

How to Change Your Brain (Really!)

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WHAT IS POSITIVE NEUROPLASTICITY?

Wow, that's a big word! What does it mean? Let's break it down:

POSITIVE = GOOD NEURO = BRAIN PLASTICITY = CHANGE

So "positive neuroplasticity" means "good brain change," or "changing your brain for the good."

Just because we're humans, with our big brains, we actually have the power to get over unhappy moods and all of the things that make us feel bad or get us down.

If we can do this, we can be happier and calmer, plus we can like ourselves a whole lot better!

We do this by growing our inner strengths. It's a bit like gardening: we pull out the (bad) weeds and plant the beautiful (good) flowers – in the brain. How good is that?!

HOW DO WE DO IT?

WELL, WE START WITH A SIMPLE IDEA: TAKE IN THE GOOD.

Every day we can always find something good going on! Maybe it's a kind look from your parent, a pat on the shoulder from your best friend, something funny you read in a book or saw on a video. Maybe it's just a sweet little bird song outside your bedroom window! All these things can be used to practice with. If we can really learn how to take these good experiences into ourselves, we can re-program our brains in ways that will make us happier and enjoy life more. Really!

To Take in the Good, we need a tool, something to practice with. Here's a really cool tool that will help a lot. It's called HEAL, which stands for four things:

- **HAVE** a good experience
- **ENRICH** it — make it better
- **ABSORB** it — make it even more real
- **LINK** it up with some not-so-good experience



HERE'S HOW TO DO EACH STEP:



1. **HAVE** a good experience.

Like we said, you can find good experiences anywhere, even on a “bad” day. Check it out! Look around and see or feel or hear something that makes you feel good, like maybe the way your dog looks when he sleeps, or the smell of breakfast as you wake up on a Saturday morning, or maybe just the good feelings inside when you look at that cool poster you hung on your wall last week. Just be aware of whatever it is and maybe name it out loud or at least in your head, anything that helps you keep your focus on it for a bit.

2. **ENRICH** it.

So how do you make something “richer?” Well, you add to it, of course! Focusing on that good experience you just noticed or created, you can make it richer by staying with it for a breath or longer, feeling it in your body, making it more intense (like turning up the volume!), or recognizing why it's important to you. You're protecting and strengthening the good experience, so it really sinks into you.

3. **ABSORB** it.

Here's where you can help your brain become “stickier” for good things, like a sponge that really soaks up a lot of water. Decide that you do want to receive this experience into yourself. Let it come into you and become a part of you, like a cup of hot chocolate spreading its warmth through you on a cold winter's day. Really enjoy whatever feels good or meaningful in this experience – like how happy it makes you to see your pet wagging his tail at you.

4. **LINK** it.

This step is powerful – but it's optional since it includes painful, stressful thoughts and feelings. To do it, think of something that makes you feel bad while also thinking of something that makes you feel good.

For example, you could focus on a nice thing your friend said to you while off to the side in your mind could be sad and angry feelings from being bullied at school. Very important: keep making the good feeling big and powerful and keep the bad feeling small and off to the side. You can imagine letting go of the not-so-good thing, and then focus on the good thing and let it fill in the empty space. If the painful feelings grab you, drop them and focus only on what helps you feel good. Later on, when it feels right, you can try linking again. And for sure tell a grownup if you keep getting sucked in to any particular feelings.

**WE EACH HAVE A SPECIAL POWER TO CHANGE OURSELVES FOR THE BETTER.
WE JUST HAVE TO USE IT!**

With practice it gets easier and easier. This is because your brain is really changing and helping you to feel stronger and more able to deal with whatever's going on in your life. It's really great to know that you can do this!