

# Making Positive Change

## What Is Happiness?

If you are thinking about changing your life for the better, one way to start is by identifying your goals. You are probably hoping to find some version of happiness or emotional well-being. That might look like any combination of the following:

- A sense of freedom
- Self-esteem
- Self-confidence
- Happy to get up in the morning
- Working toward goals
- A sense of purpose in life
- Satisfying relationships

## What Is Unhappiness?

If you are thinking about changing your life, you may be experiencing some combination of the following elements:

- Feeling sad, lethargic, depressed, anxious or afraid
- Abusing or being addicted to alcohol or drugs
- Feeling lonely or problems with relationships
- Not getting what you want in life; feeling frustrated in working toward goals
- Not caring enough to have goals

## How Will *You* Change?

When you decide to change your life, try the following ideas.

1. **Explore your feelings.** Keep a journal, talk to a trusted friend, work with a professional counselor.
2. **Envision your future.** Write in a journal, make a collage, do a guided visualization, talk to a friend or counselor, research the possibilities.
3. **Explore wishes and dreams.** Keep a journal, talk to a trusted friend, work with a professional counselor.
4. **Be open to new ideas.** Take a class, travel, say yes to things you may have avoided in the past.
5. **Look for kindred spirits.** Avoid people who make you feel bad about yourself, seek out those who make you blossom, reach out to those with similar interests and dreams.
6. **Try something different.** Deliberately buy new items, try different brands, shop at different stores, do the opposite of what you usually do, see different movies, read different kinds of books and magazines.
7. **Set goals and targets.** Learn how to set useful goals, follow through, evaluate progress regularly, reward yourself for achievement.

8. **Take one step at a time.** Divide your goals into tiny pieces and do one small new thing each day, starting now.
9. **Look for lessons.** Remind yourself that experiences are not good or bad; they are simply lessons.

### **How to Overcome Your Resistance to Change**

Have you ever noticed that when you think about changing your life, you feel resistant? Many people say that they not only feel resistant, but they actually do things to keep their lives familiar. They do things like start a diet and then eat a candy bar on the first day, or quit smoking and then sneak a puff.

There are some things you can do to make yourself less resistant. Here are six effective strategies:

1. **Eliminate clutter.** Clutter can be viewed as a sign of uncertainty. Accumulating “stuff” might be stopping you from committing to an important thing. If you keep a lot of half-started projects around, it makes it difficult to zero in on the really important things.
2. **Start small.** Thinking of your overall goal can be overwhelming. So manage your resistance by choosing one small part of it and attacking it today. Let’s say your goal is to lose 20 pounds. That can certainly seem like an impossible thing to accomplish. It will seem more doable if you tell yourself, I’m going to lose five pounds by (date).
3. **Disprove your disempowering beliefs.** In *Reinventing Your Life*, authors Young and Klosko suggest that you identify the beliefs that keep you from succeeding. They offer a way to dispute those beliefs by asking, “Is there really any evidence today that this belief is true?” They suggest making a list of the evidence.
4. **Remind yourself of all of your available options.** You always have alternatives and the power to choose among them.
5. **Take responsibility for what you want.** Look for signs that you are blaming your situation on others or not admitting past mistakes. Acknowledge them and move on.
6. **Visualize the future.** Author Barbara Sher suggests one way to do this: Write an imaginary press release about yourself. The date is today’s date, two years in the future. The press release is announcing the most extraordinary event you can think of. It doesn’t matter whether this event seems only vaguely possible to you. The important thing is that it is exciting to imagine.

### **When to Seek Professional Help**

Sometimes it makes sense to find a professional counselor to work with as you work through the change process. Here are some ways to know when that would be appropriate:

1. You’ve tried several things but you still have the problem.
2. You want to find a solution sooner rather than later.
3. You have thoughts of harming yourself or others.
4. You have symptoms of depression, anxiety, or another disorder that are significantly interfering with your daily functioning and the quality of your life. For example, you have lost time from work, your relationships have been harmed, your health is suffering. These are signs that you may need the help of a trained, licensed professional.