

**WHAT DO  
YOU NEED  
TO**  
**#MAKEITGOOD?**

# Insight Topic 8: **HAPPINESS**

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## INTRODUCTION

NHS Tayside and partners want to adopt a positive approach to young people's sexual health. An insight gathering project has engaged young people in discussion of what they need to make relationships good. The purpose of the insight process is to bring detail to consideration of future services, particularly the possible use of social marketing or broader communication messages targeting young people.

This paper is one of a number of topic chapters published at [www.makeitgoodtayside.org](http://www.makeitgoodtayside.org) Each topic chapter presents:

- Insight from young people.
- Insight from other research, resources or services.
- A summary and discussion points.

For more about the insight gathering process please refer to '**About the Insight Gathering project**' also published at [www.makeitgoodtayside.org](http://www.makeitgoodtayside.org)

## 1. INSIGHT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

In the initial focus groups, the topic of **HAPPINESS** was raised and discussed by 6 of the 16 groups. In terms of online engagement, responses to the **HAPPINESS** online survey came from 35 young people as follows:

Online engagement by Local Authority:

	Number of online submissions
Angus	5
Dundee	26
Perth and Kinross	4
Other area	-
Total by method	35

Online engagement by gender:

	Male	Female	Other gender identity
Number of participants	13	20	2

Online engagement by age:

	Under 16	16	17	18	19	20	21+
Number of participants	8	12	11	2	-	1	1

In addition to discussion in focus groups, young people completing the **HAPPINESS** survey provided a response to the request: *Tell us about your experience of happiness when it comes to sex or relationships*. Insight from young people points to several themes.

### **Happiness as wellbeing**

In its broadest sense young people view happiness as a good thing, a state of general wellbeing (including positive self-image) and a positive outlook on life. When asked *'tell us about your experience of happiness when it comes to sex or relationships'* young people commented as follows:

I think it's good to be happy. (16/Dundee/Female)

It feels good. (17/Dundee/Female)

Doing what you really enjoy and can look forward to. (17/Angus/Female)

You have to be happy to feel all the good things. You have to be happy to enjoy it. (17/Dundee/Female)

Don't worry be. (16/Dundee/Male)

Feeling fulfilled in what you do daily. (16/Dundee/Female)

Fulfilment in life. Being content with yourself. (17/Dundee/Female)

Having no worries, loving the life you live. (16/Dundee/Female)

Self-acceptance, embracing hobbies, positive environment. (17/Dundee/Female)

### **Happiness and relationships**

Being in a relationship was also viewed as having the potential to enhance this sense of wellbeing; particularly if both partners are happy. For some young people happiness is a 'must-have' in terms of relationships.

Having a partner could make you happy. (16/Dundee/Female)

You could feel happy in a relationship if they make you happy. (17/Dundee/Female)

When I feel a connection between myself and partner. (21+/Angus/Female)

When you are happy and feel comfortable in a relationship. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Needed, must have. (17/Angus/Female)

For a relationship to be successful everyone should be reasonably happy. (18/PK/Male)

Happiness then should be shared.

I am happy in a relationship when the girl makes me happy and I can make her happy. (16/PK/Male)

It's like, I've known people and their boyfriends or girlfriends really get them down, even though they really like them. Your relationships should make you feel good, should be positive, yeah you have to work at them, but they should work for you too. (Focus group 6/Dundee)

Not being happy in a relationship was seen as a poor prospect.

If unhappy, it'll go nowhere. (17/Dundee/Male)

If a relationship isn't happy then what's the point. If you find you are in a relationship and you are not happy, or you are waiting for the other person to dump you, you have to just make the decision and be honest with yourself. It's hard, like nobody wants to hear that stuff really, but if you aren't happy then what have you got to really lose? (Focus group 6/Dundee)

### **Liking someone**

In the focus group conversations young people also talked about happiness in terms of liking your partner and having things in common.

You have to like, in the first place, get along and enjoy being with each other, it can't just be that the person is like really fit, they have to have a personality too. (Focus group 6/Dundee)

*What do you need to make a relationship good?* To have things in common. Keep each other happy. (Focus group 13/Dundee)

### **Connecting happiness with other positive aspects of relationships**

The insight gathering has identified other positive relationship attributes, for some young people trust, honesty, caring and communication go hand-in hand with happiness.

For a good healthy relationship, you need happiness you need trust, honesty, and everything else. (20/PK/Male)

Love, someone you can trust and someone who can take care of you. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Lots of happiness. Healthy sexual relationship, if it is healthy you should be happy. Spread the happiness, talking to your partners, happy to share information, open conversations. (17/Angus/Other gender identity)

For this young person happiness was more important than 'love',

You may love each other in a relationship, but if one of you isn't happy, is love really enough? (18/PK/Female)

As explained in the **About the insight gathering project** chapter, in the later stages of the online engagement further materials in the form of posters with prompt statements were shared with youth work and College sector colleagues who were asked to facilitate some small group discussion with young people on specific topics of interest. One of the prompt questions was: *What makes a relationship healthy, happy and safe?* It was intended that these short facilitated discussions would also prompt young people to visit the dedicated site and encourage individual, anonymised responses. The reporting back from youth work agencies confirms the importance of happiness, and that as an intuitive idea it acts as a useful way in to reflect on valued characteristics of relationships. Thinking about *what makes a*

*relationship happy* comments recorded on the posters reflect many of the themes already identified:

Having a laugh. Knowing you can trust them. Doing fun things together.

