



*A Short Guide
to the*

*Path
to
Happiness*



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The Path to Happiness was founded by Molly L. Stranahan, Psy.D. to share what you can do to be happier and more fulfilled.

This booklet is a short summary of the *Path to Happiness*. To explore more deeply, visit www.pathtohappiness.com.

Molly can be reached at Molly@pathtohappiness.com, and is available for consultations to help you navigate YOUR Path to Happiness.

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Design, layout and editing by Eloise Gorski Branden
Every Little Detail Concierge, LLC
Printing production by Amity Foundation www.amityfdn.org

The Short Guide to the *Path to Happiness*

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Introduction

I believe happiness is our natural state. However, there are times unpleasant feelings – sadness, anxiety, frustration, worry, fear, loneliness, anger, guilt, shame or any of the myriad variations – get in the way of our happiness. We tend to believe those feelings are caused by what is happening to us. The truth is, our feelings are a result of the STORY we tell ourselves about what is happening to us. The same circumstances can create very different feelings in two different people because they each have a different story about what is happening. Your feelings and responses to what is happening to you depend on the story you tell yourself about the motives of others, whether the world is a fearful place or a loving place, and whether you are inadequate and unlovable, or good enough and even 'perfectly imperfect.'

Change Your

Story

Change Your

Feelings

Change Your

Life

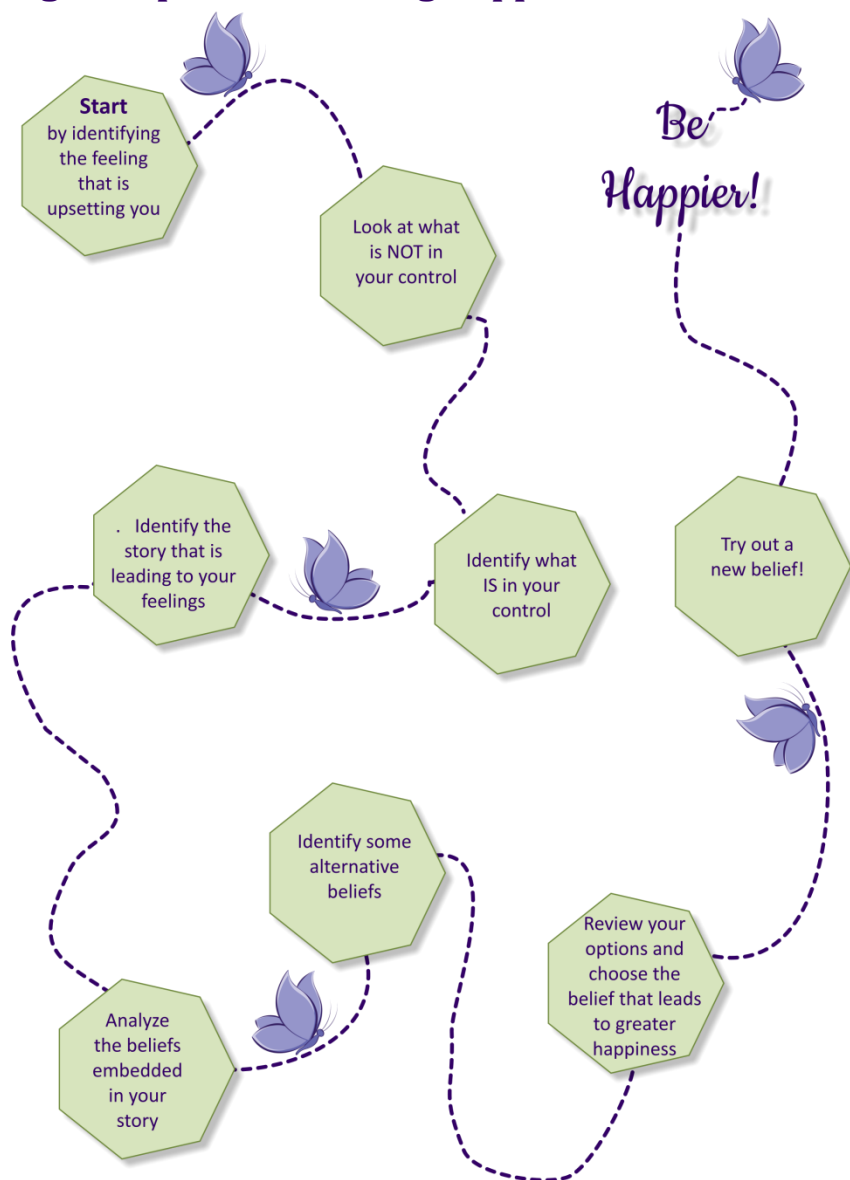
The process described in this pamphlet is a tool to help you identify your story AND alternative stories that could lead to more peace and happiness. It can help you discover what is in your control, so you can take action, and what is not in your control so you can let go of trying to change things that are not in your power to change.

