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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!

Don’t forget to subscribe to us on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now let’s dive into today’s episode!

Today I’m talking about the miracle question. It’s a question therapists often use in therapy to help people see their lives from a different perspective. Focusing on solutions sometimes helps people start to make positive change.

So I’ll explain what the question is, why it works so well in therapy, and how answering the question right now might elicit some positive changes in your own life.

Here’s the miracle question solution focused therapists often ask their clients:

Suppose that while you were sleeping tonight and the entire house is quiet, a miracle happens. The miracle is that the problem which brought you here is solved. However, because you're sleeping, you don't know that the miracle has happened. So, when you wake up tomorrow morning, what will be different that will tell you a miracle has happened and the problem which bought you here is solved?
Someone who started coming to therapy for depression might say that after the miracle they would notice how energized they felt in the morning. They might be looking forward to getting out of bed and starting their day. Someone with social anxiety might say that they would notice that they were making plans with a friend— and looking forward to doing social activities. Someone who is having a relationship problem might say they would wake up and enjoy breakfast with their partner.

When people answer this question, they usually identify some really small things that would clue them in to the fact that a miracle had happened. Because keep in mind, the miracle occurred while they were asleep so they had no idea what happened. The only way they learn about the miracle is because they notice things are different.

They often recognize they’d feel differently, think differently, and behave differently.

For some people, answering the miracle question is the first time they’ve ever taken the time to imagine what life could be like if they didn’t have this problem that has been plaguing them.

For others, it’s the first time they’ve thought about what they would be doing differently if the miracle occurred.

Just seeing a brighter future is enough to help some people feel better—and then they start creating that future.

For other people, answering that question helps them identify changes they want to make to their behavior.

And they don’t necessarily have to wait until they feel better to start doing that. They might be able to start doing those things right now.

Sometimes the therapist will ask what someone else might notice when the miracle happens like “what would be the first thing your partner would notice? Or what would your mother notice after the miracle?”

For people who might struggle to see the change within themselves, they might imagine someone else might notice a difference first.

Someone with a relationship problem might say, “My partner would notice I would come home right after work and eat dinner with the family.”

Sometimes though, people say things that are impossible. Like someone might say the miracle might be that their grandmother hadn’t actually passed away or that they had never gotten divorced.
In cases like that, the therapist will still ask things like, “What would you be doing then if that hadn't happened?”

Sometimes, people can say that if that horrible thing hadn’t happened, they might still be having fun with friends or they might be enjoying time with family. So the challenge becomes talking about whether those things are still possible to do right now.

The Miracle Question sounds simple but it’s a huge part of what we call solution focused therapy. Solution focused therapy is short-term–sometimes only eight therapy sessions or so.

Rather than look at all the problems someone has or rehash old emotional wounds from childhood, solution focused therapy looks at what people could be doing differently right now. They focus on solutions moving forward.

Of course, you don’t need to go to therapy to answer that question for yourself.

You might benefit from just thinking about that miracle in your own life now.

So often, we blame something for holding us back in life – an illness, a person, or an event. And sometimes, we forget what life could be like if we got rid of a problem–like we resolved a relationship issue, ditched an addiction, or didn’t have a specific problem that feels a bit like a dark cloud looming over us.

But I’ve met plenty of clients who were afraid to imagine how life could be for them. One man said, “I don’t dare let myself dream about a better life because it seems cruel. My life is never going to be good.”

Or one woman who said, “It’s out of my control so there’s no sense in imagining that things might get better. I don’t want to get my hopes up.”

But both of those people did eventually find the courage to answer the miracle question for themselves. The answer of course didn’t solve all their problems but it did give them a different idea of what life could be like–and it motivated them to make some changes.

I ask myself the miracle question sometimes too. And when I do, I sometimes find that I’m making an excuse. I’m blaming something for my life not being the way I want and while at that time I don’t always want to admit that’s the case, it helps me come around and see that I have choices in how I respond to whatever life is throwing my way.

There’s lots of research on solution-focused therapy. Ultimately, much of the research has found that it tends to help people quickly identify what they want in life while also
helping them uncover strengths and resources that they might have forgotten even existed.

Keep in mind that asking yourself the miracle question isn’t the same thing as say having a vision board. I’ve talked about the fact that there are times when visualizing success can backfire. Like if you are about to run a race, and you visualize yourself crossing the finish line, that may actually reduce your motivation. In that case you should visualize yourself working hard and running even when you’re tired.

Your answer to the miracle question is different. You aren’t imagining yourself winning a prize or achieving one specific thing. Instead, you’re simply imagining what you’d notice about your life if the miracle occurred. It may involve mundane things—like I’d be going to work every day. Or it might involve feeling differently—like saying other people would notice you are happier because you smile more often.

Thinking about a positive for yourself can be good for your mental health. The key is to visualize what you’d be doing differently if you were enjoying life—not that great things are necessarily happening to you. Visualizing winning the lottery might not necessarily improve your life. But thinking about what you’d be doing differently if a miracle occurred might help you feel better.

So give it a try. Ask yourself the miracle question and see what happens. Here it is one more time. Take a few minutes right now and answer this question and see what happens in your life:

Suppose that while you were sleeping tonight and the entire house is quiet, a miracle happens. The miracle is that your biggest problem is solved. However, because you’re sleeping, you don’t know that the miracle has happened. So, when you wake up tomorrow morning, what will be different that will tell you a miracle has happened and the problem is solved?

If you know someone who could benefit from thinking about a more positive future, share this show 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 probably never imagined his positive future would mean he’d go from a kid who got in trouble for owning a Snoop Dogg CD to becoming an audio engineer who won a GRAMMY for his work on a Snoop Dogg album), Nick Valentin.