

POSITIVE NEUROPLASTICITY

for Your Family

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WHAT IS POSITIVE NEUROPLASTICITY?

The science of positive neuroplasticity shows that every person has the power to change their brain for the better. This is the process of **growing specific inner strengths** for greater resilience and well-being by deliberately internalizing experiences of these strengths in ways that produce lasting changes of neural structure and function. For a summary of research on positive neuroplasticity, see the scientific paper: [Learning to Learn from Positive Experiences](#).

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Changing your brain for the better can be summed up in a simple phrase: **Taking in the Good**. Every day is full of opportunities to notice beneficial experiences you're already having or to create some by turning good facts into good experiences, **and then take these into your brain and being**. It is a daily practice that involves activating a mental state, then installing it in your brain. This works because "neurons that fire together, wire together": mental activity can change neural structure.

The practice has four main benefits:

1. It builds specific resources inside you, including the key inner strengths that are matched to your external challenges or internal issues;
2. It brings the general benefits of being active rather than passive, and treating yourself like you matter;
3. It sensitizes your brain to the positive, making it like Velcro for good; and
4. It creates positive cycles: when your own cup runneth over, you have more to offer others, which creates more beneficial experiences for you and thus more opportunities to grow your inner resources.

THE HEAL PRACTICE

This simple acronym is a four-step powerful tool for training your brain to take in the good.

1. **HAVE** a beneficial experience.
2. **ENRICH** it.
3. **ABSORB** it.
(optional)
4. **LINK** it to painful or empty places inside to soothe and even replace that negative material.

HERE'S HOW TO DO EACH STEP:

1. **HAVE** a beneficial experience. a beneficial experience: Notice an enjoyable or useful experience that you're already having – or create one.
2. **ENRICH** it: You can strengthen the encoding of the experience into your brain by through increasing one or more of these:
 - a. Duration – helping it last, protecting it, creating sanctuary for it, coming back to it
 - b. Intensity – opening to it, letting it pervade your mind, dialing it up
 - c. Multimodality – different aspects of experience, especially sensing in your body
 - d. Novelty – looking for what is fresh, new; “don't know mind”
 - e. Salience – seeing what's personally relevant; why it would help you to take this in
3. **ABSORB** it: Just like taking a mental snapshot of a beautiful sunset, you can make your brain's memory systems “stickier” by intending and sensing that the experience is sinking into you as you sink into it. Some people visualize or sense the experience sifting down into them like soft golden dust or gentle rain, soaking in like water into a sponge, placed like a jewel in the treasure chest of the heart, warming them like a cup of hot cocoa, or easing hurt places inside like a golden soothing balm. Others simply have a knowing that the experience is becoming a part of them, a resource inside they can take with them wherever they go. And be sure to highlight what is pleasurable or meaningful in the experience: enjoy it!
4. **LINK** it: (This step is optional and should be used with discretion, e.g., it could be best not to use this method on your own for trauma but seek the assistance of a skilled counselor in a safe container.) In this step, you hold both positive and negative material in awareness – **while making the positive bigger and more vivid in the foreground of awareness** – so that the positive gradually eases, brings perspective to, soothes, and even replaces the negative. If the negative material keeps grabbing you and hijacking your attention, just drop it and focus only on the positive material.

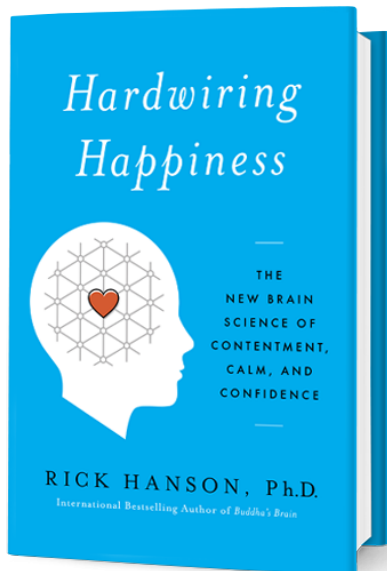
BLOCKS TO TAKING IN THE GOOD

In life, when we want to do something beneficial – something that brings happiness and benefit to oneself, and often to others – we frequently come up against various blocks. It's the same with taking in the good. Blocks are common. They're not bad or wrong – but they do get in the way. What works is to be aware of them, explore them so you know what they are, and then decide for yourself if it's better for you to give over to them – or to keep trying to take in the good. With practice and time, blocks usually fade away.

SUMMARY

Taking in the Good is about how to turn beneficial experiences into lasting inner strengths – such as resilience, emotional balance, grit, patience, generosity, positive mood, mindfulness, confidence, feeling cared about, self-understanding, and compassion. We all need strengths like these for managing stress, dealing with life's challenges, and having more to offer others.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence by Rick Hanson, Ph.D.

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