

CREATING THE BEST POSSIBLE FUTURE

Description

It can be difficult to define what we want from life. However, research suggests that creating optimism about the future can motivate us to work toward that desired future and therefore make it more likely to become a reality.

This exercise asks you to imagine your life going as well as it possibly could, then write about this best possible future. By doing so, research suggests that you'll not only increase your well-being in the present but also make future well-being more likely.

HOW TO DO IT

- Take a moment to imagine your life in the future. What is the best possible life you can imagine? Consider all of the relevant areas of your life, such as your work, studying, professional development, friendships, relationships, hobbies, and/or health.
- For the next 15 minutes, draw or write continuously about what you imagine this best possible future to be. The instructions below can help guide you through this process.
- It may be easy for this exercise to lead you to examine how your current life may not match this best possible future.
- You may be tempted to think about ways in which achieving goals has been difficult for you in the past, or about the time/social barriers such as with friends, teachers, colleagues, parents which have stopped you from making these accomplishments happen.
- For the purpose of this exercise, however, encourage yourself to focus on the future—imagine a brighter future in which you are your best self and your circumstances change just enough to make this best possible life happen.
- Another approach to thinking about your future could be: Look into the future and see yourself as you want to be, problems solved, and then explain what has happened to cause this change to come about. Think of a date in the future, then work backwards, asking yourself what has happened at various points on the way to reaching this best future.
- This exercise is most useful when it is very specific—if you think about a new course of study, imagine exactly what you would do, who you would work with, and where it would be. If you think about having a new job, consider what you would do, the type of environment you would like to be working in and where the job could be. The more specific you are, the more engaged you will be in the exercise and the more you'll get out of it.
- Be as creative and imaginative as you want, and don't worry about what your drawings look like or your handwriting, grammar or spelling.

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

People who completed the Best Possible Self exercise daily for two weeks showed increases in positive emotions right after the two-week study ended. Those who kept up with the exercise even after the study was over continued to show increases in positive mood one month later. (Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2006).

WHY IT WORKS

By thinking about your best possible future self, you get to learn more about yourself and what you want in life. This way of thinking can help you review your priorities in life so that you know what direction you want your life to take. Thinking in this way can also help you increase your sense of control over your life by highlighting what you need to do to achieve your aspirations and dreams.