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“Helping Your Child Build a Happy and Meaningful Life—and Handle the Ups and Downs Along the Way”

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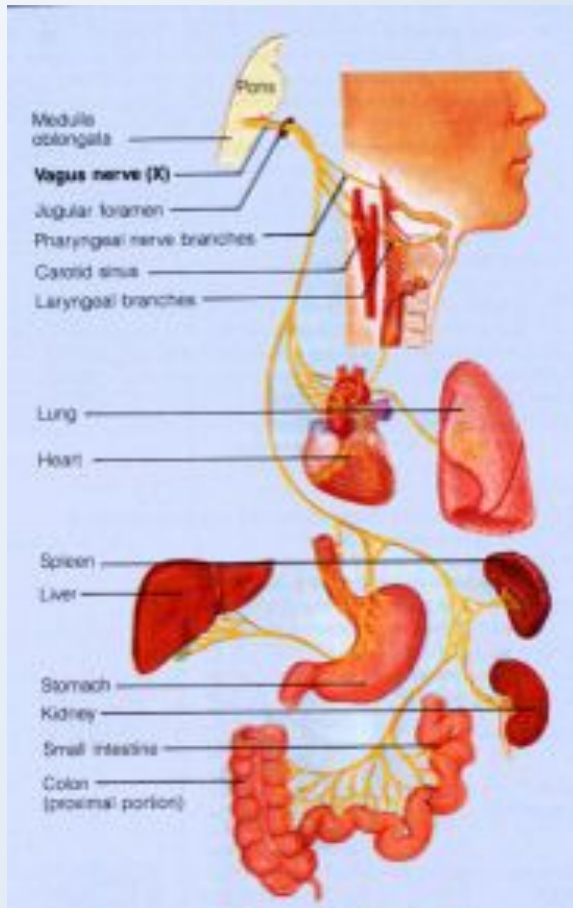
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The Vagus Nerve



- Helps coordinate interaction between breathing and heart rate.
- Vagal superstars:
 - More positive emotions
 - Stronger relationships
 - Fifth graders with stronger vagal profile intervene when a kid is bullied

To activate:

- Breathe in for a count of 3 and breathe out for a count of 6

Happiness

(Peterson, 2006)

