting activities with their friends and partners.
- **Wrap-Up—Application Plan:** Conclude the material by having students come up with an application plan (see Activities/Demonstrations below). This activity encourages students to come up with a specific application and implementation plan. They are encouraged to pick the relationship, the actions they will choose, and why it is important to do so. This will also serve as a review of the information covered.
- **Conclusion:** This is a good time to refer back to the Warmup Activity. Note some students' responses to the "What do relationships add to our lives?" question (if you can remember them), and emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships in our lives, as well as the importance of positive interactions within our relationships.

- **CAT (Day 1)—One-minute Paper:** It is helpful to end a class with a classroom assessment technique (CAT). This CAT is a one-minute writing exercise that asks students, “What was the most important thing you learned during this class?” and “What important question remains unanswered?” Review their responses after class, and answer questions at the beginning of the next class period. For more information on CATs click here: <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/>
- **CAT (Day 2)—Chain Letter**
 - It is helpful to end a class with a classroom assessment technique (CAT). This version of the chain letter activity has students answer questions in groups, and then add to other groups’ answers.
 - This activity requires that you provide large envelopes for students with questions written on them. If you have a large class, you can use multiple envelopes with the same questions on them. Questions might include:
 - “Please list two concrete, specific things you can do to increase positive relationship deposits in a romantic relationship.” Each group should add two suggestions of their own.
 - “Please list two concrete, specific things you can do to increase positive relationship deposits in your relationship with a parent.” Each group should add two suggestions of their own.
 - “What is active-constructive responding? Give an example.” Have each group clearly explain the concept and give one concrete example of how to display active-constructive responding.
 - “What is capitalization? Give an example.” Have each group clearly explain the concept and give an example. Each group should generate a different example.
 - “What are accumulated positive deposits?” Have each group clearly explain the concept.
 - Break students up into groups, based on the number of students in the class and the number of envelopes you have. Groups of 2-4 are ideal.
 - Instructions to students:
 - Answer the question on the envelope you receive. Put your group’s answer into the envelope. Don’t put your names on your answers.
 - When you get the next envelope, talk about how you would answer the question.

Then, read the previous group's answer. Discuss their answer. Add any additional information you think is necessary.

- Depending on time, you can go through the answers in class or after class. If you go through the answers after class, be sure to report back at the beginning of the next class.

Activities & Demonstrations

Capitalization and Active-constructive Responding Activity: Rationale: Sharing good news with someone has been associated with greater well-being and positive emotions, above and beyond the effect of the good news itself (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), and individuals were happier on days when they shared the most positive parts of their day with their romantic partners (Hicks & Diamond, 2008). In addition, active-constructive responding is the best type of response to hearing good news. This activity helps students practice both parts of capitalization and active-constructive responding. The Three Good Things part of the activity has been shown to increase positive emotions and happiness when individuals recount 3 good things from the day, each evening, for a specified period of time (see Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

- Time: 10 – 15 minutes.
- Materials: Noba PowerPoint question prompts.
- Directions:
 1. Have students get into pairs.
 2. Have each student share three good things from the last 24 hours.
 3. Have students respond to their partners' positive news with active-constructive responding.
 4. Discuss how the activity went. Focusing on what types of things they did and might do additionally to display active-constructive responding might be helpful.

The Gratitude Letter: Rationale: Writing a gratitude letter has been shown to increase happiness and positive emotions (see Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

- Time: 10-20 minutes.

- Materials: Students will need paper and a pen/pencil.
- Optional materials: Providing envelopes will make it more likely that students will actually mail their letter.
- Directions:
 1. Have students fill out the Satisfaction With Life Scale, which can be found at: <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>.
 - Please note that you need an account to access this website.
 - This is also included in the Noba PowerPoint slides.
 2. Students rate the following statements with a 7-point Likert-type scale, with endpoints of 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree.'
 - In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.
 - The conditions of my life are excellent.
 - I am completely satisfied with my life.
 - So far I have gotten the most important things I want in life.
 - If I could live my life over, I would change nothing.
 3. Have each student write a letter to someone, expressing gratitude to that person.
 4. Have students take the scale again. Discuss whether their ratings changed and how they feel after writing the letter.
 5. *Note:* Students do not necessarily need to deliver the letter, as some feel uncomfortable with this. You should make this option clear to students in the instructions, before they write the letter.

Wrap Up—Application Plan Activity: Rationale: This activity will guide students in creating a concrete plan to implement the information they have learned in this module. It will also serve as a review of the information.

- Time: 10-15 minutes.
- Materials: Noba PowerPoint question prompts; Students will need paper and a pen/pencil.
- Directions:
 1. Have students write an implementation and application plan, which outlines how they will

apply the information they've learned from this class period to a relationship in their life.

