

# Celebrate the Small: Changing Our Mental Mindset to Prepare for a New Year

By **Chris Abildgaard**, LPC, NCC, NCSP



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**A 17-YEAR-OLD MALE CLIENT RECENTLY CAME IN TO SEE ME FOR A SESSION. HE SAT DOWN WITH HIS MASK ON AND SAID, “I HATE THIS, CHRIS, I REALLY DO. COVID AND THIS WORLD RIGHT NOW SUCK.” I FOLLOWED UP WITH THE QUESTION, “WHAT IS IT THAT YOU HATE THE MOST?” TO THAT HE REPLIED, “THE UNKNOWN; THE INABILITY TO PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT; THE FEELING OF NOT HAVING ANY CONTROL OVER LIFE AND THIS WORLD.”**

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**I** looked back at him and simply said, “Yeah, it sucks, and you are right to feel all of those emotions and fears. However, how long will we let them sit in us? How long will we worry about the unknown or worry about when the world will be “normal” again? What can we do now to start shifting our mindset to a more positive outlook so we as people and a society can keep growing?”

As we enter a new year, we have to keep our eye on the prize for ourselves, our children, and the clients we may work with!

This year that “prize” will be different. In past years, maybe we set professional goals, aimed to travel somewhere we have always wanted to visit, or saved for the fancy new car. This year, we must help children and adolescents identify and redefine “the prize” as being found within those small nuggets of time that have the potential to bring us happiness. Below are some thoughts to start that conversation as a parent, teacher, or clinician that can help your children or the young people you work with start to shift their mindset to start this year with a more positive and productive outlook.

## Teach how to celebrate the little things

As we head into 2021 and reflect on 2020, all of us will naturally feel overwhelmed. Given all the factors we have been forced to endure, it is only natural we have doubts that this new year will be any better. But it can be if we focus on the little things in life that bring us joy. As parents and professionals, we must validate the fact that we are all wanting to maybe travel more or have those large family birthday parties like we used to. The reality is we may not be able to engage in those activities for a little while. So how can we move on from wanting them?

This is the time we need to talk about what we “need” vs. what we “want.” Needs come in different forms for sure, but basic human “needs” tell us that eating our favorite food, listening to our favorite music, or going for a walk to explore a local pond with mom or dad can bring us a level of happiness or contentment for a period of time. It is important to teach our children and clients that it is okay that the period of time we experience that happiness is maybe not as long as it used to be or as we want it to be. Emotions come and go; they fluctuate based on the context, our expectations, and what we head into the situation thinking we will get out of it. This can be the game-changer. How can we mentally and emotionally prepare ourselves (or our children/clients) for looking at the idea of taking a walk around a pond and have that level of happiness or contentment last?

It’s reshaping how we think about the idea of “doing something.” For example, I will share that for years my kids have always talked about “doing something fun with dad.” Doing something “fun with dad” usually costs money and involves obtaining something or relying on something external to help bring some sense of internal joy. We, as a society, rely on the external “bling” to bring internal joy or other positive emo-

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*Chris Abildgaard, LPC, NCC, NCSP, is the owner and director of the Social Learning Center, LLC, located in Cheshire, CT. Chris has been in private practice for over 13 years. Along with his private practice, Chris is an Adjunct Professor in the Special Education department for St. Joseph's University located in West Hartford, CT. Chris is a Nationally Certified school psychologist, a Board Certified national counselor, and a licensed professional counselor with a specialization in autism spectrum disorders. Chris is currently pursuing his doctorate of education (EdD) in School Psychology from Loyola University Chicago. In his free time, Chris loves hanging out with his three children, playing tennis, and grilling!*

Website: <https://www.sociallearningcenter.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SocialLearningCenter>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SLC545>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/chrisabildgaardslc/>

tions. Is that wrong? No. However, if we are to move forward during this time of uncertainty, unpredictability, and sometimes chaos, we need to be able to find joy, happiness, or contentment in the small things in life.

How can we help young people understand this concept? We can help shape their mindset about celebrating the “small times” by

- Us, as the adults, showing excitement over small events of the day

- Verbalizing at the end of each day two or three things that made us feel “happy” about the day

- Talking about the “why”—with this, I am suggesting we talk more with our children or clients about the “why” behind going for a walk or just hanging out with a friend with masks on and socially distancing for a period of time. What is it about those events that we should be celebrating, and what can we take away from doing those things?

- Modeling that life is largely about the small times, not just the big

Allowing ourselves to find happiness or contentment in those small everyday events will increase our positive outlook on life and those we are around. As we head into the new year, it is vital we understand the maintenance of our mental health (and those of our kids) will entail a certain level of modifying how we look at happiness and that feeling of being content. Modeling for our children and clients and reshaping how we look at “being happy” can alter our outlook on the coming year, the goals we have, and our overall mental wellbeing. Happy New Year, everyone, and embrace those life nuggets so they may bring the needed happiness we all are looking for during times like this.