



Meaning and Purpose

Lesson workbook

Your companion guide

Table of Contents

Lesson topic	Page
Before you jump in	4
Part 1. The value of having meaning in your life	5
Part 2. The search for meaning in your life	7
Part 3. Applying meaning and purpose in your life	13
Personal action plan	21
References	22
Learn more with Zone Positive	23

General instruction for watching all Zone Positive videos



The “Pause” button is here. If you don’t see this bar on your screen, roll your cursor over the lower left hand corner of your screen and the bar should reappear. Click on the Right Arrow ► to resume watching the video.

Important Note: If you want to pause the video and go to another website, open a new window in your web browser. This will enable you to return to the video lesson and resume where you left off.

Part 1: The value of having meaning in your life

Key Points

The presence of meaning is the degree to which you perceive your life to have intrinsic significance, purpose, or value. Over the years, researchers have studied the presence of meaning in life and its relationship to the promotion of well-being. From this research, several important findings have emerged.

Maintaining a sense of meaning in your life can make you more resilient in the face of great challenge and distress. It can act as a buffer against the feelings of existential doubt and hopelessness that may arise during life's most troubling moments. Having meaning in your life can also act as a stabilizing factor during times of change and transition. It can serve as an anchor to keep us level during life's inevitable ups and downs, or a compass by which to orient our actions during times of confusion.

Research indicates that a sense of meaning has been positively related to a number of measures of healthy psychological functioning, including work enjoyment, life satisfaction, hope, and happiness. By comparison, a lack of meaning in life has been associated in studies with depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.

Research has substantiated the positive impact of meaning in life on physical health. The presence of meaning has been associated with faster recovery times from diseases, wound healing, tissue repair, and higher cancer regression rates. As Carol Ryff and Burton Singer, both professors of psychology write, when an individual is actively engaged in purposeful living, the positive effects on biological functioning are truly significant.

Over the course of one's lifetime, traumatic events or losses can often bring about a meaning crisis, raising questions pertaining to the purpose of life and the nature of suffering and fairness in the world. We may find ourselves asking questions, such as "Why me?" or "Why now?" as we struggle to make peace with both the reasons the event happened and its implications for the future. Having a strong sense of meaning may not only help to provide perspective on a traumatic event, but also to instill upon us a reverence for our lives, despite these moments of despair.

Periods of change and transition are also times in life when a sense of meaning can be invaluable. It can be graduation from college into an intimidating world, the upheaval of a divorce, the loss of a job, becoming empty nesters, moving to a new city, or any number of similar events. Most people want to feel in control of their lives. It is in periods of dramatic change, facing uncertain futures, that we often feel *least* in control. It is in these times that the presence of meaning can provide an orienting sense of stability and comfort.



Part 1: The value of having meaning in your life

Exercise 1: What's important to you

In the space below, make a list of the most important things in your life; what is it that you value most.

Step 1: Create your list

Step 2: Prioritize your list from most important to less important

Step 3: Consider your typical day or week; are you satisfied that you are living your values– are you focused on the most important things in your life?

<u>Priorities in your life (from step 2)</u>	Satisfied?	Not Satisfied?
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