

# HAPPINESS

Leader's Guide for Ages 11-14



## Dear Team Leader,

Thank you for your dedication to helping children learn and grow, and for supporting *On Our Sleeves* in its mission to provide free educational resources to every community in America. We are proud to have your organization as a member of the *On Our Sleeves* Alliance to help break the silence surrounding children's mental health.

This free *On Our Sleeves* educational program provides activities for children ages 11–14 that focus on happiness. Developed by the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired in partnership with mental health professionals from *On Our Sleeves*, this program is designed to help children understand that happiness revolves around meaningful connections to others and to life experiences. This program also includes a take-home letter for families to reinforce these messages and promote greater awareness of social and emotional health.

We hope you will share this program with youth group leaders in your organization. And please take a moment to share your thoughts on this program at [ymiclassroom.com/feedback-oosalliance](http://ymiclassroom.com/feedback-oosalliance). We look forward to your comments.

Sincerely,  
The *On Our Sleeves* team

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Children ages 11–14 and their families

## PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Promote the mental health and well-being of children by helping them better understand the pursuit of happiness.
- Help children identify and communicate the meaningful connections and experiences that make them feel happy.
- Encourage understanding that happiness is a choice, and how we determine happiness is up to us.
- Provide resources and tips for talking with children about mental health and wellness.

## About the *On Our Sleeves* Alliance

The *On Our Sleeves* Alliance represents the diverse and powerful voices committed to breaking the silence surrounding children's mental health and taking action. The Alliance works together to share best practices and advance *On Our Sleeves*' mission to provide every community in America with access to free, evidence-informed resources necessary for breaking stigmas around children's mental health and educating families and advocates. Together, we empower the mental health and wellness of every child in America and support families. Learn more at [OnOurSleeves.org](http://OnOurSleeves.org).

## How to Use This Program

Make copies of the activity sheet for your group and prepare any materials needed. The activity should take approximately two class sessions of 45 minutes to an hour. Have children share the completed activity sheet with their families, along with a copy of the take-home letter. You might also email the letter to parents/caregivers.

## Materials Needed

**Part 1:** Two sticky notes, pencils, and markers, as well as board space.

**Part 2:** Copies of the activity sheet, pencils, markers, and lined paper for writing.

**Extension Activity:** Blank paper or index cards, pencils, markers, and a dedicated display wall or board space labeled "Happiness is . . ."

## That Makes Me Smile! Activity Sheet

► **Part 1:** Give each child two sticky notes and have them write one thing on each note that makes them happy. Write the following category titles on the board: People, Places, Activities, Things. Then have the children share by coming up to place their notes in the correct category. Next, use one or more of these prompts to lead a class discussion:

1. Do you think happiness is important when it comes to supporting our feelings, emotions, and moods? Why? How?
2. Is happiness a choice? Why or why not?
3. Do you think any one thing or person can make you happy? Why or why not?
4. What does it feel like to be happy? What does it feel like to be unhappy, and what are some things you do to help yourself feel better?

Remind the children that their discussion shows that happiness isn't about any one thing, but about feeling connected to and good about the special people, places, and experiences in their lives, as well as their own unique strengths and interests. Explain that working to experience more happiness takes effort, and that while everyone can have days when they feel mostly sad and down, we can choose to focus on the bad, or we can choose to think about or do things that help us feel happy. It takes hard work and practice, but it's worth it. Add that happiness helps boost our mental health and is good for our emotional well-being.

► **Part 2:** Begin by explaining to the children that sometimes they may feel stressed or anxious because of pressure from family and friends, or from situations such as schoolwork, sports, or other activities. It's important in these moments to avoid negative self-talk, which only makes us feel worse.

Distribute the activity sheets and review the directions with the children. If they are comfortable, have the children share their affirmation ideas with a partner. Tell them to take home their letters and put them someplace safe. Remind them that no matter where they keep their letter or affirmations, they can use both resources to help support their emotional health any time they need it.

**Extension Activity:** Have the children create a "Happiness Is . . ." wall display featuring words and images of things that make them happy. Challenge the children to create colorful drawings and words so that their ideas represent happiness in a visual way. The children may add ideas to the wall on an on-going basis, especially when they are having a difficult day or need some cheer.

