A woman's profile is shown in silhouette, facing right. The interior of her head is filled with a vibrant, lush green forest scene, with sunlight filtering through the trees. The background is a soft-focus green forest with sunlight creating a bokeh effect.

# Gratitude and Happiness: Mother Nature's Harmonious Survival Recipe

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# Adaptability: Mother Nature's Daily Exercise

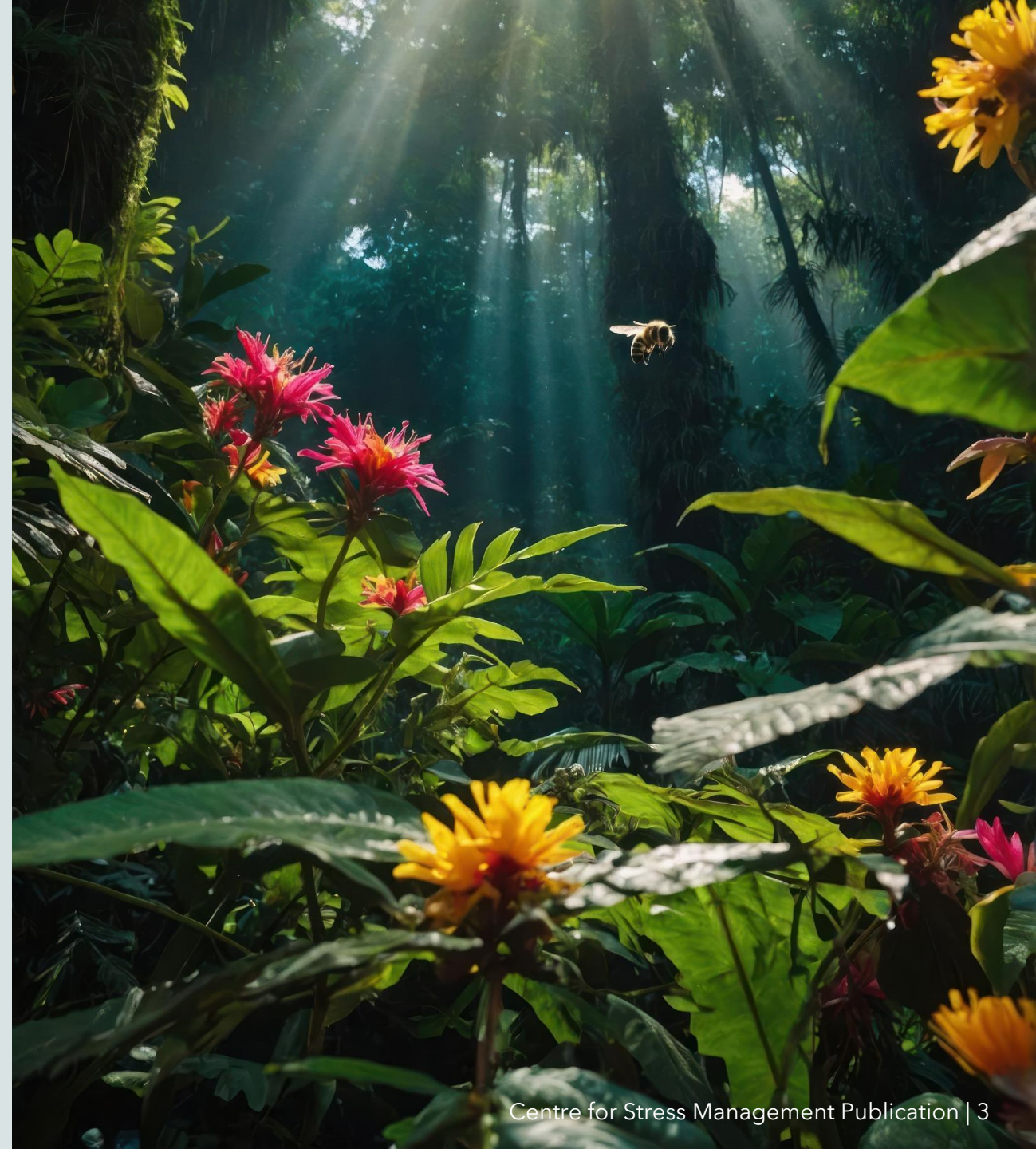
***Five feelings for survival:*** the human brain relies on five basic feelings to survive and thrive in our daily lives. Happy, sad, fear, anger and shame, four of which are considered “negative” feelings, has over 400,000 years of evolution that created the *negative bias brain*. Our negative bias brain is not to “beat us up” as one would assume with four out of five feelings being negative. These feelings, especially those that are negative, is mother nature’s gift to “build us up” by way of learning how to adapt when we are happy or unhappy to sustain our homeostasis.

This handout will highlight two key areas of adaptability; being happy and being thankful, (there are many others) that will enhance your life skills to keep surviving and then thriving in the best version of your authentic self in these challenging times.

# Survival: Adaptability and Resilience Neurons

**The Neuroplasticity Code:** modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) have been in existence approximately 300,000 years. One theory with our ability to survive all these years is how humans have been able to experience diverse working and living conditions, and as well, embrace the seasonal changes with the weather in the various terrains we live. Neurologically speaking, the brain rewires itself after life's challenges, either by strengthening the current neural pathways and or building new neural pathways, or both. In short, we daily connect, then adapt, and then restore our wellness.