If you find the process useful, I hope you will use it every time you notice an uncomfortable feeling is interfering with your ability to enjoy your life exactly as it is.

I'd love your feedback on how it works for you at molly@pathtohappiness.com.



Eight Step Guide to Being Happier





Step One: Pay attention to the message of your feelings, especially when you're upset

- ◆ Notice whether you are comfortable or stressed, happy or unhappy. Try to get to basic feelings (happy, hurt, angry, afraid, anxious, sad, lonely, guilty, ashamed).
- ◆ Feelings are messages. They are a result of what happens to you AND what you tell yourself based on your beliefs about the world. Not everyone will react to the same situation with the same feelings. Your feelings are a result of the *story* you tell yourself about what is happening to you. This process can help you identify the *story* that is upsetting you.
- ◆ Unpleasant feelings give you the opportunity to look at changing something in your life – your story, your behavior or your expectations.

Step Two: Look at what is NOT in your control

- ◆ Remember that you do not control **OTHER PEOPLE'S behavior and feelings** or for that matter, their perceptions or beliefs. So accept others as they are, and let go of the desire to make them what you want them to be. You can tell them what you would like, and the consequences you will offer for their behavior, but they decide what they will do.
- ◆ You also cannot change **the PAST**. It is past, it has happened. You can change how you feel about it, and what you believe about it. You can share your experience of it with others. But you can't change what happened. You *can* let go of the hold it has on you.
- ◆ Free yourself of worry about **the FUTURE**. We worry about things that might happen over which we have little or no control. Examples are the stock market, terrorist attacks, death. When there are things we can do to protect ourselves, we should do them, then let go of the worry. If you have done what you can, the rest is out of your control so don't let worry control your happiness. Trust that you will be able to cope with the future when it makes itself known.



Step Three: Identify what **IS** in your control

- ◆ You control **YOUR BEHAVIOR**. You are responsible for how you respond to the events in your life - how you treat yourself and other people.
- ◆ **DECIDE** whether or not to stay in the situation. Often we forget that we can end a relationship, give up a job, or get out of a long line. Sometimes we get mad about a situation that feels out of our control, and don't recognize we have a choice.
- ◆ **COMMUNICATE** what you are feeling and what you would like. Many times others don't know you are bothered by something. It wouldn't bother them, or they didn't notice. It is up to you to share your reactions.
- ◆ Determine **the CONSEQUENCES YOU SET FOR OTHER PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR**. This is the only way to successfully influence someone else's behavior. For the abused spouse, she can tell her husband that unless he starts anger management classes by a week from Friday, she will leave. And if he ever harms her again, she will be gone. This can include setting up bargains so both parties can be happy. For instance, you might offer to give a ten-minute back rub in exchange for being taken out for dinner. Just like in raising children, you must follow through on the consequences or bargains, so think seriously before you declare a consequence.
- ◆ Examine **YOUR BELIEFS**. This one is so important it has its own steps below.

Step Four: Identify the **STORY** that is leading to your feelings – and the beliefs that underlie the story

- ◆ Why are you feeling this (e.g. Why am I unhappy with my job)? I believe that _____ (e.g., a job should be fun and psychologically rewarding. I should feel challenged and energized by my work.)
- ◆ It can help to ask yourself "What would someone experiencing this feeling when X happens be thinking or believing? What story would someone else need to have to feel the way I am feeling in this circumstance?"



