

MENTAL HEALTH

Manifesting and affirming

Positive practices have a variety of long lasting impacts on mental health and physical well-being

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Laughing cheerfully as he starts his lesson Charles Stampley exudes positive energy. Whether making jokes about food from Sonic, calming down students panicking about grades, or showing genuine interest in his students personal success, Stampley remains a steady positive force in the lives of many that he interacts with.

Stampley is a former member of the U.S. military, and would help build up soldiers' self-esteem helping to find positive light in a world of negativity. Stampley now uses those skills as a history teacher, building up the students and staff around him.

"It's important to be grounded in the real world and understand that bad things are going to happen," Stampley said. "Bad things are going to happen to good people, and being prepared to help in those circumstances, helping yourself, helping your friends is important. Not everything is good every day."

Stampley helps others remain positive by being positive himself. In the modern world there are many practices people can use to focus on and bring more positivity into their lives.

According to the Berkeley Well-Being Institute, positivity is the continued action of being optimistic or positive. That includes positive emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.

However along with true positivity which is fostered through healthy positive habits, there is also false positivity which can feel forced, and can just be used to suppress other negative emotions. The Berkeley

Well-Being Institute pushes an ideology that positivity may only be good for those who are genuine about what they are feeling.

"Positivity can impact memories," psychology teacher Diana Croll-Guard said. "There is a concept in psychology called mood congruence which states that someone's current mood will help elicit memories that match. For instance, when someone is happy, they are more likely to recall happy memories. When someone is angry, they will have a stronger recall of other instances when they had that emotion."

Positivity can impact mental health in many ways. According to the University of Pennsylvania Online LPS, the serotonin produced when a person thinks optimistically can actually have a calming or focus effect. Furthermore, positive emotions can activate a person's prefrontal cortex stimulating problem solving and creative thinking. According to the Business Insider, positive thinking habits can also have long term physical benefits such as low-

er risk of heart failure, fewer chronic illnesses, and reduced risk of hypertension.

Recently, there is a larger awareness of the impacts on mental health," Croll-Guard said. "We can thank a few high-profile athletes for their bravery in addressing their mental health issues under public scrutiny, Naomi Osaka and Simone Biles. They both did an amazing job of humanizing the fact that mental health can have huge impacts on an individual and that it is important to address mental health in addition to physical health."

MINDFULNESS AND AFFIRMATION

One thing that is important for maintaining positivity is mindfulness which is being aware of thoughts, emotions, and things going on in the surrounding environment without making judgments. According to the University of Pennsylvania Online LPS, it is important for people to disengage when they realize they are around negative environmental stimuli such as a negative work environment, group of people, or continuous news involving crime and hatefulness. It is also helpful for people to avoid negative thought patterns including perfectionism, minimization of positive experiences, and over-generalization of negative experiences.

"Mindfulness to me is being content with where I am, or what's around me, just staying calm and knowing that I'm going to be fine," junior Gavin Suskic said. "It's important to step back and just chill out for a second to be like, 'Okay, I'm good, I'm fine', and to just be mindful for a little bit. I feel like it'll help to not feel so stressed or overwhelmed in the moment."

One practice commonly related to improved mindfulness is meditation. Meditation, while often represented by a person sitting with their palms facing up resting on their knees, is actually a term that refers to a variety of practices. According to National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), meditation is meant to focus on mind and body integration and often include maintained focus on breathing, visuals, phrases, or sounds. Based on data from a 2012 survey done in the U.S.,

utilized by NCCIH among those who responded that they practiced meditation 73% claimed to meditate for their general wellness, and 92% claimed to meditate for relaxation or stress reduction purposes.

"Meditation is focusing inwardly, emptying your mind of all external stimuli and breathing deeply," Croll-Guard said. "One of my favorite experiences with meditation happened in grad school. One professor would always have our class start with a quick meditation mindfulness practice. The quick meditation at the beginning of class helped us focus on our class material better afterward because we were not thinking about everything else in our lives we were carrying with us into the space."

Something that can help people feel more confident and secure with themselves is positive affirmation, which Oxford languages defines as emotional support or encouragement. Affirmation can also be defined as something

being affirmed or confirmed.

"I've had a lot of experience helping other people, not just students, but soldiers and employees," Stampley said. "I'm familiar with helping students, so if a student has a bad day, or something bad happens at home I can try to help find the positives in that person. If somebody is doing really good in school, but something bad happens at home I can tell them, 'Hey, you're doing really good, you have a bright future'."

Another form of affirmation is self-affirmation. Self-affirmations are similar to mantras, and according to MentalHealth.com, are statements which positively assert someone's worth. According to the University of Pennsylvania Online LPS, positive affirmations can re-frame negative

thoughts, and the act of engaging in positive self-talk can be motivating, can improve state of mind, and can reduce worry.

"Affirmations are just a way for someone to keep building themselves up, it's really all in the mind," sophomore Mallory Hartono said. "Affirmations are a good way for someone to keep positive about what they're doing, like when someone gets down and they're about to give up, affirmations can definitely help with that. I normally just keep telling myself, there has to be some way around it. There's no set way to find something. I always tell myself, there has to be another way. If this way doesn't work, it's fine."

