

Hope is the key to a meaningful life, according to new research

Hope isn't just wishful thinking — it's a powerful emotional force that gives our lives meaning. Now, a new groundbreaking study from the University of Missouri shows it may be even more essential to well-being than happiness or gratitude.

For years, psychology has tied hope to goal-setting and motivation. But a team of researchers demonstrates that hope stands apart as one of the strongest positive emotions that directly fosters a sense of meaning.

Using six studies with more than 2,300 participants from diverse backgrounds, the team analyzed a range of emotions, including amusement, contentment, excitement and happiness. The findings consistently demonstrated that only hope consistently predicted a stronger sense of meaning.

How to cultivate more hope in daily life

The researchers suggest simple ways to build hope each day.

One key approach is to pay attention to and appreciate positive moments — even small ones. While we often think about future milestones, simply noticing when things are going well can foster hope.

Another strategy is to seize opportunities even in chaotic times. When life feels uncertain, recognizing and seizing small opportunities can create a sense of forward momentum.

Engaging in caring and nurturing activities is another way to cultivate hope. Just as tending to children or planting trees can symbolize future possibilities, investing time in activities that nurture growth can reinforce a hopeful mindset.

And when things feel bleak, it's important to remember that nothing is permanent. Situations can change — and hope begins with the belief that they will.