Step Five: ANALYZE THE BELIEF embedded in your story

- ◆ Ask yourself if it is true. Is it true for everyone in the world? Can it be tested? Look for evidence to confirm or contradict your belief.
- ◆ Look for patterns in the ways you tend to interpret situations – the beliefs through which you filter your experiences (e.g. no one respects me).
- ◆ Look for *shoulds*, *woulds*, *coulds*, *have tos*, and judgments (right, wrong, good, bad, stupid). Look for expectations, assumptions, catastrophic thinking and over-generalizations.
- ◆ Is it a wish for how you would like the world to be? Is it just your preference?

Step Six: Identify some ALTERNATIVE beliefs

- ◆ Is there another belief that might lead you to have a different feeling in this situation?
- ◆ Imagine what story or belief someone who feels calm or happy in the circumstances you are experiencing would have.
- ◆ You can ask other people for ideas of different ways to interpret your situation.

Step Seven: Step Seven: Review your OPTIONS and choose the belief that leads to feeling happier

- ◆ ANALYZE the potential new story and the story identified in Step Four by asking which belief is most likely to lead to being happier. Choose the belief that leads to the feelings you want to have – feelings of less distress and more happiness.
- ◆ Is there something you can do about the situation (get out, share your feelings, set consequences)?
- ◆ What can you **not change** in the situation (other people, the past, the future)? Let go of being upset about things that are not in your control.
- ◆ Remember **changing your story** is *ALWAYS* an option.



Step Eight: TRY OUT THE NEW BELIEF

- ◆ Ask yourself, "If I believed the new belief, how would I act differently? How would I feel?" If you think you might feel better, tell yourself "Now, I'm choosing to believe ..."
- ◆ Sometimes you need to look at what you are afraid would happen if you change your belief. A common fear that people express is "What if my new belief is wrong?" As in, "What if I believe that I am a worthy person, but I am wrong?" Check again if it is a provable thing, or just something that people have beliefs about. If it is provable ask yourself, "What would be the consequences if I am wrong?" But usually, we discover that it would only be a matter of opinion. You can choose to believe in self-fulfilling prophesies, and then choose the belief that you most want to have be true!
- ◆ Take the new story for a test drive. Say to yourself, "I am choosing to believe" Write your new story on a sticky note and put it someplace you will see it regularly.
- ◆ Try to live *as if* you believed it. See how it feels. Does it make you feel better? Remember, it doesn't have to pass a *trueness* test; it just has to make you feel better.
- ◆ When you decide what makes you happiest, and most content, keep telling yourself *that* story.
- ◆ Next time the feeling comes up in a similar situation, try to remember the new belief sooner than the last time.



Be
Happier!



Tips and Tools: Deceptive Brain Messages or “Old Stories”

Below are some common beliefs that lead to distress. These deceptive brain messages, or ‘old stories,’ might help you identify the beliefs leading to your unpleasant feelings. In the next *Tips and Tools* section you will find a list of positive beliefs and attitudes which may inspire you when you are looking for alternative beliefs that can bring more happiness to your life.

Some deceptive brain messages that lead to beliefs which make us unhappy and stressed

We think everyone thinks like we do, and has the same feelings and responds the way we would under similar circumstances.

We think our assumptions are really facts.

We think things happen because of us. We interpret the actions of others as comments about us. We believe our actions cause other people’s feelings.

We make errors about what we can control. We think we control things we don’t (such as other people’s feelings or behavior). We think we have no control when we do (over our own feelings, for example, or whether we can give up a source of income).

We focus on things we can’t change. We hold on to the past, thinking “if only...” or we worry about the future to the point that we ruin today.

We set ourselves up for failure by having unrealistic expectations -- of ourselves and about how others will behave toward us.



Some deceptive brain messages that lead to beliefs which make us unhappy and stressed

We judge – others and ourselves – rather than accept.

We think we have to be perfect to be worthwhile human beings.

We “should” on ourselves and others.

We assume other people know what we want. That if they love us, they will do what we want them to do. And if they don’t do what we want them to do, they must not love us.

We over-generalize: “Traffic lights *always* turn against me.” “I *never* get what I want.”

We “catastrophize.” This is when we make the small stuff bigger than it really is. And we make the big stuff huge. “It is *awful*.”

We turn our wants into needs. Then we’re unhappy because we didn’t get what we believe we needed.



