

Essential Education

**The 16 Guidelines for
a Happy Life
Study Programme**

Presented by the
Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom

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Contents

Introduction	3
Aim and approach of the study programme.....	4
Structure.....	5
General advice for the facilitator	7
Why mindfulness meditation?	8
Guiding questions	9
Daily Exercises	14
_____ A Daily Challenge	14
_____ Formalised Reflections	14
_____ Exercise Handouts.....	15
Resources	17

Introduction

The aim of the *16 Guidelines for a Happy and Meaningful Life* is to help people create happiness for themselves and others. The purpose of this guide is to inspire and help people to organise study programmes based on these guidelines.

This programme can be facilitated by anyone with the right motivation and a good understanding of the 16 Guidelines. It is intended for use in all kinds of settings, such as schools, workplaces and communities.

This is not a rigid manual, telling you 'how to do it' – rather, it is hoped that this document will guide and inspire you. Facilitators can adapt and develop the material that it contains in their own way.

My experience of presenting this programme is that it brings out profound compassion and wisdom in the people who participate. The facilitator is more of a guide than a teacher, helping us to reveal the inner wisdom that we all hold within ourselves.

This programme is mainly about asking 'the right questions', questions that help participants understand the wisdom that underlies each Guidelines. In this sense, experiential learning is one of the primary methodologies behind the programme. Learning about the meaning of the Guidelines comes not merely from an intellectual perspective, but through each participant's personal experience.

It is important for the facilitator to be conscious of the collaborative learning processes taking place in the discussion sessions. The contribution of any one participant may well assist in developing insights that are meaningful to the other people in the group.

The program has been developed with much help from Mikkel Bjelke Kristiansen, Alison Murdoch, Dekyi Lee Oldershaw and Lakha Lama Rinpoche.

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Aim and approach of the study programme

The aim of Essential Education and the *16 Guidelines for a Happy and Meaningful Life* is to help people create happiness for themselves and others. The two main foundations for happiness are kindness and wisdom. Kindness is the primary attitude leading to personal and collective happiness. Wisdom, defined as an understanding of our mind and of the world in which we live, is a key factor in developing kindness. The aim of this Study Programme is to facilitate changes in the minds of participants in the direction of happiness, through kindness and wisdom.

From the ancient masters to the contemporary learning theorists, one idea is constant: learning cannot be forced, merely facilitated. To facilitate learning requires an understanding of the mind.

For change and/or learning to take place in the mind, four basic factors need to be present:

1. First of all the mind has to be *ready*.

For this some 'space' and motivation is needed. A full mind is like a full cup – it cannot contain anything new.

This can be achieved through a short breath/mindfulness meditation before starting. It is also important to consciously set up a positive motivation.

2. Secondly some *understanding of the content* is needed.

The change needs a direction.

This can be achieved through reading, reflecting and discussing.

3. Thirdly some *active mind work* is needed.

Simply consuming facts does not change patterns of thinking.

This can be achieved through concentrated analysis of the content.

4. Fourthly some *active practicing of the content* is needed.

This can be done by consciously practicing the content in daily life.

The context and content of the intended learning does not change the need for all four factors to be present.

When all four factors are included in the facilitation process, then genuine learning can take place.

Structure

The following structure is based upon a successful pilot programme conducted in Denmark in 2007.

One session takes two hours and focuses on one of the Guidelines. The full programme therefore takes 16 sessions.

The structure is yours to adapt but it is suggested that every session should address:

- *readying the mind*
- *understanding the content*
- *active mind work*
- *active practicing of the content*

10 minutes:

Introductions to:

Essential Education
The Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom
The 16 Guidelines
The 16 Guidelines Study Programme

20 minutes:

Mindfulness/breathing meditation

Introduction to mindfulness meditation
Guided meditation
Set the motivation for the evening

5 minutes:

Introduction to the section

Introduce the section which contains this guideline

20 minutes:

Experience-based discussion on "What is ... (the Guideline for the evening)?"

Introduction to the role model that relates to this Guideline
Introduction to the Guideline itself
The Essential Education definition of the topic
Guided group discussion

- 20 minutes:** **Experience-based discussion on the relationship between this Guideline and happiness**
Introduce the Essential Education points about the relationship
Guided group discussion
- 20 minutes:** **Experience-based discussion on how to practise this Guideline more skilfully or effectively**
Introduce the Essential Education points on the question
Guided group discussion
- 10 minutes:** **Formalised reflection about the Guideline**
- 5 minutes:** **Introduction to home practices**
- 10 minutes:** **Q&A**

General advice for the facilitator

Here is some general advice to help the facilitator. However, it will be important to conduct sessions in a way that suits your individual competence and experience.

What is your own motivation for doing the facilitation?

Take some time before the sessions to consider your motivation for undertaking the facilitation. A genuine motivation for benefiting the participants will have a considerable impact on the atmosphere and outcome of the sessions.

Seek inspiration in science and spiritual traditions

The 16 Guidelines books and website have a lot to offer. However it will often be fruitful to seek additional inspiration from other sources.

