

# INCREASING REWARDING EXPERIENCES

July, 2021

## Increasing Rewarding Experiences

There is strong theory and research indicating that emotional distress may be caused or worsened by a decreased engagement in rewarding experiences and activities. Therefore, an effective strategy for reducing distress is to increase the amount of rewarding activities in your life.

There are two types of rewarding activities: “pleasurable” activities and “mastery” activities.

- **Pleasurable activities** are those that are just plain fun.
- **Mastery activities** are those that give you a sense of accomplishment or pride.

Increasing pleasurable and mastery activities may seem difficult at first. You may feel that there is *no time* in your day for anything else. You may also feel that you have *no interest* or *no motivation* to do anything. These feelings and reactions are common. Unfortunately, some people get trapped by the myth that motivation must come first (i.e., they incorrectly believe that they can’t increase their activities until they “feel motivated”). The truth is that oftentimes motivation develops after you begin the activity. It is often necessary, therefore, to *make a plan* for increasing rewarding activities, and to *stick to the plan*, even when you don’t particularly feel like it. As you begin to increase your rewarding activities, you will likely find that your motivation and interest in doing them gradually increase, as well.

**Make a list of any pleasurable activities that you have decreased (or quit) doing recently:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Make a list of any mastery activities that you have decreased (or quit) doing recently:**

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**Now make a list of additional activities that you believe might be fun and pleasant, or might give you a sense of accomplishment and mastery.** If you have trouble coming up with ideas, consider talking with a friend, family member, or behavioral health consultant to help generate ideas. You may also find some activities that seem to “fit” you and your life from the list on the following page.

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# INCREASING REWARDING EXPERIENCES (CONT.)

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## Potentially Pleasurable and Mastery Activities

Listening to music  
Taking a walk  
Knitting/sewing  
Playing golf  
Fishing  
Reading stories, novels, poems  
Playing with the kids  
Talking on the phone  
Writing a letter  
Cleaning the house  
Straightening the office  
Playing cards  
Painting  
Playing tennis  
Gardening  
Doing a crossword  
Watching a movie  
Going to church  
Visiting friends  
Playing board games  
Going out to eat  
Dancing  
Woodworking  
Exercising  
Going for a drive  
Riding a bike  
Swimming  
Playing an instrument  
Camping  
Bird watching  
Going to a sports event  
Shopping  
Working with computer  
Daydreaming  
Singing  
Watching t.v.  
Ceramics  
Photography  
Being in the country  
Talking about sports  
Going to a concert  
Planning trips or vacations  
Buying things for myself  
Being at the beach  
Reading the scriptures  
Rearranging/redecorating house  
Breathing clean air  
Working on machines  
Playing cards  
Laughing

Shaving  
Having lunch with friends  
Taking a bath or shower  
Driving  
Being with animals  
Going to social/church functions  
Making snacks  
Skiing  
Being in a city  
Making food or crafts to give away  
Playing pool or billiards  
Being with grandchildren  
Playing chess or checkers  
Putting on makeup, fixing hair  
Watching wild animals  
Visiting people who are sick/alone  
Gardening, landscaping, yardwork  
Sitting in the sun  
Just sitting and thinking  
Talking about philosophy or religion  
Listening to the sounds of nature  
Dating  
Having a lively talk  
Listening to the radio  
Having friends come to visit  
Giving gifts  
Going to school/government meetings  
Getting massages or backrubs  
Getting letters, cards, or notes  
Watching the sky, clouds, or a storm  
Going on outings (park, picnic, BBQ)  
Buying something for family  
Gathering natural objects  
Helping someone  
Working on my finances  
Being in the mountains  
Hearing jokes  
Talking about my children/grandkids  
Meeting someone new  
Eating good meals  
Improving my health  
Wrestling or boxing  
Organizing a closet  
Hunting or shooting  
Playing in a musical group  
Hiking  
Going to a museum  
Writing papers, essays, poems  
Fishing  
Doing a job well

Loaning something  
Pleasing employers or teachers  
Counseling someone  
Going to a health club or sauna  
Learning to do something new  
Complimenting or praising someone  
Going to a “drive in”  
Thinking about people I like  
Being with my parents  
Having daydreams  
Kicking leaves, sand, pebbles  
Playing lawn sports  
Going to school reunions  
Seeing famous people  
Kissing  
Being alone  
Cooking meals  
Budgeting my time  
Doing “odd jobs” around home  
Being at a family get-together  
Giving a party or get-together  
Washing my hair  
Coaching someone  
Using cologne, perfume, aftershave  
Talking about old times  
Having peace and quiet  
Visiting friends  
Writing in a diary  
Saying prayers  
Giving massages or backrubs  
Meditating or doing yoga  
Talking with people on the job  
Being relaxed  
Reading the newspaper  
Walking barefoot  
Playing frisbee or catch  
Doing housework or laundry  
Being with my roommate  
Talking about sex  
Going to a barber or beautician  
Going to the library  
Preparing a new or special food  
Watching people  
Building or watching a fire  
Confessing or apologizing  
Having coffee or tea  
Going to auctions/garage sales  
Playing with pets  
Organizing my kitchen  
Visiting a pet store

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# INCREASING REWARDING EXPERIENCES (CONT.)

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Use your own list of pleasurable and mastery activities to make a plan to increase rewarding experiences in your life each day.

In the morning, plan at least one pleasurable and one mastery activity for the day. At the end of the day list several things you did that day that gave you a sense of pleasure and accomplishment.

The following chart may help you get started, remain motivated and “on track,” and remind you of the progress you make.

Date	My pleasurable activity today will be....	My mastery activity today will be...	My most fun activities today were...	My significant accomplishments today were...