1. Hedonic treadmill

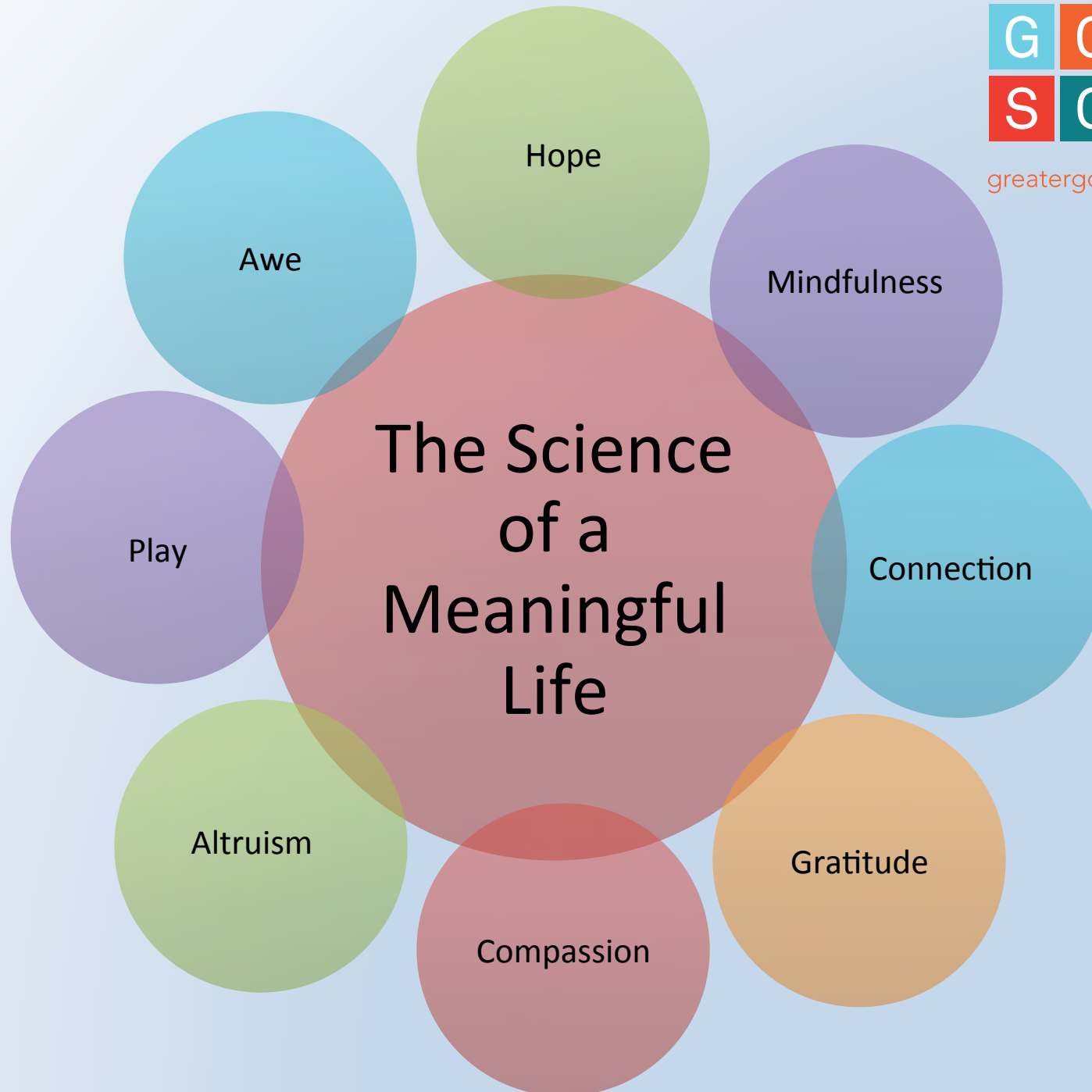


2. Flow

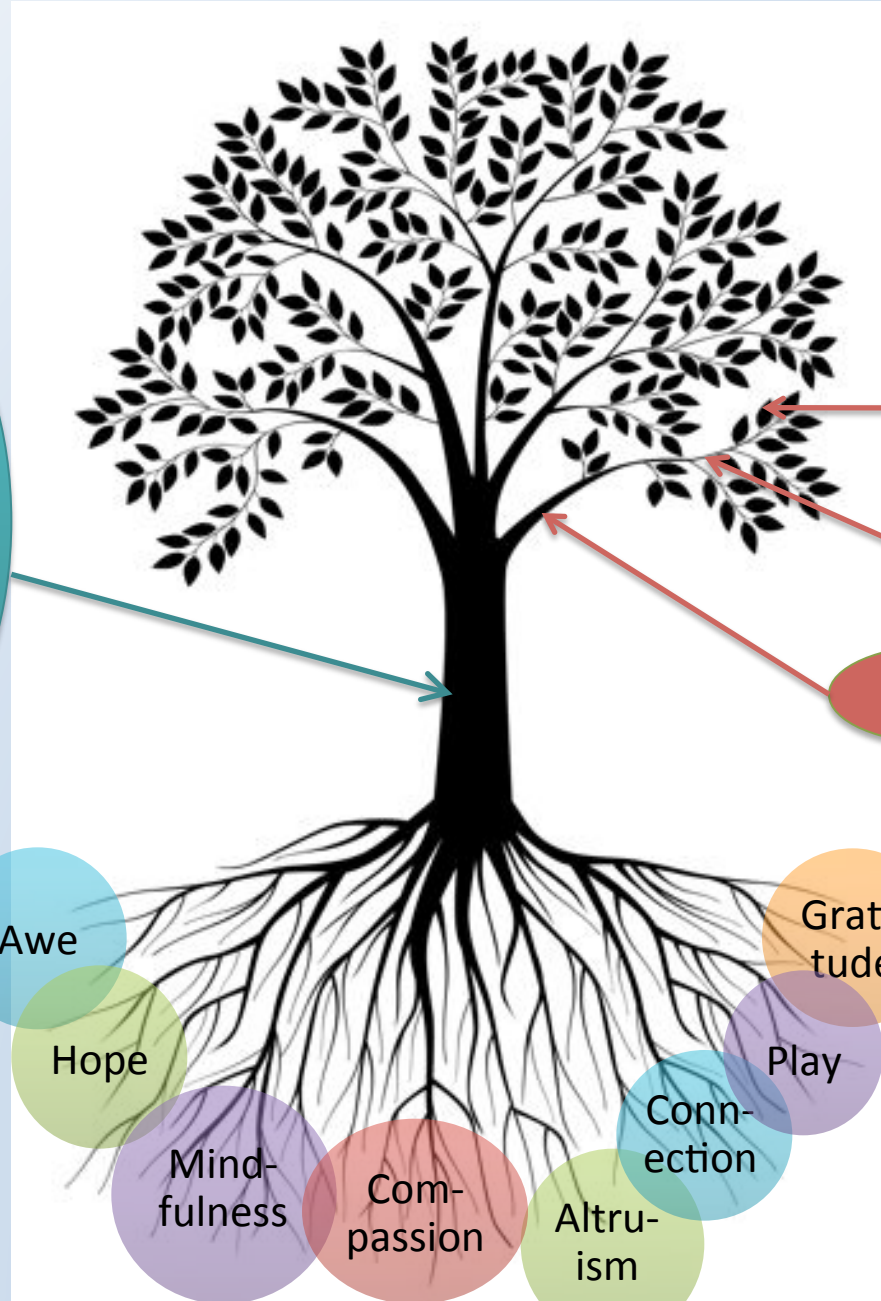


3. Meaningful life

What IS
“a meaningful life”?



- Executive Functions
- Critical Thinking
 - Creativity
- Curiosity/Passion
 - Self-Efficacy
 - Perseverance
 - Social skills
 - Emotional Literacy/Regulation
 - Ethical Reasoning



Awe

Hope

Mindfulness

Compassion

Altruism

Connection

Play

Gratitude

Lessons

Topic

Subject Area

How This Translates in the Real World...

Forbes

| Skill | 1970 | NOW |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Teamwork | 10 | 1 |