There is much academic research taking place around the world that relates to different aspects of the Guidelines. Insights from this work can greatly enhance the presentation of the Guidelines.

Many spiritual traditions have wise and inspiring perspectives related to individual Guidelines. Taoism, Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism etc - all the major religions can provide inspiration and insights.

If the content is clear for you, it will be clear for the participants

A clear understanding of each guideline will make it easier for you to ask the right questions and guide the group to a clear understanding as well.

Having a clear understanding may well benefit from additional inspiration from other sources.

Technical understanding versus personal insight

As a facilitator, it is important to be aware of two general directions the discussions can take, and the different learning they bring about. On the one hand you can reinforce a technical discussion on the topics that brings about a theoretical understanding. On the other, you can encourage discussions that are grounded in the personal experience of the participants. The second option will generally bring about a higher level of personal insight and development, which are the main aims of the programme.

Why mindfulness meditation?

There are two main reasons for using mindfulness meditation in the programme.

Firstly, for any significant learning to take place, it is important that the mind is ready to change. In order to be ready the mind needs to be calm, at ease, and focused in the present moment. Mindfulness meditation is a powerful tool to achieve this.

Secondly, mindfulness meditation is a method that trains the practitioner to observe how the mind works. Understanding of the mind leads to an understanding of the way in which the mind perceives the world. From this, we can slowly start to develop a more realistic view of the nature of reality. The process of understanding the mind and the nature of reality brings the wisdom that is a prerequisite for creating stable and lasting happiness.

Mindfulness meditation is now well known throughout the world, including in the scientific community. The benefits are very well documented. People who are sceptical about traditional spiritual and religious practices can often benefit from mindfulness. It is a practice without any dogmas, religious visualizations or beliefs. It's just about the mind.

One of the most famous western scientists using and introducing mindfulness meditation is Jon Kabat Zinn. In his *Full Catastrophe Living* he gives clear instructions on how to guide mindfulness meditations.

A more traditional, but very clear explanation of mindfulness meditation is given in the book *Mindfulness in Plain English* by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana.

Guiding questions

This programme is largely about asking the right questions. The process of asking and addressing questions is the route by which participants can realise the wisdom and methodology offered by each of the Guidelines - not merely from an intellectual perspective, but through their own experience.

Every participant can be considered to have great wisdom 'within', even before attending a session. The role of the facilitator is merely to help reveal that wisdom. This is why the discussion sessions, and the questions addressed within them, are a core aspect of the course and will need attention and preparation.

The aim of the discussion sessions is to examine the participant's own experiences in relation to the Guidelines. Questions that are put in the right way can help us to reconsider old attitudes and point to new ways of thinking. Through this approach, instead of simply lecturing, it is possible to support genuine understanding, inspiration and personal development in the group.

The facilitator needs to be very conscious of the collaborative learning processes that will take place in the discussion sessions. It is often possible that the contribution of one participant will support the development of understanding among the rest of the group.

It will be important for the facilitator to formulate his or her own questions, not merely to use the questions below. By formulating their own questions, facilitators create their own framework for understanding each guideline.

It may be useful to plan the framework for discussion. Choosing appropriate questions will help the facilitator to keep on track, making sure that all points are being covered.

Alternatively, wide-ranging discussions that explore very different human experiences within the group may have a considerable impact on individual learning.

For some inspiration, here is a list of possible questions for each guideline.

How We Think – the power of the mind

Humility

What is humility?

How do others act when you are humble?

What do our lives become like without humility?

How would our life be if others were never humble?

What do you need to be humble?

Patience

What is patience?

What is the opposite of patience?

What do you feel like when being patient? And when you are not?

Who is suffering when you are not being patient?

How can we train ourselves in patience?

Contentment

What is contentment?

Is it possible always to be content irrespective of the circumstances?

Why are we not always by nature content?

What are the causes of discontentment?

Do we have the potential to constant contentment?

How do we become more content?

Delight

What is delight?

What are the positive sides of delight? For oneself? For others?

What is the relationship between jealousy and delight?

Is there something to be delighted about in *any* situation or just some situations?

Are there any keys to greater delight?

How We Act – every action has a result

Kindness

What is kindness?
Is happiness possible without kindness?
Can you be happy if no one is kind to you?
Are you more happy when being kind to others?
Is it possible to train ourselves to be kind?
Does kindness always have to be soft and pleasurable?
Is it possible to be kind in any situation?

Honesty

What is honesty?
What is dishonesty in speech?
What is dishonesty in action?
What is dishonesty in thoughts?
What reasons can you find for not being honest?

Generosity

What is generosity?
Does generosity always have to do with material goods?
How do others react when you are being generous?
How does it feel to be generous to others?
Is it possible to be generous when alone?

Right Speech

What are the criteria for speech to be 'right'?
What is the opposite of right speech?
How does it influence our surroundings when we use right speech? And when we don't?
How do you feel when using right speech? And when you do not?
What are the causes of right speech?
How do we become better in it?

How We Relate to Others – Independence is a Myth

Respect

What is respect?

How does it feel to be shown genuine respect?

How do others react when you show genuine respect?

How would your life be like if no one respected you?

How do you achieve the respect of others?