Being kind. Complimenting each other.

Confident. Good friendships. Express yourself.

Quality time. Love. Trust. Understanding.

## **2. INSIGHT FROM RESEARCH, RESOURCES OR SERVICES**

The purpose of identifying insight from other sources is to help locate young people's perceptions and lived experience in a broader context, and where possible to provide further evidence to support the stress which young people have given to an issue, in this section regarding *happiness*.

In our insight gathering process young people have talked about happiness, but this intuitive idea would fit in professional terms into a broader discussion and understanding of mental health – particularly mental wellbeing. The World Health Organisation<sup>i</sup> defines **mental health** as "a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". As examples of **mental ill health** we might identify mental illness or symptoms which interfere with emotional, cognitive, or social function; this may include depression or anxiety. On the other hand, **mental wellbeing** might be experienced as a sense of control, having a purpose in life, a sense of belonging and positive relationships with others. The insight chapter *Stress + Mental Wellbeing* explores these issues further.

Happiness might also be considered to be the idea of **subjective wellbeing**, that is what people feel and report when they think of their own sense of wellbeing; this may also sometimes be considered as the broader idea of quality of life. In a UNICEF report<sup>ii</sup> from 2007 child wellbeing was assessed across the 20 richest countries, using six dimensions of child wellbeing countries were ranked: in terms of the 6<sup>th</sup> domain of subjective wellbeing, the UK was ranked 20<sup>th</sup>. The report suggests that life satisfaction diminishes as teenagers get older, particularly for girls.

In his book 'Social Happiness: Theory into Policy and Practice'<sup>iii</sup> Edinburgh University academic Neil Thin explores actual and potential applications of happiness in various policy domains: intimacy, parenting, schooling, gender reform, old age, the workplace and business. He argues that **happiness is enjoyment, qualified by self-scrutiny and by interaction with social and physical environments**. Happiness therefor requires a sense of positivity, empathy, the ability to look at interdependencies and interactions between life domains and experiences (called holism); happiness and self-worth come with interactions with others and shared stories over a lifetime. In Thin's analysis happiness is an intrinsically good thing;

research on happiness evidences that self-reported happier people have better health. Meanwhile unhappiness can be associated with apathy, passivity, guilt and fear. Thin also argues that **just by asking about and talking about happiness we help the individual develop empathy and respect for others**. (Thin also discusses whether it is happiness or love that is the 'ultimate value'; for more see the insight chapter LOVE + RESPECT).

In his book 'Happiness: Lessons from a New Science'<sup>iv</sup> Richard Layard also seeks to investigate the importance of understanding and promoting happiness. In terms of relationships he writes: **"We need other people, and we need to be needed**. Increasingly, research confirms the dominating importance of love. People who are in loving relationships with another adult have better hormonal balance and better health, and are of course happier".

In his book 'Making Happy People: The nature of happiness and its origins in childhood'<sup>v</sup> Paul Martin confirms this interest amongst those researching and writing about happiness that happiness is something we should build explicitly in childhood and that throughout life it is interpersonal relationships that are key to happiness; he writes **"...connectedness is an almost universal feature of happy people"**. Martin observes that from research about self-reported levels of happiness these are similar for people of all ages; men and women generally report similar levels of happiness although younger women tend to report being happier than younger men.

Of course the theme of happiness and its importance for relationships is addressed in the plethora of self-help, relationship-advice and positive thinking/positive psychology publications and websites. The global success 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers'<sup>vi</sup> is a reminder that this can also be targeted at young people.

### **3. HAPPINESS: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION POINTS**

When it comes to the insight offered by young people and other sources important themes and issues have been highlighted. These are summarised below and discussion points are highlighted. Again, some attention is given to the use of insight from this project in terms of the use of social marketing to promote positive sexual health for young people.

#### **Using happiness as a lens through which to focus on 'the good relationship'**

Young people have an intuitive grasp of the meaning and importance of happiness; research on the topic agrees that it is intrinsically a good thing. Young people have also talked about connections between happiness and many of the positive features of relationships that they seek: trust, honesty, caring and communication. Thinking about social marketing this *insight* and the *customer orientation* it provides means that communication with young people, and service provision which targets them, should be informed by the positive and aspirational aspects of young people's personal and sexual relationships, not just worries, anxieties or deficits that can easily frame young people's sexual health outcomes.

## Using happiness to develop empathy and respect for others

Young people understand happiness to have meaning when it is shared; scholars in the field of 'happiness studies' would agree that talking about happiness with an individual requires them to reflect on and consider the happiness of the 'other'. Thinking about social marketing and what might inform young people's inclination to behave in certain ways, the need for empathy and respect might then act as counters to competitive norms of sexualisation, pressures to have sex and commodification of sex.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> WHO [http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/)

<sup>ii</sup> An Overview of Child Well-being in rich countries UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Report Card 7

[http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc7\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc7_eng.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> 'Social Happiness: Theory into Policy and Practice' Neil Thin

[https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Social\\_Happiness.html?id=GZq7tjmA1toC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Social_Happiness.html?id=GZq7tjmA1toC&redir_esc=y)

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<sup>vi</sup> 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers' Sean Covey

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