



# OPTIMISTIC HOUSEHOLD

## On-Line Family Social and Emotional Wellbeing

By Leading Positive Psychology Expert  
SHAWN ACHOR and INTERNATIONAL  
THOUGHT LEADERS NETWORK

Six (6) Bi-weekly SEL Lessons | Resources for Parents and Families

1. Happiness and Gratitude in Challenging Times;
2. Increasing social connection in a time of social distancing;
3. Inoculating your brain about anxiety and stress;
4. Being adaptive in the midst of uncertainty and change;
5. Uncovering possibilities with a growth mindset;
6. Restart forward progress – creating a virtuous cycle





# OPTIMISTIC HOUSEHOLD

## Overview

School Districts have partnered with Shawn Achor, bestselling author, speaker and renowned Harvard expert in the field of positive psychology, to launch Optimistic Household, a series of six interactive modules designed for Staff, Families and Students to foster learning and social emotional wellbeing at the highest levels for Adults and Students.



## Shawn Achor – Positive Psychology Expert

- Most Popular Course on Harvard Campus for 7 years
- Top 15 Most Watched TED Talks of All Time (22 Million)
- International Best-selling Books ‘The Happiness Advantage’, ‘Orange Frog’ and ‘Big Potential’
- Most popular training “Workshop on Happiness and Optimism”

## Why launch Optimistic Household?

School Districts have been embracing the principles of growth mindset and positivity as part of their mission to prepare students for the complex world they will enter as young adults and professionals. Optimistic Household builds upon these principles, supporting the skills students need to be college and career ready, as well as engaged their parents and teachers. Skills that will help them become resilient and resourceful learners, who are able to adapt and demonstrate grit as they face academic and other challenges.

The neuroscience and data behind these principles reaffirms that students, who possess hope and optimism and embrace mistakes as part of the learning process, can become adaptable learners and succeed at higher levels both academically and personally.

More than ever wellbeing and self care of staff, students and their families is critical utilizing SEL principles.



# OPTIMISTIC HOUSEHOLD

## WHAT EVIDENCE (RESEARCH) SUPPORTS THIS DECISION?

- Research shows that people make better decisions when they are in a positive state of mind.
- Research shows we become more successful when we are happier and more positive.

## WHAT IS POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY?

Positive psychology focuses on the positive events and influences in life, including:

- Deepens student, family, and community development.
- Positive experiences (like happiness, joy, inspiration, and love).
- Positive states and traits (like gratitude, resilience, and compassion).
- Positive households (applying positive principles within families).

## RATIONALE

To strengthen the core mission, commitment to excellence as the hallmark of your School District. As a school and community partnership, our promise is to provide the highest quality educational experience we can envision and to support families. During this time our primary focus is on creating a highly positive school community that recognizes the importance of positivity, optimism and hope.



## Background Reading

The world is going through what one may call the biggest global crisis in history, pushing both health and economy down the hill. While certain regions in this world are still building resilience, others have begun planning recovery and acclimatizing themselves to the new normal. The question that arises is this –especially in education - is the new normal going to remain the new normal, or is there any going back to the older ways of living? This question is bound to create anxiety and chaos in the human mind, and with that the need for “being happy” or “finding happiness” appears far-fetched and irrelevant. Is it that far-fetched and irrelevant though? In order to achieve this we need to focus on staff’s wellbeing and self care.

Discussing the need for a positive psychological approach to face crisis for school districts, Shawn Achor, author of ‘Big Potential’ and ‘The Happiness Advantage’ emphasizes the need for finding happiness amid crisis to boost optimism, based on research and bringing about a positive psychological shift to approach upcoming challenges.

Key points include:

- Building a resilient positive psychology
- The impact of social connections on positivity and rational optimism for wellbeing
- Steps to build individual and family happiness hygiene habits for self care
- What are you doing to raise the levels of happiness of yourself, family, staff and students?

Here are your highlights.

### **Building a resilient positive psychology for wellbeing and self care**

“This is a crucial time to see all of the research and to find ways in which we can create a positive and adaptive mindset that will help us not only to be able to navigate the current crisis but to be able to come out on the back side of it,” said Shawn Achor discussing the research and answers to some of the most common questions on being able to mentally process the ongoing crisis. These questions were:

- How do we mentally process the crisis for the most adaptive response?
- How do we pursue happiness, rational optimism and success in these difficult times?
- How can individuals create positive change in these difficult times?
- How do we ripple positive changes to other people?
- What have we learned from the crisis and how do we support the emotional wellbeing of all?

