

Taking in the Good

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Do you ever find that you are prone to self-criticism or feelings of inadequacy? Or that you can't sustain a sense of accomplishment and self worth? Maybe you are anxious and have a hard time feeling safe. Or you are depressed and are unable to find pleasure in life. At the heart of each of these is the same core issue: how to develop internal resources such as self-soothing, optimism, and resilience. It is also important to learn to overcome the brain's survival (but misery)-promoting negativity bias, which acts like Velcro for painful experiences and Teflon for positive ones.

One solution to all this is to learn to "take in the good". In other words, learn to weave good experiences into the brain and the self—in three essential steps:

1. Turn positive events into good experiences—look for good news about the world and yourself (a flower blooms, someone is nice to you, you get something done) and actually feel it when you see it.
2. Savor the experience—let it become as intense and long lasting as possible.
3. Sense it sinking in—imagine and feel it soaking into your body and mind.

The point is not to recall specific events, but to internalize the experience of them in implicit (emotional) memory. Then, as appropriate, there can be a fourth step:

4. Sense current, positive experiences sinking into, soothing, and eventually replacing the old, negative ones. Have the positive experience be powerful and prominent in the mind while the negative one is dim and in the background.

You will likely find that most of the positive experiences you absorb will be the little stuff of daily life: gratitude for the smell of an orange, a compliment from a friend, a moment of being kind, the recognition of a task finally completed. Bit by bit, day by day, you will build new neural networks—the underpinnings of a genuine and growing sense of strength, confidence, and happiness.

Reference

Hanson, Rick, PhD. 2010