Follow Our Show:

Verywell Mind - Apple - Spotify - Google
Welcome to The Verywell Mind Podcast! I’m Amy Morin, editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I’m also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You’re listening to The Friday Fix. Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Now let’s dive into today’s episode!

Today I’m talking about how to look for the good in life without crossing the line into toxic positivity.

When you’re going through a rough patch, or you feel stuck in a rut, it’s hard to see the good things that might be going on around you.

But it’s important sometimes to recognize that not all things are horrible. Here are some reasons why:

1. The way you think affects how you feel and how you behave. If you’re only thinking about the bad stuff, you’ll feel bad. And then you’ll be less likely to take
positive action. It’s a vicious cycle that is important to break.

2. Ignoring the good also affects your relationships. If you walk through the door after work every day complaining about all the things that went wrong, your family isn’t going to be all that excited to see you.

But before we talk about strategies for looking for the good, let me explain what not to do. If you’ve read my books or you’ve listened to the show for a while, you know how much I value talking about what not to do. Looking for the good is not the same thing as toxic positivity. Toxic positivity involves minimizing pain in an unhealthy way.

You’ve likely been on the receiving end of toxic positivity and you know how bad it feels. Like when you share something upsetting with someone and they respond by saying, “Well it could be worse,” or “It wasn’t meant to be but something better will come along.”

Doesn’t it just feel awful when someone says something like that? You’re hurting in some way and the other person implies you not only you shouldn’t feel bad but that you should immediately shove your feelings aside and look on the bright side?

People usually mean well when they say things like that. I had to remind myself of that often when my husband died. I was only 26 at the time and people would say things like, “Well at least you’re young enough to get married again,” or “At least you hadn’t been married that long. Some people lose their spouse after like 50 years.”

Those sorts of things didn’t make me feel any better. But I knew people just didn’t know what to say and they didn’t want me to be sad so they came up with things like that in an effort to somehow make things better.

But any time you’re tempted to start a sentence with, “At least…” it’s probably a good idea to pause and pay attention to what you’re about to say someone. Most of us don’t
feel better by being reminded that our problems aren’t quite as bad as they could be. They’re still bad.

But, if we’re honest, we use some toxic positivity on ourselves sometimes too. Sometimes it’s just to hide our feelings from other people. When you get turned down for a job you really wanted, you might tell your parents, “It’s no big deal. I’m sure I’ll find an even better job next week,” even though you’re feeling really bad about it.

Sometimes we try to convince ourselves that looking on the bright side is good for us too.

When it comes to looking for the good, don’t minimize your pain.

It’s something we often do. We’re quick to say things like, “Well, at least it’s not as bad as it could have been.” But that’s not really looking for the good. Instead, it’s our own roundabout way of trying to superficially cheer ourselves up when we’re going through rough times.

But it’s OK to be sad when you lose your job. And it’s OK to be upset that you got a flat tire and missed out on something fun. And it’s OK to feel anxious about a relationship that seems uncertain.

A healthy dose of looking for the good in life won’t involve ignoring reality or shaming yourself for feeling bad. Instead, you can do both at the same time. You might be sad about the things you’re leaving behind when you move to a new city—like your job and your friends. But you might also look for the good by reminding yourself of what you have to look forward to in this next phase of your life.

You can feel two emotions at the same time. You can be both happy and sad. Or you can be both excited and anxious.
Looking for the good shouldn’t be about canceling out one of those emotions. Instead, it might simply be adding to the way you already feel.

So how do you look for the good in a healthy way:

1. Ask yourself what was the best part of my day? This can help you break free from only focusing on the worst parts of your day. And while there may have been some bad things or frustrating things that happened, remind yourself of something good that happened too.

2. Go after the good in conversations with other people. Instead of asking your kids or your partner, “How was your day today?” ask, “What was the best part about your day?” That can help get some positive conversations going.

3. Write in a gratitude journal. Gratitude is all about thinking about the things we’re thankful for. It can be part of you’re practicing in looking for the good for the day. Ask yourself, “What am I grateful for today?” Rather than think about something that happened a long time ago, focus on today. So you can think about what you have gratitude about right now in your life.

4. Go after the good in the past, the present, and the future. Take a few minutes to think about something good that already happened (maybe earlier today). It could be something small, like someone held the door for you or you had enough gas in the car to get where you needed to go. Then, think about something good right now. It might be that the sun is shining or that the temperature in the room is comfortable. Then, think about something good in the future—like you are planning to see a friend next week or that you are going to go for a walk after work today.

5. Pair going after the good with another habit, like brushing your teeth. Hopefully you brush your teeth in the morning and again at night. So maybe when you
brush your teeth in the morning, you think about something good you expect to happen today. Then, when you brush your teeth at night, think about something good that happened today.

So those are 5 things you can do to look for the good in a healthy way: ask yourself what was the best part of my day, go after the good in conversations with other people, write in a gratitude journal, go after the good in the past, present, and future, and pair going after the good with another habit.

Purposely going after the good can put you in a better frame of mind, which is healthy for your overall well-being. Just make sure you don’t cross the line into toxic positivity.

If you know someone who could benefit from hearing this message, share it with them. Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger!

Do you want free access to my online course? It’s called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We’ll reply with your all-access pass to the course.

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast!

And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer (who tends to naturally go after the good), Nick Valentin.