Don’t believe everything you think!



Tips and Tools: Potential Alternative Beliefs

Here are some beliefs that can help you to be happier. It is not that they are right. But they may help you because we have accepted for so long that our beliefs are reality, truth and fact that it can help to have an idea of an alternative belief that someone else has chosen. You may generate different ones and then figure out which ones work for you.

Old Story	Potential New Story
If I am wrong, I am stupid.	If I am wrong, I am human. Being human means being imperfect.
I must take care of all my spouse's needs to keep his/her love.	I would like to be my best self with my spouse, but it is his/her job to be in love with me. I am worthy of love, just for being me.
Any job worth doing is worth doing well.	Any job worth doing just needs to get done.
I must be perfect to be worthy.	I love and accept my imperfections, they make me human.
If people see who I really am inside, they won't like me.	If people see the real me, with my flaws and vulnerabilities, they will have compassion. A perfect person would be hard to like, and my flaws can make others feel better about themselves.
If someone is mad at me, it is my fault and I am a bad person.	Other people are responsible for their own feelings. But did I transgress?
If I fail at something, I am worthless.	Failure is the price to pay for trying something worthwhile. What can I learn from this?



Old Story	Potential New Story
My worth is measured by what I do.	I am valuable as a human <i>being</i> , not as a human <i>doing</i> .
If XX happens, it will be AWFUL.	If my worst fear comes true, I will do I will be able to cope.
I must be nice so everyone will like me.	It's OK if there are people who don't like me. I lose my self trying to please everybody.
I <i>need</i> to have ... this person, this thing, this success, this security.	I want to have ..., and I'll be disappointed not to have my way, but we don't always get what we want. If I don't get it, I will survive.
I <i>should</i> ...	If I don't, X will happen, so I <i>want</i> to ...
If I forgive someone for harming me, it is accepting it, and they aren't punished.	Holding a grudge hurts me. Letting go frees me to move on.
If I _____, people will think something is wrong with me.	What do I care what other people think, if it is right for me?
If I worry about something happening, I can prevent it from occurring, or it won't be as painful if it happens.	Worry is a message to see if there is something I can do to avoid negative consequences, but after I've done that, it just takes away serenity in the present.
If I am not "better than" another person, I am "less than."	All humans are of equal value as human beings.
There is not enough.	I have enough. I <i>am</i> enough.



Tips and Tools: Stepping Stones on the Path to Happiness

Try some basic 'steps' or attitudes that will bring you greater happiness, and see what happens!

- ◆ Other people don't make you happy or unhappy, and you don't control their happiness.
- ◆ Try to accept yourself and others as imperfect but valuable, worthy humans.
- ◆ Stop and appreciate what you have, and who you are. Take an "attitude of gratitude."
- ◆ Listen and learn. Don't focus on being right.
- ◆ Let go of judgments (right, wrong, good, bad, better, worse).
- ◆ Let go of your resistance to "what is."
- ◆ Have realistic expectations – your goals should be reachable.
- ◆ What and whom you compare yourself to is important. If you compare your success to Bill Gates and your beauty to Halle Berry, you will feel less-than, poor, unsuccessful and unhappy.
- ◆ Worrying about things outside of your control makes you unhappy (e.g. other people's behaviors and feelings, the past, the future, terror attacks...). Don't focus on "if only..." The past is past.
- ◆ Question your beliefs – especially the *shoulds* and *have tos*.
- ◆ Be open and flexible, and willing to change your expectations and behaviors based on what you learn about yourself, and from others. This attitude leads to growth, acceptance and happiness.
- ◆ Believe in yourself – "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, you're right." ~ Henry Ford



Tips and Tools: Our Beliefs Matter - Positive Beliefs to Try

What you believe is important. It changes what you notice in the world around you. If you focus on the positive, you will “see” more of the positive. Try these positive beliefs, which include some of my favorite quotes and sayings (all unattributed lines are mine.)