## Resources

- **On Our Sleeves:** [OnOurSleeves.org](http://OnOurSleeves.org)
- **On Our Sleeves—7 Ways to Cultivate Happiness:** [OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides/helping-kids-stay-positive/cultivate-happiness](http://OnOurSleeves.org/mental-wellness-tools-guides/helping-kids-stay-positive/cultivate-happiness)
- **YMI microsite:** [ymiclassroom.com/oosalliance](http://ymiclassroom.com/oosalliance)

Name \_\_\_\_\_



# THAT MAKES ME SMILE!

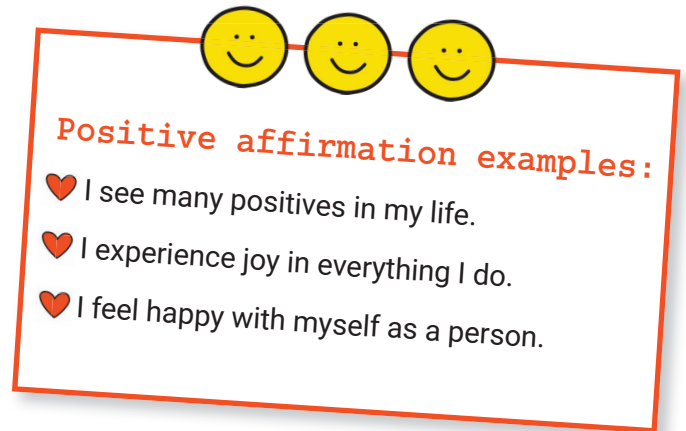
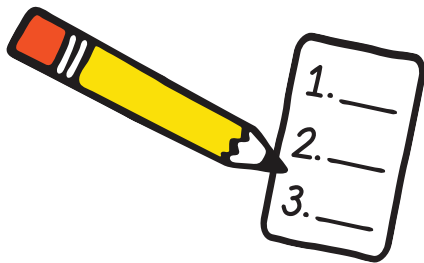
Encourage the “happy” in your life! We can choose to work on experiencing more happiness when we decide to look for the good, and when we address the bad moods that stem from emotions like anger or sadness instead of letting them linger.

Another way to choose happiness is by telling ourselves positive things. Have you ever told yourself that you weren’t good enough? Or that you will never pass a test? Or that the thing you said in class was stupid? That’s called negative self-talk. If you find yourself doing this, make a choice to switch your thinking. Instead, boost your happiness with positive affirmations. Positive affirmations are positive thoughts and statements we tell ourselves to boost self-esteem and build confidence. Find a balanced thought for every negative thing you say about yourself.

On the back of this sheet, write positive affirmations that work for you. Use the tips and examples below to help you get started.

## Tips for Writing a Strong Affirmation

1. Identify a negative belief or thought you have about yourself.
2. Come up with an idea that challenges that thought.
3. Write in the first person, and in present tense.
4. Make your affirmation short and strong by using empowering and expressive language.



## A Happiness Letter to Myself

Continue to build your happiness skills by writing a letter to yourself that describes all the things that make you happy. Your letter might include examples of:

- ▶ A beloved family member
- ▶ A special friendship
- ▶ Things that make you proud
- ▶ Things that make you laugh out loud
- ▶ The funniest moment you ever experienced with your family or friends
- ▶ A movie that made you happy
- ▶ Songs that make you smile and dance
- ▶ A place you love because of the way it makes you feel . . . the list is endless!

After writing the letter, fold it up and store it in a safe place. The next time you are feeling down, pull out the letter and read it to help make you feel happy!

Nombre \_\_\_\_\_



# ¡ESO ME HACE SONREÍR!

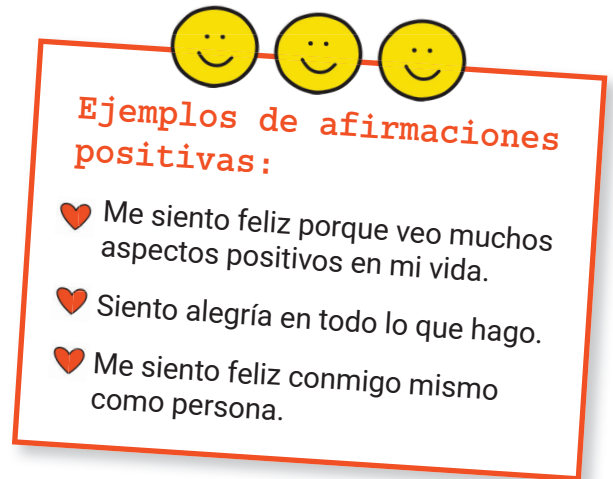
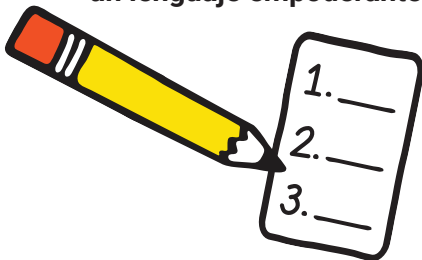
¡Fomenta los “momentos felices” en tu vida! Podemos elegir trabajar en sentir más felicidad buscando el lado bueno de las cosas y abordando el mal humor que surge de emociones como la ira o la tristeza en lugar de dejar que persista.