MANIFESTING AND GOAL SETTING

One practice that can be related with affirmation is manifestation. Manifestation, according to MentalHealth.com, is the process of using focused thoughts and actions in order to bring certain desires into reality, which often involves visualization and goal setting. Manifestation can be used to overcome negative thought patterns such as catastrophizing which is the act of assuming or imagining the worst possible outcome for a situation. However, manifestation is not magical, because

goals still often require actual action in order to be achieved, meaning manifesting a 100 on a math test may not actually have that result.

"Manifestation is like wishing for a positive result, or the best results of something," Suskic said. "I think of it almost like praying, but not in a religious way. I think realistically manifestation has an effect of making people more optimistic. I think of it more as a short term thing. For example, when manifesting my group does good on a quiz, I don't believe that there's a way that something would change the results, but it makes the people around me feel better and have more optimism."

Something that can help manifested dreams come to fruition is goal setting. According to PositivePsychology.com, goal setting can improve performance, persistence, task enjoyment, effort, and self-esteem. According to CALE Learning Enhancement, for the best

results people can set both short term and long term goals, and they can set SMART goals which stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based goals.

Gavin Suskic

"I think of manifestation almost like praying, but not in a religious way."

Junior

aspects in life, and cause someone to feel lost." One well known example of goal setting is New Year's resolutions. At the start of the new year many people come up with intentions for the year ahead whether to exercise more, eat less sugar, or just be nicer. Although many people set goals for the new year, many people also quit their goals soon after with national quitters day landing on the second Friday in January.

"People shouldn't have a set time for when they want to set their goals," Hartono said. "People should be able to make their own goals whenever they want."

Setting it up where someone will do a goal once a year specifically on New Year's, makes it feel like they have to wait till they get there, and kind of waste time until then. I don't think setting a New Year's resolution is really that useful."

Another activity that many people participate in at the start of the new year is the creation of vision boards. Vision boarding is an activity done year round, and is typically a collage of images, words, quotes, and other decorative items which can be made physically or digitally. Vision boards can be a way for people to physically visualize their goals. According to BetterUp, vision boards can be used to manifest goals, and frequently reviewing the board can help reinforce goals and possibly increase motivation.

"I love vision boards," Suskic said. "I like making them visually appealing, and then also having some goals in mind, or general feelings of where I want to go, keeping in mind whenever the vision board is set to, whether it's long term or short term."

According to Culture Works, working towards and achieving goals helps with self-esteem, creating a growth mindset, and learning about individual strengths and weaknesses. Culture Works also states that celebrating achievements is important for maintaining motivation and fulfillment when working towards goals.

"I feel very happy and satisfied when I've met my goals, and I feel like I should try to make more goals that will make me reach beyond that to get to be the person I want to be," Hartono said. "My vision board is more of things I've been proud of, and what I've accomplished. That way I can see how I've progressed and where I need to go. I like having boards to see what I've done, so I know myself, I've made progress, I've done this, and I can do more."

GRATITUDE AND EMPATHY

Along the path of life every human being experiences some good, and some bad. One practice that is often talked about when considering a positive attitude is gratitude, which is the state of being grateful or thankful. According to PositivePsychology.com, the practice of gratitude whether saying thank you or keeping a gratitude journal can improve empathy, interpersonal relationships, stress, anxiety, and depression bringing people more happiness in daily life and even in some cases reducing feelings of pain.

"If someone goes through life just being thankful for the little things they're going to see all the positivity around them, it's huge," Stampley said. "That's one reason why I'm so positive and thankful for little things, because I've been in situations that aren't positive. I really don't take things for granted."

Many practices related to maintaining a positive mindset such as manifesting and gratitude can also be associated with some form of spirituality. Some define spirituality as being concerned with the spirit rather than material things, some define it as a belief that there is something bigger than everyone that connects everyone, and some connect the idea of spirituality with religion. While acts like gratitude can relate to spiritual or religious acts like prayer, positive practices are separate from religious ideas, and one does not need to be religious to practice different forms of positivity.

"Spirituality means different things for different people," Stampley said. "For a lot of people it means religion, but you can manifest and meditate and spend time alone for non religious reasons. Just thinking about the bigger things in life, besides the daily grind is important."

Having a positive attitude can affect an individual's mental health, but Michigan State University Extension

writer Ann Chastain also states that those surrounding a person with a positive attitude can be affected by it as well.

"Positivity is just the act of being positive to not only yourself, but to others," Hartono said. "It's important to be mentally aware that you're in that mindset of being positive and that you should act that way to other people, because other people can be affected by how you're feeling, whether you're positive or negative that day. You need to be aware that other people can feel what you're feeling, especially with empathy being a sense on people's emotions. I think positivity is just keeping yourself in check so you don't affect others with your thoughts."