- ◆ Grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. (Variation of Reinhold Niebuhr’s 1934 prayer)
- ◆ It’s not what happened, it’s how you think about what happened that controls your feelings and reactions.
- ◆ “Though we might not determine all the events around us, we are omnipotent in determining our reaction to them.” ~ Barry Neil Kaufman
- ◆ “No one can take away Man’s last freedom – the freedom to choose his attitude in any given circumstance.” ~ Viktor Frankl, psychiatrist and concentration camp survivor
- ◆ “Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.” ~ Abraham Lincoln
- ◆ “Happiness is a choice, and misery is an option” (not inevitable). ~ Barry Neil Kaufman
- ◆ “Happiness is the ultimate currency.” ~ Tal Ben-Shahar
- ◆ “We see things the way our minds have instructed our eyes to see.” ~ Muhammad Yunus, 2006 Nobel Peace Prize Winner
- ◆ Happy people interpret the world based on believing the best, unhappy people by focusing on the negative and believing the worst.
- ◆ In a choice between beliefs, try choosing the one that makes you happier and less stressed.
- ◆ When something unpleasant is happening, ask “what am I supposed to learn from this?”



- ◆ “Good” and “bad” are judgments based on beliefs. So question them! Try “healthier for me” and “less healthy for me.”
- ◆ “Don’t sweat the small stuff. And it is all small stuff.”
~ Richard Carlson
- ◆ Counteract the tendency to “catastrophize” by creating a rating scale of 1 to 100 and ranking what’s making you upset on the scale:
 - 1 = I won’t remember this an hour from now
 - 10 = I won’t remember this next week
 - 100 = my family is brutally killed
 - It will give you some perspective and help you let go of the little things.
- ◆ Savor the good “small stuff,” like a beautiful sky, or the smile someone gives you.
- ◆ We don’t know how many years or days we will live, so appreciate the minutes.
- ◆ Try an “attitude of gratitude.”
- ◆ Accept others, and yourself, as you are. Judgments interfere with love – including love of yourself.
- ◆ “The most reliable ways to make oneself miserable are attempting to change people and not attempting to change circumstances. Figure out what’s going wrong, figure out what can be done, whether it’s to adjust, accept or leave. Then do it. The pain just gets worse if you don’t.” ~ Carolyn Hax in her “Tell Me About It” column, *Newark Star Ledger*
- ◆ You don’t have the power to change someone else’s feelings or behavior. You can only change the consequences you provide for their behavior.
- ◆ Express your wants, work toward your dreams, but LET GO OF THE OUTCOME.
- ◆ The other person’s actions are almost always about them, not about you.
- ◆ Whenever you find yourself feeling irritated about something you “should” do, stop and ask why you should. Should is a judgment-laden word that often creates resentment. After investigating your feelings about what you *should* do, you may find you *want* to do it, which is much healthier. Don’t “should” on yourself.



- ◆ Remember that being human means making mistakes. So forgive, especially yourself. When you make a mistake, don't tell yourself, "That was really stupid, you jerk!" Speak to yourself as gently as you would to a beloved child: "Oops, sweetheart, that was an accident, but we can fix it this way."
- ◆ Being human means being imperfect. But we're all (you and I included) worthy and valuable just for being.
- ◆ Have realistic expectations and attainable goals.
- ◆ Listen and learn instead of always trying to be "right." Let go of judging yourself and others.
- ◆ It isn't the avoidance of mistakes that makes us worthy. How we handle mistakes is based on our maturity level. Accepting mistakes, addressing them, and moving on is healthy.
- ◆ Think of life as an experiment!
- ◆ "Learn to fail or fail to learn." ~ Tal Ben-Shahar
- ◆ "To love is to be happy with. No judgments. No conditions. No expectations." ~ Barry Neil Kaufman
- ◆ Humans need to connect with others to be happy. Doing something that makes someone else feel good will make you feel better.
- ◆ Kind words and kind deeds will come back to you.
- ◆ "Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace within the storm." ~ Found on a greeting card
- ◆ If you ask for what you want, and accept what you receive, you will get what you need.
- ◆ "When you appreciate the good, the good appreciates." ~ Tal Ben-Shahar
- ◆ "Work like you don't need money, love like you've never been hurt, and dance like no one's watching." ~ Crystal Boyd
- ◆ "It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is." ~ Erasmus
- ◆ "Be who you are and say what you feel. Those who mind don't matter. And those who matter don't mind." ~ Dr. Seuss



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