



A deeper dive into the life satisfaction intervention review

In the intervention review the research question was:

- What is the **effectiveness of interventions** aimed at improving life satisfaction across the life-course?

Our rapid review of the international literature identified 189 studies which tested 234 interventions. These interventions were tested in high quality randomised controlled trials or quasi-experiments and provide strong evidence for what works to improve life satisfaction.

We sorted all the interventions into six key themes with subthemes. The table below defines each theme/subtheme, summarises our findings and provides some insight into the evidence base for each.

Theme (definition)	Sub Theme (definition)	Effectiveness (Meta analysis outcome)*	Understanding what might work
<p>Emotional</p> <p>Activities: Involve interventions focused on delivering activities that engage participants in emotional development.</p> <p>Personal**: Involve topics that take place within or primarily concern participants' own mind and the self.</p>	<p>Mindfulness</p> <p>Mindfulness is a cognitive skill that broadly involves sustaining attention on the conscious self and the present moment. Interventions in this subtheme focus on learning and practicing mindfulness activities.</p>	<p>Effective + (Small positive effect)</p>	<p>Interventions of six weeks or more that combined structured learning and individual practice seem more effective. Evidence for in-person delivery is stronger than virtual delivery. In groups, minimal group conflict and individual motivation to participate appear important.</p>
	<p>Gratitude</p> <p>Involves showing appreciation and thankfulness; these interventions primarily involve gratitude-focused activities, such as reflection, writing, and expressing gratitude to others.</p>	<p>Effective + (Small positive effect)</p>	<p>Primarily delivered to individuals rather than groups. Interventions typically sought to deliver short gratitude activities (10-15mins) over a number of weeks.</p>
	<p>Therapy</p> <p>Comprise programmes or educational material that follow recognised psychological therapeutic practices, e.g., Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.</p>	<p>Effective + (Small positive effect)</p>	<p>Group and individual therapies are included and both provided significant results. Further research to understand differences would be useful.</p>
	<p>Meditation</p> <p>Meditation involves the practice of focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity. While meditation is a core element to mindfulness training, interventions in this subtheme only focus on the practice of meditation (rather than combining or prioritising other mindfulness activities).</p>	<p>Mixed (Non-significant small effect)</p>	<p>The shortest intervention provided the greatest improvement in life satisfaction. Research into how sustainable improvements in life satisfaction would be useful.</p>
	<p>Visualisation</p> <p>Characterised by making a strong mental image of things or events; interventions in this subtheme include visualisations of the self in the past, present, and future.</p>	<p>Not Effective</p>	<p>Five studies all providing results that were not statistically significant. Most of the evidence from interventions delivered to students or adults.</p>

Theme (definition)	Sub Theme (definition)	Effectiveness (Meta analysis outcome)*	Understanding what might work
	Positivity Comprise activities that foster a more positive or optimistic outlook on events and personal relationships.	Mixed	Promising evidence with older people and for military personnel reframing stressors.
	Reflection Involves the process of serious thought or consideration, and interventions in this subtheme consistently directed participants to reflect upon their own life experiences.	Not Effective	Six studies all providing results that were not statistically significant
	Other Includes interventions categorised as personal emotion-based activities (i.e., focus on the mind and the self) but which do not fit into the other subthemes.	Mixed	A range of interventions. Most promising were hope-based goal setting in children and a short intervention focused on identifying personal values.
Emotional Activities: Involve interventions focused on delivering activities that engage participants in emotional development. Relational**: Interventions which relate to relationships and communication between people.	Prosocial Prosocial relates to voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others; interventions in this subtheme include topics like kindness, volunteering, and forgiveness.	Mixed	Successful interventions were delivered to children or university students. A successful intervention of volunteering with adults was particularly effective.
	Social Interventions in this subtheme have the primary focus on promoting the benefits of social interactions.	Not Effective	Four studies all providing results that were not statistically significant.

Theme (definition)	Sub Theme (definition)	Effectiveness (Meta analysis outcome)*	Understanding what might work
Emotional development***: involves instructional interventions on the nature of emotions, how and why they occur, and developing ways to effectively manage feelings.	Resilience Interventions that teach participants the ability to withstand or quickly recover from difficulties, e.g., by using personal strengths.	Mixed	Interventions predominantly aimed at teenagers in secondary school. Largest improvements in interventions focused on life skills, positive personal development and character building.
	Regulation Interventions that teach participants how to effectively manage feelings.	Mixed	Interventions which did not produce a statistically significant improvement were generally delivered at low intensity i.e. shorter duration and frequency and involved less group work.
	Skill Development Interventions that teach participants the ability to maintain or improve emotional wellbeing and emotional intelligence.	Effective ++ (Moderate positive effect)	All five successful interventions delivered in a group setting although school-based interventions demonstrated mixed results
Health promotion Interventions that promote a healthy lifestyle, including exercise, diet, sleep	Exercise Includes physical activity that improves health and fitness, such as yoga, walking, dance, skiing, and strength training.	Effective + (Small positive effect)	Interventions delivered to groups appear to be more effective than individual exercise. Only one intervention delivered to children with mixed findings.
	Education Educational programmes focused on maintaining or improving health – primarily physical health.	Mixed	Strongest evidence for interventions aimed at older adults.
Music Involve participants engaging with some form of music, such as singing or playing instruments.		Insufficient Evidence	All the interventions were delivered to older adults. Future studies should examine benefits for working-age adults and children.
Social Media Involve changes to social media use, typically reduction or abstinence.		Insufficient Evidence	Interventions all examine reduction or abstinence from social media. Future studies may wish to look at different interventions like altering use patterns or pro-social use of social media.

Theme (definition)	Effectiveness (Meta analysis outcome)*	Understanding what might work
<p>Multi-component</p> <p>Involve multi-faceted wellbeing programmes. Interventions in this theme have no primary component, i.e., several components are equally represented, therefore, these interventions cannot be sorted into a single theme.</p>	<p>Mixed</p>	<p>Three interventions with the largest impacts were grounded in psychological therapeutic approaches but mixed them with other elements like mindfulness, goal setting or problem solving.</p>

*For an explanation of our approach to meta-analysis and describing effects as small, moderate or large please see page 18 of the [technical report](#).

**The theme of emotion-based activities was spilt into two sections - personal and relational

*** The distinction between themes 1 (emotion-based activities) and 2 (emotional skill development) is that 1 primarily involves activities whereas 2 primarily involves instructional teaching.

Table Key:

Effective	We found multiple studies or were able to conduct a meta-analysis which found significant improvements in life satisfaction.
Mixed	We were unable to do a meta analysis and found a number of studies. Some studies showed a significant improvement but others did not.
Not Effective	We found multiple studies, none of which demonstrated significant improvements in life satisfaction.
Insufficient Evidence	We found a small number of studies (five or less). One or two of these studies were significant but the others were not.

For a summary of both our life satisfaction rapid reviews see [our briefing](#).

For full details of the research methodology, findings, recommendations and limitations, read the [technical report](#).