Positive practices

Visualizing

Visualization involves picturing a desired outcome, and can be assisted by meditation apps or videos. Consistently visualizing a goal can improve focus, self-confidence, and motivation. **INFO** Penn LPS Online

Acts of kindness

Volunteering time through large or small acts of kindness can enrich the lives of others and give someone a sense of purpose. This can create a sense of community, and reduce stress and anxiety. **INFO** Penn LPS Online

Positive music

The iso-principle matches music to a specific mood or emotion. Listening to positive music can facilitate a mood shift. Making music can cause dopamine and serotonin release, influencing focus, sleep, and mood. **INFO** Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare

Gratitude journaling

Gratitude journaling is the practice of writing down things someone is grateful for throughout the day. This can help improve mood, and reduce toxic thoughts. Gratitude is associated with increased happiness, optimism, increased self esteem, and better psychological health. **INFO** Penn LPS Online

INFOGRAPHIC BY Liberty Pittman

Bowie affirmations

What students say to themselves to improve their confidence

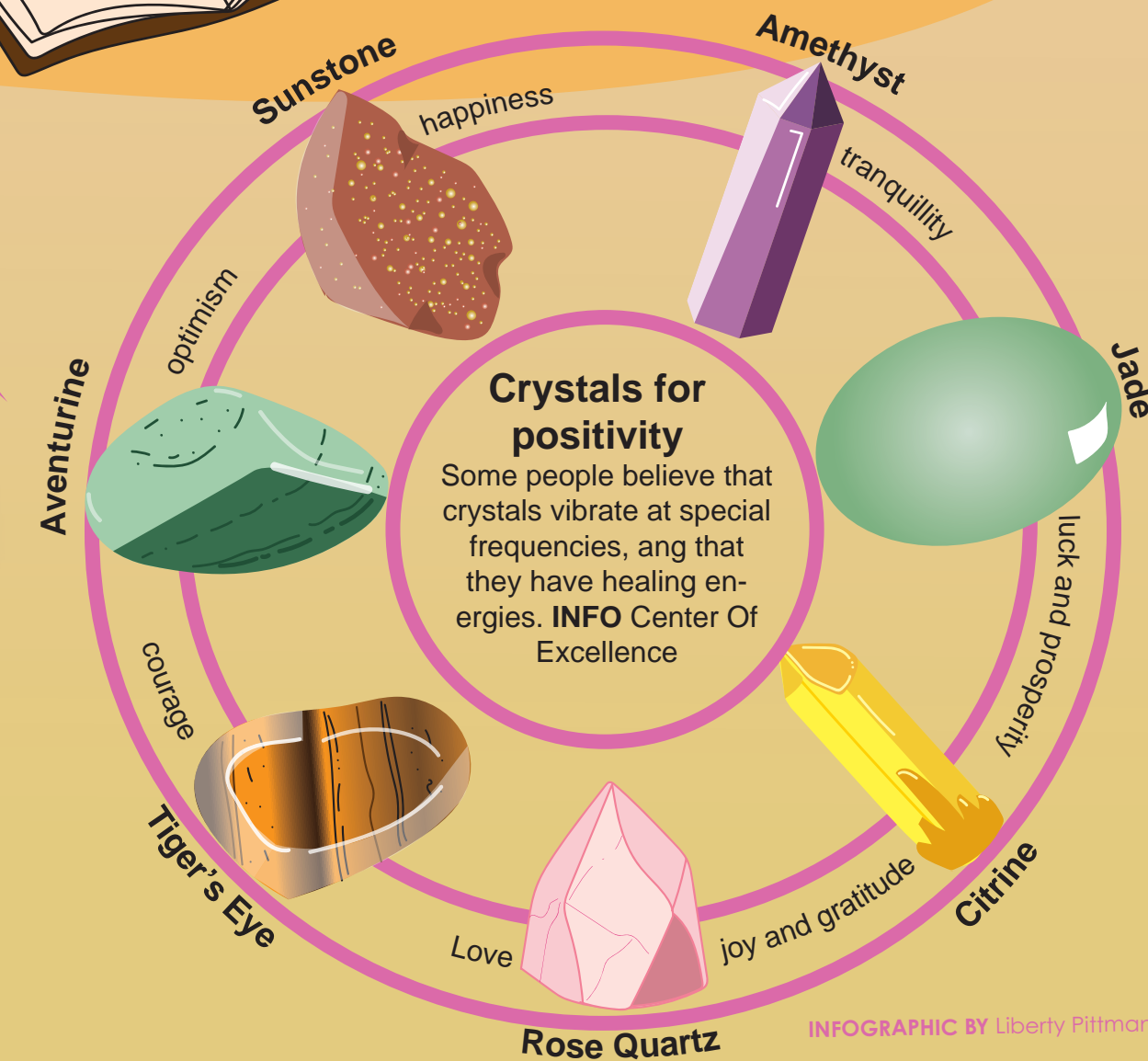
I can do this. I got this.
- Grace Chandler

Just be present.
-Gavin Suskic

I'm pretty, talented, and smart.
-Bubba Infante

You are human, change is bound to happen.
-Clover Campbell

I can do hard things.
-Avery Loyd



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda

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