Otra forma de elegir la felicidad es decirnos a nosotros mismos cosas positivas. ¿Te has dicho alguna vez que no eras lo suficientemente bueno? ¿O que nunca aprobarás un examen? ¿O que lo que dijiste en clase era estúpido? Eso se llama diálogo interno negativo. Si te encuentras haciendo esto, elige cambiar tu forma de pensar. En cambio, puedes potenciar tu felicidad con afirmaciones positivas. Las afirmaciones positivas son declaraciones y pensamientos positivos que nos decimos a nosotros mismos para aumentar nuestra autoestima y generar confianza. Encuentra un pensamiento que compense cada cosa negativa que dices sobre ti mismo.

Al dorso de esta hoja, escribe las afirmaciones positivas que te funcionen. Utiliza los consejos y ejemplos a continuación como ayuda para comenzar.

## Consejos para escribir una afirmación rotunda

1. Identifica una creencia o un pensamiento negativo que tengas sobre ti mismo.
2. Piensa en una idea que cuestione ese pensamiento.
3. Escribe en primera persona y en presente.
4. Haz que tu afirmación sea breve y rotunda utilizando un lenguaje empoderante y expresivo.



## Una carta de felicidad para mí mismo

Continúa desarrollando tus habilidades para sentir felicidad escribiéndote una carta que describa todas las cosas que te hacen feliz. La carta podría incluir ejemplos de:

- ▶ Un familiar querido
- ▶ Una amistad especial
- ▶ Cosas que te hacen sentir orgulloso
- ▶ Cosas que te hacen reír a carcajadas
- ▶ El momento más divertido que hayas vivido con tu familia o amigos
- ▶ Una película que te haya hecho feliz
- ▶ Canciones que te hacen sonreír y te dan ganas de bailar
- ▶ Un lugar que te encanta por la forma en que te hace sentir. . . ¡la lista es interminable!

Después de escribir la carta, dóblala y guárdala en un lugar seguro. ¡La próxima vez que te sientas triste, saca la carta y léela para ayudarte a sentirte feliz!



## Dear Parents & Caregivers,

Mental health professionals from *On Our Sleeves*, the movement for children's mental health, have teamed up with the curriculum specialists at Young Minds Inspired to create activities for schools and youth organizations to support children's mental health and social and emotional development. This includes encouraging children and families to make positive choices to promote overall health. Your child's organization is a member of the *On Our Sleeves* Alliance to help break the silence around children's mental health.

Your child has been learning about happiness, something all parents want for their children. Happiness is more than just one thing or an isolated moment. Focusing on happiness is a skill that takes practice.

### What Is Happiness?

Meaningful connections to others and to events, activities, accomplishments, and places in our lives bring us happiness. Long-term happiness, the kind you want for your child, is built through the habit of consciously choosing to think of and even engage with those connections often, but especially when we're going through a difficult time.

Focusing on happiness can foster a cycle that promotes health and well-being. Research shows that there are physical benefits to happiness, too. Happiness:

- ▶ Builds a stronger immune system.
- ▶ Allows one to experience fewer aches and pains.
- ▶ Improves educational outcomes.
- ▶ Improves sleep.
- ▶ Improves life expectancy.

### Tips for Helping Your Child Build the Happiness Habit

1. Talk about feelings and moods together. Being aware of and processing emotions, especially emotions like anger or sadness that can bring on bad moods, is key to promoting happiness and overall emotional health.
2. Encourage happiness strategies such as: thinking about the people and things that make you happy, practicing positive self-talk or gratitude, appreciating the small and simple moments, and promoting optimism. Recalling simple things that bring us happiness can help us feel better in difficult moments.
3. Practice physical self-management routines that support happiness. These routines include eating healthy, exercising regularly and practicing mindfulness, or taking moments to stop, pause, breathe deeply and notice the little things around you that you might otherwise take for granted.
4. Work toward a growth mindset. Often children get stuck feeling sad, angry, or frustrated when something doesn't go as planned or they feel they have failed. Help them flip their thinking and respond with, "You just haven't built up that skill YET," or, "With more practice and time, you will get better at it."
5. Encourage building meaningful relationships with others, including extended family members, neighbors, and school friends.

### Let the Happiness Begin!

Try some of these ideas to help bring more happiness into your child's life.

- ▶ Create a family collage using photos, cards, words, and images of things and people that make your family happy. Display the collage on the refrigerator or in some other central location of your home.
- ▶ Create a family playlist of happy songs. Listen to the playlist in the car on the way to school or during other events.
- ▶ Make a Happiness Jar. Place an empty jar or container on the kitchen counter, along with paper and a pencil. Have each family member write down one thing that made them happy for each day of the week. At the end of the week, remove the papers from the jar and read them out loud while your happiness playlist as your soundtrack!