| Problem Solving | 12 | 2 |
| Interpersonal Skills | 13 | 3 |
| Oral Communication | 4 | 4 |
| Listening | 5 | 5 |
| Personal/Career Development | 6 | 6 |
| Creative Thinking | 7 | 7 |
| Leadership | 8 | 8 |
| Goal Setting/Motivation | 9 | 9 |
| Writing | 1 | 10 |
| Organizational Effectiveness | 11 | 11 |
| Computation | 2 | 12 |
| Reading | 3 | 13 |

Students today... (Damon, 2009; Levine, 2008)

Lack of purpose

Anxiety

Depression



Substance abuse

Self-injure

Eating disorders

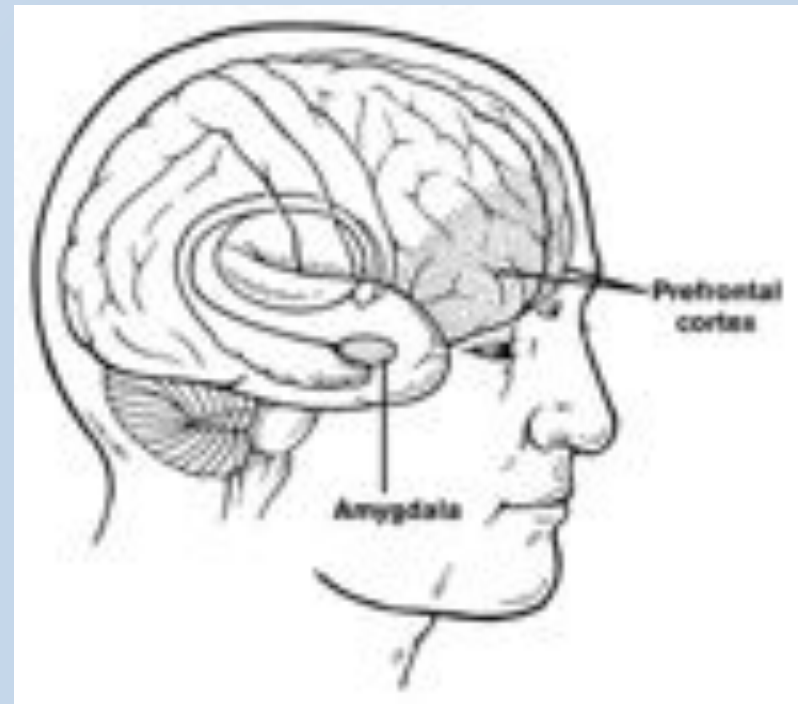
PERFECTIONISM (Covington, 1984; Dweck, 2007)

