

Gratitude Letter

Gratitude

Exercise

10-20 min.

Client

Yes

Expressing gratitude to others can have a significant impact on well-being. Previous research has tested the impact of "gratitude letter": a letter in which gratitude is expressed to another person. In a study by Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky and Sheldon (2011) it was found that compared to their non-motivated counterparts, motivated participants reported improved overall well-being and fewer depressive symptoms at the end of the intervention. In addition, motivated participants also showed improved well-being at the 6-month follow-up and reductions in depressive symptoms at the 9-month follow-up (see also Seligman et al., 2005). Note that no improvements in well-being unless they were motivated to engage in the activity.

Goal

The goal of this exercise is to increase gratitude and sense of well-being by writing a gratitude letter.

Advice

This exercise can be done just once, or can be done on a regular basis. Some studies have asked participants, in addition to writing and reflecting on the letter, also to deliver it and read it in person to the recipient. Although this can be a valuable experience, it may not be an option for all clients. For instance, a client may find it too difficult or uncomfortable to deliver and read the letter. This may reduce motivation. Given that improvements in well-being were only found in participants who were motivated to complete the exercise, it is important to take this preference into consideration when doing this exercise.

Suggested Readings

Lyubomirsky, S., Dickerhoof, R., Boehm, J.K., Sheldon, K.M. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: An experimental longitudinal intervention to boost well-being. *Emotion, 11*, 391-402.

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist, 60*, 410-421.

Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 111-131.

Tool Description

Instructions

Gratitude is a feeling of being thankful for the people and things in your life. The expression of gratitude brings positive emotions to those receiving and giving thanks. Yet, we do not always express our gratitude to the people in our lives. Here is your opportunity.

Choose someone in your life who has been helpful and kind to you, yet you haven't had an opportunity to express your gratitude. This person can be a family member (parent, grandparent, child, spouse, etc.), a friend, teacher or coach – anyone who has made a positive impact on your life but has never (or rarely) heard you express your gratitude. Take a moment to think about the things that this person has done that make you extremely grateful.

In this exercise you are to write a letter of gratitude to this person. Take 10-20 minutes to write this letter expressing your gratitude for what this person has contributed to your life. Use the following points as a guide to help you:

- Address the letter specifically to the person (e.g. "Dear...").
- Do not worry about grammar and spelling.
- Directly address the person throughout the letter.
- Describe specific things that this person has done that made you grateful and how this person's behavior has affected your life.
- End the letter in a way that identifies it is from you (e.g. Sincerely..., or Love..., etc.).
- If possible, deliver the letter personally and ask the person to read the letter in your presence or read it aloud to them during your visit.