For more ideas and information on how to help your child learn more about practicing happiness and its positive impact on mental health, visit [OnOurSleeves.org](https://OnOurSleeves.org).

Sincerely,  
The *On Our Sleeves* team

# Estimados padres y cuidadores:

Los profesionales de salud mental de *On Our Sleeves*, el movimiento para la salud mental de los niños, se han unido a los especialistas en planes de estudio de Young Minds Inspired con el propósito de crear actividades para escuelas y organizaciones juveniles a fin de apoyar la salud mental y el desarrollo social y emocional de los niños. Esto incluye alentar a los niños y a las familias a hacer elecciones positivas para promover la salud en general. La organización de su hijo(a) es miembro de la alianza *On Our Sleeves Alliance* cuyo fin es ayudar a romper el silencio en torno a la salud mental de los niños.



Su hijo ha estado aprendiendo sobre la felicidad, algo que todos los padres quieren para sus hijos. La felicidad es más que una cosa o un momento aislado. Centrarse en la felicidad es una habilidad que requiere práctica.

## ¿Qué es la felicidad?

Las conexiones significativas con otros y con eventos, actividades, logros y lugares en nuestra vida nos dan felicidad. La felicidad a largo plazo, el tipo de felicidad que desea para su hijo, se construye con el hábito de elegir conscientemente pensar e incluso interactuar con esas conexiones a menudo, pero especialmente cuando estamos atravesando un momento difícil.

Centrarse en la felicidad puede fomentar un ciclo que promueve la salud y el bienestar. Las investigaciones demuestran que la felicidad también tiene beneficios físicos. La felicidad:

- ▶ Fortalece el sistema inmunitario.
- ▶ Mejora la calidad del sueño.
- ▶ Permite experimentar menos dolores.
- ▶ Mejora la esperanza de vida.
- ▶ Mejora los resultados educativos.

## Consejos para ayudar a su hijo a crear el hábito de la felicidad

1. Hablen juntos sobre sentimientos y estados de ánimo. Ser consciente y procesar las emociones, especialmente las emociones como la ira o la tristeza que pueden provocar mal humor, es clave para promover la felicidad y la salud emocional en general.
2. Fomente estrategias de felicidad como: pensar en las personas y las cosas que te hacen feliz, practicar el diálogo positivo o la gratitud, apreciar los momentos pequeños y sencillos y promover el optimismo. Pensar en cosas sencillas que nos dan felicidad puede ayudarnos a sentirnos mejor en momentos difíciles.
3. Practiquen rutinas físicas de autocontrol que favorezcan la felicidad. Estas rutinas incluyen comer de manera saludable, hacer ejercicio regularmente y practicar el mindfulness, o tomarse momentos para detenerse, hacer un alto, respirar hondo y observar las pequeñas cosas a nuestro alrededor que de otra manera podríamos dar por sentadas.
4. Trabaje para conseguir una mentalidad de crecimiento. A menudo, los niños se quedan atrapados sintiéndose tristes, enojados o frustrados cuando algo no sale según lo planeado o cuando sienten que han fallado. Ayúdelos a cambiar su forma de pensar y responda con: "Simplemente todavía no has desarrollado esa habilidad" o "Con más práctica y tiempo, lo harás mejor".
5. Promueva la construcción de relaciones significativas con otras personas, incluidos familiares lejanos, vecinos y amigos de la escuela.

## ¡Que comience la felicidad!

Pruebe algunas de estas ideas para ayudar a llevar más felicidad a la vida de su hijo.

- ▶ Cree un collage familiar con fotos, tarjetas, palabras e imágenes de cosas y personas que hagan feliz a su familia. Coloque el collage en el refrigerador o en algún otro lugar central de su casa.
- ▶ Crea una playlist familiar con canciones felices. Escuche la playlist en el auto de camino a la escuela o en otras ocasiones.
- ▶ Haga un Tarro de la felicidad. Coloque un frasco o recipiente vacío en la encimera de la cocina, junto con papel y un lápiz. Haga que cada día de la semana todos los miembros de la familia escriban algo que los haga felices. Al final de la semana, saque los papeles del frasco y léalos en voz alta con la playlist de la felicidad de fondo.

Para obtener más ideas e información sobre cómo ayudar a su hijo a aprender más sobre practicar la felicidad y su impacto positivo en la salud mental, visite [OnOurSleeves.org](https://OnOurSleeves.org).

Atentamente,  
El equipo de *On Our Sleeves*