- Created by environment, not inborn
- Focus is on making mistakes, not success
- Fueled by fear of failure, avoidance of criticism (even constructive), frustration, disappointment
- Keeps kids from taking risks, embracing challenge, learning from their mistakes & enjoying their successes

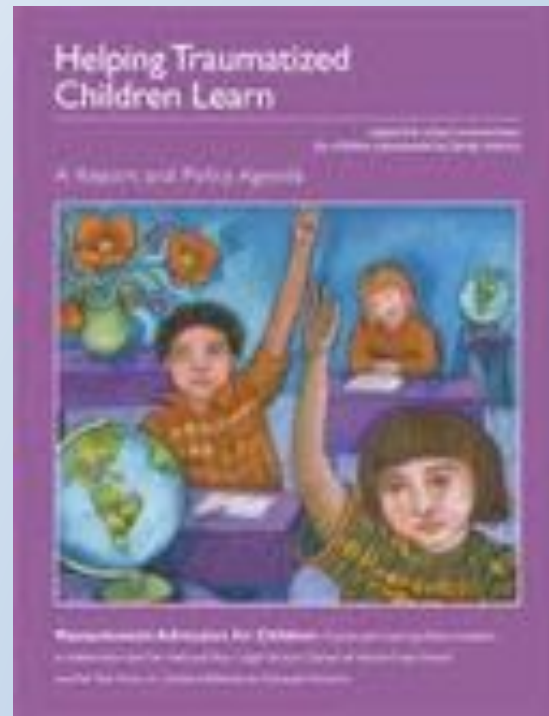


LOW RESILIENCE (Davidson & Begley, 2012)

- The role of the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala



TRAUMA



Helping Traumatized Children Learn

http://www.massadvocates.org/documents/HTCL_9-09.pdf

Characteristics of Kids High in Hope

- Can set *clear and attainable* goals.
- Able to develop *multiple* strategies to reach those goals.
- Stay *motivated* to use the strategies to attain goals, even when the going gets tough. (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)



Students High in Hope:

- Greater academic success
- Stronger friendships
- More creative & better at problem-solving
- Lower levels of depression & anxiety
- Don't take failure personally—they use it to improve performance.
- **More optimistic** (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)



Developing Hope

(Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)



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1. What's most important to you? Why? Looking back on your life, what do you want to be remembered for? Why?



2. List the broad categories of what's most important to you (e.g., family, friends, school, sports, environment, future career).

Developing Hope

(Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)

3. Pick one category you could improve. Create 2-3 goals that are specific, measurable and take a “solutions-oriented” approach.
4. Rank those goals in order of importance.



5. Breakdown the top ranked goal into steps.
6. In case you encounter obstacles to any of these steps, visualize at least 1 different pathway to reach that goal.

Two More Things About Hope...

7. Tell stories of success.



8. Enjoy the process!



Self-Compassion (Neff, 2011)

The practice of quieting the inner critic, replacing it with a voice of support, understanding, and care for oneself



