

The Future is **SO BRIGHT!**

We live in a world where the daily news has headlines swiped from the story lines of bad movies from the 1980s. A world where daily updates on a disintegrating ozone layer or natural disaster fill our screens. A world where even our personal lives are on display and the opportunity exists to be unfavourably compared to others in social media.

The world can be a ruthless and intimidating place when viewed through the lense of today's headlines or social media. It is easy to become disheartened and disillusioned with the world surrounding us.

Research undertaken in 2013 indicates that stress in a pregnant womb passes through to the child in the form of reduced protein. If the presence of stress in the womb is toxic to the unborn child.. what damage are we doing to the life of children born into the world that are then exposed to stress in their daily lives?

What kind of world do you want to have our children grow up in?

Research is clear that optimism has an effect on health and well-being and on improving our ability to withstand stress and anxiety.

So what impact can optimism have on children?

Optimistic children perform better at school, in social relationships and in sport. Optimistic children have an increased resilience and confidence and are often proactive in seeking assistance from others.

Did you know that children can learn optimism from those around them?

This positive approach has been coined 'Learned Optimism' by Martin Seligman and been proven in laboratory tests. Yes, optimism can be learned!

Cognitive psychology suggests that people learn through social interactions. That is, through copying and mirroring behaviours that they observe in their environment. Children are highly impressionable when it comes to social learning. Positive adults can provide a supportive environment in which children can develop and practice optimism.

As optimistic thinking feels intrinsically better to most children than pessimistic thinking, it is a behaviour that can be quickly learned.

Likewise, if the adults around children are negative and pessimistic, the children are more than likely to have the same pessimistic attitudes and behaviours.

If these habits are ongoing, Seligman believes people are at an increased risk for acquiring "Learned Helplessness" - the opposite of learned optimism. Learned helplessness perpetuates an attitude of apathy and negativity. Helpless people believe that they have no control of their life and of the events that happen to them.

They believe they are at the mercy of the universe and see themselves as a magnet for misfortune.

Seligman, as the leading psychologist in the field of optimism, has studied the thinking styles that underpin optimism, and the way in which optimists differ from pessimists through self-talk. This optimistic explanatory style can be summarised by the "three P's": Pervasive, Permanent, and Personal.



"Optimistic children have an increased resilience and confidence and are often proactive in seeking assistance from others.

Did you know that children can learn optimism from those around them? "

Optimists tend to view the causes of positive events as global, or PERVASIVE, rather than specific. So if they receive an award for achievement they will think, "I got that because I am a good worker" rather than a more specific reason such as, "I worked hard this year." For negative events, this self-talk is reversed. So if an optimist fails an exam, they will tend to think of a specific reason such as "I didn't study hard enough" rather than more global reasons such as "I can't do this because I am stupid".

An optimist tends to believe that the causes of a positive event are stable and PERMANENT rather than temporary. So if a meeting goes well, they will think, "they like me and agreed with the ideas I presented" rather than "they were just being nice and probably aren't interested." If the event was negative, optimists are more likely to choose an explanation that involves a changeable cause, for example, "I need to get more information to help back up what I am saying" rather than "they are not interested and what I was saying was all wrong."

Finally, optimists view PERSONAL causes as responsible for positive events. For example if they do well in an assessment and rating visit, they will ascribe this to their own skills. However, a pessimist will tend to attribute the success to

external factors such as; "we had an assessor that didn't look at everything". If the event is negative, the optimist will look to external rather than personal causes. For example, losing a job might be attributed to the attitude of the employer or the opportunity to take a new direction rather than taken on as a personal failure. In some situations, however, optimists may freely accept personal responsibility for disappointment in order for them to reflect and improve the situation for next time.

We all can help support children to become more optimistic. Why not try 5 simple methods that can make a difference to your life and those of the children you care for...?

1. Assist children to reframe their responses to setbacks. When they are expressing negative feelings like "I cannot draw" encourage them to reframe their attitude to the activity with encouragement that results in language being reframed such as "You do enjoy drawing and the more you practice the better you get!"
2. When faced with a challenge, together with a child, or a group of children, brainstorm ways to change the situation into a positive one.
3. When children confide in you about a problem ask them what they would do to make it better.
4. Practice optimism regularly. Ask children to think of 5 positive outcomes to different scenarios that they would find to be negative.
5. Be a good role model and use the techniques above yourself. As always, seeing is the key way children learn! Practice what you preach.

Optimism has the capacity to be infectious. But save your infection control procedures for other areas in your services and make it your goal to the spread this disease. You will find that in doing so you vaccinate children against apathy and negativity and secure not just their health and well being, but yours too!

HOW OPTIMISTIC ARE YOU?

Why not take the Learned Optimism test?

<http://web.stanford.edu/class/msande271/onetools/LearnedOpt.html>

or hear from Martin Seligman himself on "You Tube"

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Me9T19JhvJw>

References

<http://www.parentingideasclub.com.au/getattachment/dac08008-4275-4b5c-93a7-5436d01301a9/Optimism.aspx>
Seligman., Martin.E. (2006) "Learned Optimism", New York, Random House, Inc.,