

GRATITUDE SESSION

Background: The purpose behind these activities are to get people thinking about things for which they can be grateful. If continued over time, they might begin to spontaneously look for things and situations for which to be grateful. Clinical psychology literature has suggested that gratitude is related to a “wide variety of forms of well-being” (Wood, et al, 2010), whereas “negative attributions” can adversely affect relationships (Wood, et al, 2010). Several studies have shown that interventions to increase gratitude can impact areas such as overall life satisfaction (Emmons and McCullough, 2013), decreased negative affect (Watkins et al, 2003, Seligman et al. 2005), increased happiness, (Seligman et al. 2005), the ability to provide emotional support to others (Emmons and McCullough, 2013), and decreased worrying (Geraghty et al, 2010).

Ideas: Multiple interventions have been shown to be effective, so choose the one that seems to fit best with your team and your time constraints or alter one of the proposals to suit your needs.

1. Gratitude Worksheet – This is a good way to introduce gratitude, and it can be completed in a single session. Have each member of the group complete a worksheet on which he or she answers a list of questions about things for which they are thankful. This might include listing some things or people for which they are grateful. Other questions might include why they are grateful for certain things, such as family or friends. It could also include listing one or more qualities about themselves for which they are grateful. Suggestions and sample worksheets are available on <https://www.therapistaid.com>

Another variation of this is to have each member list 100 (or 50 or 25) things for which they are grateful. To facilitate this list, categories can be used, such as people, experiences, possessions, etc.

Other ideas can be found at <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com>

2. Write a letter – Have each person in the group write a letter to someone who has had a positive impact on his or her life, but whom he or she feels they have not properly thanked. Examples might be a teacher or mentor, a grandparent. The letter should include specific details about why the person is appreciated and how that person affect the writer’s life. Depending on the group, options might be for each member to share your letter with the group or to send it to the person to whom it was written.
3. Seeking Gratitude in Challenges – This can be a group activity or an individual activity. Have each person think of an adverse event that has occurred, and answer questions that require them to look for positive features of the event. Questions might include things, like how they can grow from the event, what they can learn, or what was good about the event. Some examples of questions that can be used are available at <https://daringtolivefully.com/gratitude-exercises>
4. Passing the Card – In this activity, the group sits in a circle. Each person is given an index card, on which they right the name of the person on their left. They then write some about that person for which they are thankful. The cards are then passed to the right, and each new person adds their comments. Eventually, the card will make its way around the table to the person for whom it is written.

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5. Gratitude Journal – Select a two–week period when you will be at home with a stable schedule. Have a journal by your bedside. Each evening write down three positive things that occurred to you from the time you woke up to the time you began writing in your journal. Place a check ✓ by days that you completed the task and X by days that you forgot.

Pick a Starting Date (Ex: May 1 st – May 14 th)						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1 ✓	2 ✓	3 ✓	4 X	5 ✓	6 X	7 ✓
8 ✓	9 X	10 ✓	11 ✓	12 ✓	13 ✓	14 ✓

Answer the following questions.

1. Was it difficult to find three positive things to write about each evening? Yes No
2. Did it get easier to recall positive events in your day? Yes No
3. At the end of the two weeks which statement best describes your impression of the exercise?
 - I found myself feeling more positive, and it was easier to notice the good things that were happening to me each day.
 - I felt no difference in my mood or demeanor over the past two weeks.
 - I found myself getting more discouraged during this exercise.

Courtesy of Dr. Jon Courand

6. Collage – This can take different forms, as the theme of the collage can be adjusted to meet your needs. One option might be to have each resident create a collage of things for which he or she is grateful. An alternative might be to have each resident create a collage to introduce himself or herself at the beginning of the academic year. Here’s how the activity can be arranged (courtesy of Dr. Jon Courand):

For some period of time before the event, have friends, family coworkers save all types of magazines. Collect and ensure you have at least two to three per individual. In addition buy a standard poster board (22 x 28 is a standard size) for every individual participating with a few extra. You will need many small scissors and glue sticks. Over the course of an afternoon, give participants 2-3 hours to peruse the magazines, select and cut out words and pictures for their collages. A few examples are shown below. Used magazines are put in a central location for others to look through and use as desired. Once created, participants can show their collages and describe what they chose to include on it and why. If done mostly in private the collages can be shown to the group randomly with people trying to guess who created it. Once determined that person can then come up and explain their collage. These can be laminated and hung in resident work rooms. A great ice–breaker or way to get a new group to learn about each other. This is an excellent project for resident retreats.

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Acknowledgements: The information presented in these documents was adopted from the following sources:

Supporting Articles:

Gratitude and well-being: A review and theoretical integration. A.M. Wood et al. / *Clinical Psychology Review* 30 (2010) 890–905

Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84, 377–389

Watkins, P. C., Woodward, K., Stone, T., & Kolts, R. L. (2003). Gratitude and happiness: Development of a measure of gratitude, and relationships with subjective wellbeing. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 31, 431–451

Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive psychology progress: Empirical validation of interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60, 410–421

Geraghty, A. W. A., Wood, A. M., & Hyland, M. E. (2010a). Attrition from self-directed interventions: Investigating the relationship between psychological predictors, technique and dropout from a body image intervention. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71, 30–37.

Websites:

Therapist AID – <https://www.therapistaid.com> – A source for therapists that includes gratitude suggestions and worksheets

Positive Psychology Program – <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com> – A psychology resource that includes suggestions for gratitude exercises, as well as TED talks and books on gratitude

Daring to Live Fully – <https://daringtolivefully.com/gratitude-exercises> This website includes a list of gratitude activities.

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