3 Components of Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2011)

- **Self-Kindness** vs. Self-Judgment



- **Common Humanity** vs. Isolation



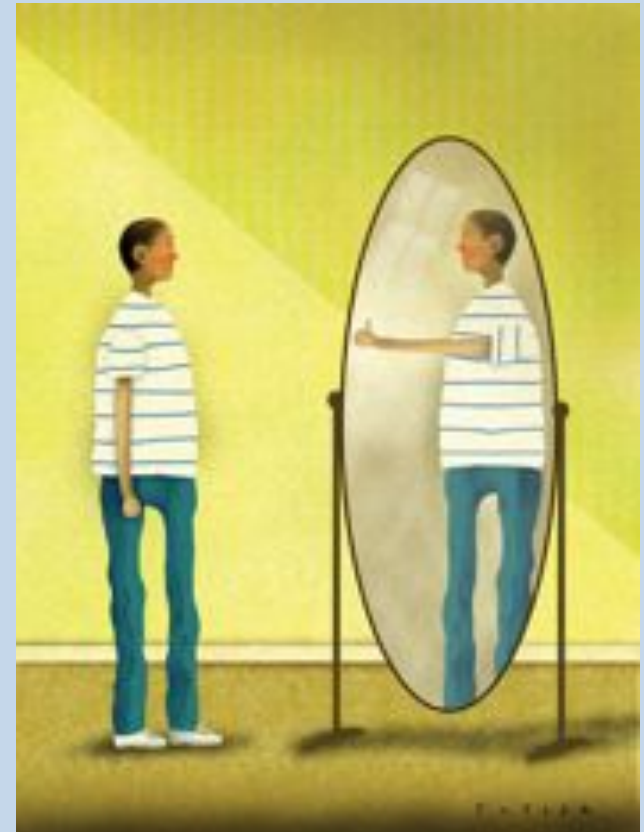
- **Mindfulness** vs. Over-identification



Benefits of Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2011)

- **Reductions in:** Anxiety, depression, stress, perfectionism, body shame, fear of failure
- **Increases in:** Life satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, creativity, gratitude
- Greater compassion & empathy for others and more forgiveness of others



3 Practices of Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2011)

- Talk to yourself as you would a best friend




- Self-squeeze



- Breathe-in, breathe-out compassion

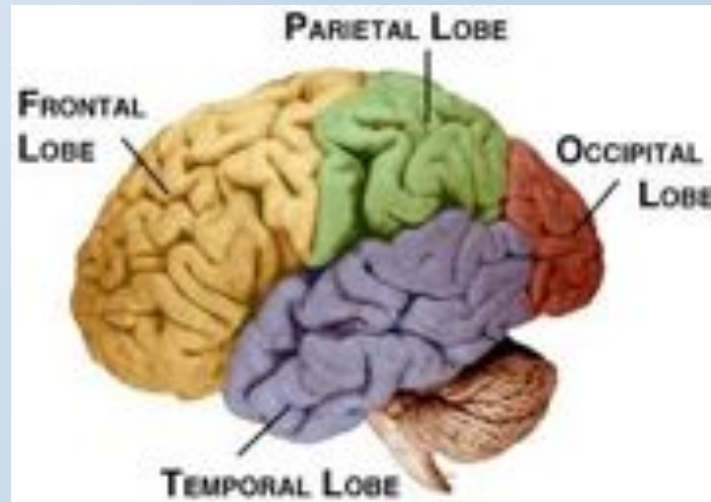


Mindfulness



“The awareness that arises out of intentionally paying attention in an open, kind, and discerning way” (Shapiro & Carlson, 2006)

Mindfulness and Brain Plasticity (Davidson & Begley, 2012)



Benefits of Mindfulness



Boosts:

- Positive emotions & resilience
- Attention skills (and neural mechanisms)
- Memory

Reduces:

- Stress & anxiety
- Depression (and prevents relapse)
- Negative emotions
- Post Traumatic stress

Mindfulness Practice

- Sitting meditation



- Walking meditation



- Loving-kindness meditation

Gratitude (Emmons, 2007)

“..it’s an affirmation of goodness--that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we’ve received.”



“We recognize that the sources of this goodness are outside of ourselves.... We acknowledge that other people—or even higher powers, if you’re of a spiritual mindset—gave us many gifts, big and small, to help us achieve the goodness in our lives.”

Why Gratitude is Good...

- Strengthens social ties.
- Increases self-worth.
- Middle school students who practice gratitude (Froh, 2008):
 - Higher levels of optimism
 - Increased life satisfaction
 - Decreased negative feelings
 - Greater satisfaction with school



Taking Gratitude Deeper...

- Notice intentions
- Appreciate costs
- Recognize the value of benefits



Gratitude Activities

Gratitude journals

Gratitude letters

Stream of gratitude
(Mindful Writing) (Broderick, 2013)



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