2. Questions for the students:

- Which relationship will you focus on?
 - Plans are more helpful when they are specific and concrete.
- What, specifically, will you do?
 - It may be helpful to discuss action triggers, which prompt people to act. So, a specific plan with an action trigger might be, "When I pack my daughter's lunch, I will put in a positive note." Packing the lunch is the trigger, with the inclusion of the note being the action. Another example might be: "When I come home from work, I will hug my wife and ask her about her day."
- Why do you think this is important?
 - This will help students think of motivations to engage in these actions, as well as help them connect the plan back to the material that has been covered.
- If you have time, you can have the students discuss their answers. There will likely be a diversity of answers.
- This activity could also work well as an assignment or project.

Additional Activities

Authentic Happiness website

- This website has many different questionnaires that students can take (as long as they sign up for an account on the website). Some examples include the Authentic Happiness Inventory, Close Relationships Questionnaire, Gratitude Survey, and Compassionate Love Scale. Students can take these questionnaires in class (if there are computers with internet access, or if you convert it to a paper-and-pencil measure) or out of class, and the assignment might be to reflect on their scores, as well as ways to improve their scores in the future.

- Link: <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/>

Bridges, K. R., Harnish, R. J., & Sillman, D. (2012). Teaching undergraduate positive psychology: An active learning approach using student blogs. *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 11, 228-237. doi:10.2304/plat.2012.11.2.228

- This article describes an assignment utilizing student blogs, but the activities in the article could be done with or without a blog assignment. The article describes three exercises: the three good things, signature strengths, and the gratitude letter exercises. Each of them has been shown to increase positive emotions (see also Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and they could be used as in class or out of class assignments.

Social Psychology Day of Compassion Assignment

- This is an out-of-class assignment. Students participate in a Day of Compassion, a 24-hour period when they strive to be as compassionate as possible. Students then write a one-page paper answering questions outlined on the website.
- Link: <http://www.socialpsychology.org/teach/compassion.htm>

Discussion Points

1. Could something happen in a relationship that is so negative it wipes out all of the positive relationship deposits? Why or why not?
 - This question goes further into the concept of positive relationship deposits, and it brings up the idea that positive deposits, while helpful, may have limits. You can point out the negativity bias (that negative events have more emotional impact than positive events) at this point.
2. How recent do you think the positive relationship deposits need to be? Could a person be very positive at the beginning of the relationship and then accrue fewer relationship deposits later?
 - This question explores positive relationship deposits more critically, and it brings up relationship length as a factor in relationship satisfaction.

Outside Resources

A Primer on Teaching Positive Psychology

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct03/primer.aspx>

An Experiment in Gratitude

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHv6vTKD6lg>

Positive Psychology Center

<http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/videolectures.htm>

Relationship Matters Podcast Series

http://spr.sagepub.com/site/podcast/podcast_dir.xhtml

Understanding Forgiveness

<http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/forgiveness/understanding-forgiveness>

Evidence-Based Teaching

Maybury, K. K. (2013). The influence of a positive psychology course on student well-being. *Teaching of Psychology, 40*, 62-65. doi:10.1177/0098628312465868

- Exercises based on positive psychology have been shown to increase happiness and positive emotion. This research article found that students improved in domains such as their sense of well-being, hope, self-actualization, and agency. This research supports teaching students positive psychology and positive psychology application exercises.

Links to ToPIX Materials

Songs

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/54339452/Song%20List>

Videos/Audio

<http://topix.teachpsych.org/w/page/19980988/Emotion%20Video>

Teaching Topics

Teaching The Most Important Course

https://nobaproject.com/documents/1_Teaching_The_Most_Important_Course.pdf

Content Coverage

https://nobaproject.com/documents/2_Content_Coverage.pdf

Motivating Students

https://nobaproject.com/documents/3_Motivating_Students_Tips.pdf

Engaging Large Classes

https://nobaproject.com/documents/4_Engaging_Large_Classes.pdf

Assessment Learning

https://nobaproject.com/documents/5_Assessment_Learning.pdf

Teaching Biological Psychology

https://nobaproject.com/documents/6_Teaching_Bio_Psych.pdf

PowerPoint Presentation

This module has an associated PowerPoint presentation. Download it at https://nobaproject.com//images/shared/supplement_editions/000/000/157/Positive%20Relationships.ppt?1475878299.

About Noba

The Diener Education Fund (DEF) is a non-profit organization founded with the mission of re-inventing higher education to serve the changing needs of students and professors. The initial focus of the DEF is on making information, especially of the type found in textbooks, widely available to people of all backgrounds. This mission is embodied in the Noba project.

Noba is an open and free online platform that provides high-quality, flexibly structured textbooks and educational materials. The goals of Noba are three-fold:

- To reduce financial burden on students by providing access to free educational content
- To provide instructors with a platform to customize educational content to better suit their curriculum
- To present material written by a collection of experts and authorities in the field

The Diener Education Fund is co-founded by Drs. Ed and Carol Diener. Ed is the Joseph Smiley Distinguished Professor of Psychology (Emeritus) at the University of Illinois. Carol Diener is the former director of the Mental Health Worker and the Juvenile Justice Programs at the University of Illinois. Both Ed and Carol are award-winning university teachers.

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