“ to truly thrive physically, emotionally, and spiritually, we need to change our pursuit of potential in the same way we need to change our pursuit of happiness. We need to stop trying to be faster alone, and start working to be stronger together” ~Shawn Achor ~



## Background Reading

“I think that one of the things we have realized in the midst of this is that people take one of two approaches when the crisis occurs. You get one side that creates an intentional optimistic approach in which they sugar coat it and turn a blind eye to any of the negatives that are going on... The other is you see a problem and assume it takes up the entirety of your reality and that it is permanent and pervasive and that causes paralysis to the brain” Achor says.

Bringing in positive psychology here, Shawn talks about developing and encouraging a mindset of rational optimism to navigate through the crisis. It does not start with rose-colored glasses but a realistic assessment, he said. “When people have that approach, the realistic assessment to maintain the belief that my behavior will eventually matter and it is linked to the right people, what happens is that you get people that do not get paralyzed by the problem, neither do they turn a blind eye to the problem.”

In the last 100 years, humans have overcome a number of crises they faced for the very first time, adapted to the new normal, and yet in the face of a new crisis feel threatened to lose the familiarity of the older way of living. From World War I, Great Depression, World War II, The Korean War, Cold War, 9/11, financial meltdown of 2008, and now COVID-19, with every passing crisis, humans learned to adapt and get on and about with the new normal.

### How can you build happiness hygiene?

“As we come out of quarantine, whenever that is whether weeks from now or a year from now, as we are emerging from this, what I think is important before we move forward and rebuild is to look forward in this period of time and to look for the things that were good and meaningful, to stand for them, to take pictures of them, write down the gratitude(s).” How does one really go from being perplexed and overwhelmed by crisis to adapting to a positive mindset and being grateful?

How do we create individual change that allows us to create an interconnected positive adaptive response? One might say it's in the genes, the entire mindset of positive and negative, however, research has found were very simple things you can do to inoculate your brain against stress in the midst of this challenge.

“The greatest predictor of long-term happiness is your social connection score, shares Shawn. The breath, the depth and the meaning in your social relationships. “We can't pursue happiness in isolation when the greatest predictor of happiness is other people” ~Shawn Achor ~



## Background Reading

Here are some of those things plus there will be many more practical ideas to implement:

**The 21 day gratitude challenge:** Think of three new things you are grateful for, for 21 days. It does not matter what you are grateful for, what matters is scanning through to find the positives. A study from the time of banking crisis showed that people who tested as low level pessimists in the initial phase of the study, for whom it was assumed they had genes for pessimism, it was found that after six months of keeping up with the gratitude challenge they became moderate optimists, and when they continue this with their kids at the dinner table, they essentially are predisposing their kids to optimism. Akin to other healthy habits, this becomes a happiness hygiene. Such an approach builds a background app in your brain passively scanning the world for the positive and making optimism easy for you.

**Journaling:** If not the 21 day gratitude challenge, journaling is a great way to think of at least one positive experience in the last 24 hours. Write down every detail you can remember and share it.

“When you do this, your brain can't tell the difference between visualization and actual experience. So not only did you have to scan for a meaningful moment in the crisis but you also got to relive it as your brain goes through the memory,” added Shawn.

**15 minutes of fun cardio:** Equivalent to taking an antidepressant, even 15min of regular exercise everyday pumps up your energy, charging up your brain cells. It keeps both your physical and psychological self active and receptive to what lies ahead, and energetic enough to scan through probable alternative solutions.

**Meditation:** Observing your breathing pattern and calming your inhaling and exhaling activity helps eliminate all unnecessary noise and negative thoughts that distract you and keep you from living up to your potential.

**Random acts of kindness:** Following the 21-day rule, find one person to appreciate or extend thanks to everyday. Given the global need for social distancing, this is a great way to reconnect with someone from your life, be it a school teacher, an old friend, your old boss, your ex-colleagues you haven't been in touch with and let them know how they made a difference to your life. Shawn insists that this is not social distancing as everyone thinks, this is physical distancing. Reach out to people and feel more socially connected in the midst of the crisis than before the crisis.

Highlighting basic human tendency, Shawn said, “Our brains will scan for threats in the midst of a crisis unless we create patterns to allow our brains to see the positive,” With everything that is keeping families occupied 24\*7, it's a good time to check-in and restructure our thoughts and approach where needed, and enable a faster and more resilient recovery from the global crisis.

“It increases your accuracy rate by 10%, raising the level of happiness and optimism and not only impacts you but also brings calmness to people around you through your interactions with them”

~Shawn Achor~