Objectives

- Understand what optimism is and why it is so beneficial
- Learn how to turn around pessimistic thinking
- Be able to create a learning environment that supports optimism
- Use field-tested activities to form and enhance children’s optimistic thinking
- Involve families in fostering children’s optimism
- Implement a program-wide focus on optimism

“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.”

- Winston Churchill
Pessimists brace for the worst case scenario—for themselves, for others, and for the world.

Optimists expect good things to happen—to themselves, to others, and to the world.

Research tells us:
- Optimism and pessimism are ways of thinking
- Optimism can be learned
- Optimists view failure as learning springboards
“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times I’ve been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”

—Michael Jordan

How much of our optimism or pessimism is genetic?

A. All
B. About three-quarters
C. About half
D. About one quarter
E. None

Research also tells us:

- Optimism is not a panacea
- Optimism is constrained by reality
“Realistic optimism keeps you shooting for the stars without losing sight of the ground below.”

- Karen Reivitch

“All else being equal, optimists are healthier and live longer. It is not just that healthy people are more optimistic, but optimism can enhance health.”

- Tali Sharot, The Science of Optimism: Why We’re Hard-Wired for Hope (TED Talk)

On average, how many years longer do optimists live than pessimists?

A. 1  
B. 5  
C. 7  
D. 9  
E. There is no statistical difference.
Optimism’s Other Benefits:

- School success
- Success in sports
- Career success

Optimism is linked to:

- Resiliency
- Mindfulness
- Growth mindset
- Grit

Optimism is also linked to:

- Gratitude
- Happiness
- Kindness
Explanatory Style:
The stories people use to explain the cause of any event – good or bad. It is the prism through which we experience life either helplessly or hopefully.

“'The optimist sees the donut, the pessimist sees the hole.'”
- Oscar Wilde
The 3 P’s:

1. Permanence: “How long will the situation last?”
2. Pervasiveness: “How much of my life will this situation affect?”
3. Personalization: “Who or what caused the situation?”

Optimists say “NO” to the 3 P’s:

1. It’s NOT permanent.
2. It’s NOT pervasive.
3. It’s NOT personal.

ABCDE

A = Adverse event
B = Beliefs about the event
C = Consequences of having these thoughts
D = Disputation of negative thoughts
E = Energization experienced
Nine Needed Skills:
1. Regulation of emotions
2. Executive function
3. Self-efficacy
4. Independence
5. Taking risks

Nine Needed Skills - Continued:
6. Perseverance
7. Solving problems
8. Being empathic
9. Calming one’s self
Creating an Environment that Supports Optimism

Opportunities to Build Optimism

• Part of the daily program - use the ABCDE model
• Embedded in interactions
• Tailored to fit individuals and
• Planned to support learning, including optimistic thinking

Where do Activities Come From?

• Some are things you already do (e.g., reading aloud)
• Others are specifically designed with optimism in mind (e.g. using persona dolls)
• All include opportunities to help children use or expand their optimistic thinking.
Create Optimistic Endings with Challenges

Make up a story, ideally based on real children and situations. For example, Jorge the Builder:

- Loves blocks
- He thinks his buildings are not as good as his friends are
- Throws the blocks
- Teacher intervenes

In the Story, What does Jorge’s Teacher Say or Do?

Sits next to Jorge, asks, “What were you thinking in your head?”

Invite Children to Help Jorge Reach an Optimistic Conclusion.

Ask...

- What do you think Jorge said and did?
- What do you think his teacher said and did?
- What do you think Jorge’s friends said and did?
Persona Dolls

- Hand-made or purchased
- Members of the classroom
- Used to teach about diversity
- Can also be used to teach about optimistic thinking

How Persona Dolls Support Optimism

- Teachers and children can use the dolls to revisit challenging situations
- Persona dolls might take on the child’s feelings
- Doll (with teacher’s help) can help with using ABCDE to address a challenge

Read Aloud and Discuss Optimism

- See handout for suggestions of books and questions to ask
- Read book all the way through at least once
- Ask questions to guide optimistic thinking
- Relate to children’s own lives
When can teachers support children’s optimism?

A. At the end of the day  
B. Any time during the day when opportunities arise  
C. During meal times  
D. During group time  
E. All of the above

Your Own Optimistic Thinking

• Very difficult to teach children to use optimistic thinking if you are not optimistic yourself  
• You are a role model  
• Children learn as you handle daily challenges - with optimism or pessimism

Think of a Typical Challenging Event

• What happened?  
• Consider the 3 P’s of explanatory style: Personal, Pervasive, Permanent  
• How would an optimistic educator respond?  
• How might a pessimistic educator respond?
Who is the “Executive Optimist” in your setting?

A. A Teacher
B. The Director
C. A Coach
D. Anyone who believes in the power of optimism
E. Any of the above

“Optimistic leaders focus on opportunities. Optimism is magnetic. Optimism enables open-mindedness and open-mindedness enables collaboration, and problem solving.”

- Bert Jacobs  
Chief Executive Optimist  
The Life is Good Company

- Who sets the tone for optimism?
- How does he or she do that?
Executive Optimists

• See mistakes as inevitable and opportunities for learning
• Are strengths-based
• Value efforts, progress, and accomplishments
• Show gratitude, don’t sweat the small stuff, stay in the moment

Family Involvement is Essential

• Children learn from all the adults in their lives
• Families and educators are partners in supporting children

• Include families in planning a classroom or program-wide approach
• Share information and resources
• Encourage families to exchange information with teachers
Thank You for Your Participation!

Any Questions?

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