



Wellbeing Insights

Permission to be Human

When it comes to wellbeing, with our cultural emphasis on the term positive, whether this be 'positive emotions', 'positive education', or 'positive psychology', we do have times when we worry that people are trying to chase happiness, and that this can lead to the opposite effect.

Some young people (and adults) may hear and understand the importance of positive emotions, and then jump to the incorrect conclusion that to be 'happy', they need to be experiencing positive emotions all the time. We also worry that some people think positive emotions are 'good' and negative emotions are 'bad', and therefore the goal is to experience as many positive emotions as possible, and to avoid, or push away, or suppress any negative emotions. This is not only incorrect, it's unhelpful and harmful.

It was Tal Ben-Shahar who first introduced me to the phrase 'The Permission to be Human' and what he meant by this was that humans will and should experience a full range of positive and negative emotions as part of living a rich, full, and meaningful life. Giving yourself the permission to be human means accepting and even embracing all emotional states. Cherish the positive emotions, and lean into and learn from the negative emotions.

The way I think about it is, I love being a dad – and the positive emotions I experience from being with and caring for my children is incredibly powerful. In just the last few days I have felt joy, pride, excitement, hope, gratitude, amusement, and of course love. In just the last few days I have also felt sadness, concern, disappointment, frustration, guilt, incompetence, a lack of confidence, and more. I am okay with this full emotional experience being my reality of being a parent and having a deep sense of care and affection for my children. And of course, I could have replaced the word dad in this example with husband, son, colleague teacher, triathlete, cook – and the full range of emotions would still apply.

You may have heard of the Happiness Paradox. This is the idea that on the one hand we know happiness is a good thing with many benefits but on the other hand it appears that if we directly try to pursue happiness that this can be problematic and actually make us less happy.

Research by psychologist, [Iris Mauss](#), suggests that the more someone pursues happiness, the more he or she will probably end up feeling disappointed. Through the analysis of participants' diary entries, she found that the more people valued happiness, the lonelier they felt on a daily basis. To resolve this paradox, we should not hold happiness as the goal, instead we can aim to pursue happiness indirectly, by seeking to experience the key elements of wellbeing such as experiencing positive emotions, deep engagement, close relationships, meaning and purpose and accomplishment. We can then experience happiness as a pleasant side-effect, or a by-product of the way we live our life.



At **my manifesto**, the goal isn't for you to pursue happiness. The goal is to help you find clarity and inspiration to allow you to live fully and authentically. (And, by the way, we suspect this may well lead to greater happiness 😊)