**The Grit Circuits:** the brain learned early on that life will have challenges and opportunities that activates the negative bias brain for survival. The disappointments, losses and other challenges we face is one of the most effective ways of strengthening our neural pathways to manage our negative feelings, sustain healthy hard behaviors, and keep a positive mindset as we work through the unhappy times. Learning how to remain resilient in the now and persevere over time (our "grit") promotes one of the highest states of emotional and physical well-being. There is a real science to the mantra "no pain no gain."





# Survival: Happy | Gratitude

The human experience happy is usually seen as an emotion or feeling, an internal transient state that is often times a reaction to an external experience. Associated with happy is an experience that involves a reward, a pleasure, achievement or goal fulfillment. Numerous models exist as to what are the elements of happy, our model is based upon four key internal and external life events.

**Enjoyment** can arise from being alone and as well being with others whereby we experience joy in the activities, conversations, intimacies and other life activities that create “happy memories.” Enjoyment can also be experienced as a temporary and or sustained state of well-being.

**Interesting** activates many brain chemicals and healthy behaviors, especially dopamine that boosts curiosity which drives a person to explore new ideas, life skills and perspective on life. Pursuing things of interest often times enhances social engagement and fosters a deeper sense of belonging.

**Satisfaction** arises when we engage in a life activity with our best version of our authentic self, whether we won and or learned from that event. Achieving satisfaction on how we performed regardless of the outcome motivates a person to keep pursuing their goals in life, strengthening our grit and growth mindset.

**Purposeful** provides a person with a clear direction and genuine values, and when aligned, unleashes a flow that enhances feelings of fulfillment, a deeper sense of happiness for many. Purposeful also increases focus and attentiveness that strengthens cognitive functioning and mood regulation.

# Survival: Happy | Gratitude

Recognizing that work and relationships are the two main sources of survival; work for financial stability and relationships for mood stability, we can also experience various types of happy at work and in our relationship worlds. Work and relationships require connection, stress management, learning and adaptability (among many other activities) for happiness to become an experience.

**Work** happiness arises from a sense of autonomy and mastery, working in a like-minded community, giving and receiving respect – civility, meeting our basic needs, and harmonious with our values. Growing research and our clinical practice also affirms that purposeful work is a long-term source of happiness that is expressed at work and carries over in our personal life. We see purposeful work that activates an intrinsic motivation to engage in deeper learning about our work and how that new, deeper knowledge can make a more positive impact on our organization and community.

**Relationship** happiness is activated when we first experience unconditional trust and psychological safety at home and at work. Connecting with supportive relationships buffers our stress, invites collaboration and group learning which sustains a feedback loop for lifelong learning. Pair-bonding with others releases not only the feel good chemical dopamine, but we believe more importantly, our brain-mind-body has the bonding chemical oxytocin released promoting deeper intimacy connections. Being mindful on how to practice empathy and active listening, kind behaviors is another form of “feeling happy.”

*We are rewarded through purposeful work and meaningful relationships that transforms short burst of pleasure into longer lasting happiness.*



# Being Happy

Elements	1. Chemicals	2. Duration	3. Benefits
<b>A. Enjoyment</b>	More so dopamine but as well oxytocin.	Range from short burst to many hours.	Sustains healthy habits, reduces stress.
<b>B. Interesting</b>	A mixture of dopamine, adrenaline and oxytocin.	A brief moment to a lifetime of curiosity and exploring.	Skill expansion, knowledge stacking and greater perspective.
<b>C. Satisfaction</b>	Depending on the challenge, cortisol, adrenalin, endorphins.	Short periods to long term and throughout life.	Enhances confidence, strengthens grit, sustains positive self-talk.
<b>D. Purposeful</b>	Oxytocin and endorphins, for some dopamine and adrenaline.	Consistent conscious and unconscious presence throughout life.	Clarity and confidence, mood regulation, affirms authentic self.

# Survival: Happiness | Gratitude

The four orientations to happiness; enjoyment, interesting, satisfaction, and purposeful, provide similar and different surviving opportunities and challenges that has kept us protected, fed, and connected.


**Nature** of happiness can range from temporary to enduring, hopefully reminding us that happiness does not come our way automatically, we must attend to and engage in healthy behaviors and thoughts to actualize a happiness state.

**Focus** of happiness involves being aware of the self and others on the circumstances and choices in life that bring us happiness and or disrupts our happiness.

**Impact** of happiness when present provides joyful memories that is a primary source of gratitude. Concurrently, the absence of happiness can also develop thankfulness with the lessons we learn in life from failures and disappointments.

**Neuroplasticity** from happiness boosts serotonin that improves mood regulation, reduces cortisol stress hormone and enhances resilience. Happiness combined with gratitude boosts the brain's happiness base line that reduces reactivity and increases reflection.

**Wellness** without the presence of happiness can be realized, requires the person to know the difference between healthy hard and unhealthy hard that shifts the brain's focus from feeling good to doing good.



Survival of the fittest is not being the strongest or the smartest, it is that person who can be adaptable with life and not let fear stop pursuing happiness or being in happiness. Pursuit of happiness is not to be feared, it is only to be understood. Understand more so one can fear less.

Dr Mark