


Making Lemonade

Teaching Young Children To Think Optimistically

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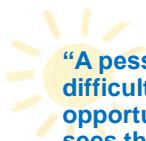
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Objectives

- 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

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

- Winston Churchill



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



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



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Research tells us:

- Optimism and pessimism are ways of thinking
- Optimism can be learned
- Optimists view failure as learning springboards



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"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

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How much of our optimism or pessimism is genetic?



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

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Research also tells us:

- Optimism is not a panacea
- Optimism is constrained by reality



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“Realistic optimism keeps you shooting for the stars without losing sight of the ground below.”

- Karen Reivitch



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“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)

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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.

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Optimism's Other Benefits:

- School success
- Success in sports
- Career success



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Optimism is linked to:

- Resiliency
- Mindfulness
- Growth mindset
- Grit



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Optimism is also linked to:

- Gratitude
- Happiness
- Kindness



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From Learned Helplessness to Learned Optimism



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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.



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“The optimist sees the donut, the pessimist sees the hole.”

- Oscar Wilde



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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?"



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Optimists say "NO" to the 3 P's:

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



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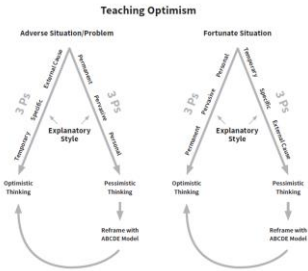
ABCDE

- A** = Adverse event
- B** = Beliefs about the event
- C** = Consequences of having these thoughts
- D** = Disputation of negative thoughts
- E** = Energization experienced



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Nine Needed Skills:

1. Regulation of emotions
2. Executive function
3. Self-efficacy
4. Independence
5. Taking risks



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Nine Needed Skills - Continued:

6. Perseverance
7. Solving problems
8. Being empathic
9. Calming one's self



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Creating an Environment that Supports Optimism



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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



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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.



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Create Optimistic Endings with Challenges



- Make up a story, ideally based on real children and situations
 For example, Jorgé the Builder:
- Loves blocks
 - He thinks his buildings are not as good as his friends are
 - Throws the blocks
 - Teacher intervenes

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In the Story, What does Jorgé's Teacher Say or Do?

Sits next to Jorgé, asks, "What were you thinking in your head?"



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Invite Children to Help Jorgé Reach an Optimistic Conclusion. Ask...



- What do you think Jorgé said and did?
- What do you think his teacher said and did?
- What do you think Jorgé's friends said and did?

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Persona Dolls

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



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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

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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



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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



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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



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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?



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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



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“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



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



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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



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Family Involvement is Essential

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



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- Include families in planning a classroom or program-wide approach
- Share information and resources
- Encourage families to exchange information with teachers



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Thank You for Your Participation!



Any Questions?

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