Forgiveness

What is forgiveness?

Are anger, grudges etc. something one *is* or something one *has*?

Is forgiveness the same as accepting?

Is it the past or the feeling from the past that we hold on to when we are not forgiving?

What is the difference between *letting go* and *not holding on to*?

Gratitude

What is gratitude?

How can you achieve the gratitude of others?

Can you be grateful and angry at the same time?

Can you be grateful and feel alone at the same time?

Are there negative sides of gratitude?

Loyalty

What is loyalty?

Towards whom are you loyal?

Why be loyal?

How can you sustain your ability to be loyal?

How We Find Meaning in Life – if everything is changing, anything is possible

Aspiration

What is aspiration?

Is happiness possible without aspiration?

How do we choose the direction for our aspiration?

Does aspiration come naturally or do we have to nurture it?

Principles

What is a principle?

Do you have any principles?

Are principles always positive?

What is the connection between principles and happiness?

How does we know whether a principle is positive or negative?

Are there any universal positive principles?

Service

What is service?

What is the connection between service and happiness?

How do you feel when you serve others?

How do you feel when being served by others?

How can we get better at serving others?

Courage

What is courage?

What would our lives become like without courage?

How does it feel not to have the courage to do something that needs to be done?

How does it feel to show courage?

How do we develop courage?

Daily Exercises

A Daily Challenge

Daily challenges are the point where people really start to change in everyday life. Reflecting and discussing is very important to prepare the mind but the only way to become kind is by being kind. The only way to achieve humility is through being humble. This is why the study programme also includes exercises to carry out at home.

The first exercise is a daily challenge to act in accordance with one of the Guidelines.

Participants are asked to put aside two minutes every morning. In these two minutes they briefly visualize the day ahead, and choose a specific situation which they know will be a challenge in relation to that Guideline. They are asked to create a clear determination to act in accordance with the Guideline in the situation. Each evening they are asked to spend a few minutes evaluating how it went.

By consciously practicing the Guidelines in this way, participants can develop a strong awareness of the Guidelines throughout the day. In addition, they get some real practical experiences which can be the first step to creating new and positive habits. This also brings valuable experiences that can reinforce their understanding and deepen the Reflections.

The Daily Challenges are the fuel that creates genuine energy and inspiration to go deeper in practising the Guidelines.

Reflections

The aim of the Reflections is to familiarize ourselves with the Guidelines in order to deepen our understanding and to realise their benefits. In Buddhism, they might be described as 'analytical meditations'.

This programme is primarily addressing people with little or no experience of doing a daily meditation practice. This means that the Reflections need to be fairly short. 5-8 minutes is appropriate. The language should be simple and not technical.

It is beneficial for the Reflections be based in the practitioner's own life experiences. As with the discussions, the greatest change takes place when the Reflections are directly

grounded in a practitioner's own experiences rather than in moral or theoretical abstractions.

To achieve this, it is important to link the Reflections directly to a practitioner's own life experiences. This can be achieved through a five-step process:

- To *reconnect* with a personal experience and thereby get a strong feeling of the subject.
- To *remember* very clearly how it was.
- To *realize the benefits* of practicing the Guideline.
- To *rejoice* in the benefits of practicing the Guideline.
- To make a *resolution* to practice the Guideline in the future.

You can find inspiration for the Reflections in the 16 Guidelines Wikipedia or you can use the Reflections in one of the 16 Guidelines books. In either case it is recommended to stick with the same structure in all 16 Reflections, because this will make it easier for the participants to become comfortable and familiar with them.

Exercise Handouts

It is helpful to give the participants a printed copy of the exercises after each session. Below is an example of what an exercise handout can include.

When handing out and explaining the exercise and analysis, participants should be asked to make a commitment to themselves to do it for a certain number of days or weeks.

16 GUIDELINES FOR A HAPPY AND MEANINGFUL LIFE

PRINCIPLES - DAILY EXERCISES

A challenge: Be aware of, and hold on to your principles

Sit for a moment every morning when you get up.

Briefly go through the basic principles you have in your life.

Look at the day ahead of you and choose a situation where you know one of your principles will be challenged: when travelling, at work, in your family etc.

Make a resolution that you will apply and hold on to your principles no matter how hard it may be in that situation.

Sit for a moment every evening before you go to bed. Spent two minutes on evaluating the situation: How did it go, how did it feel, what was the reaction from other people?

8 minutes Reflection on the benefits of holding principles

Sit comfortably with a straight back, relaxed hands, arms and shoulders. Keep your eyes closed or half open. Relax your mind. Take 3 deep and relaxed breaths. As you breathe out, let all thoughts of where you just came from, and where you are going, to leave your mind.

Be mindful of your breath. Give all your attention to the sensation of the air passing through your nostrils. Sit like this for 2 minutes.

1. Think of a situation where you have been in doubt about what to do. A situation where you held on to your principles even though it was difficult. Reconnect with the situation and remember it as clearly as possible.
2. Observe how it felt to hold on to your principles
 - What is the sensation in the body, and in the mind?
 - Does it make you feel stronger, or weaker, when you stand by what you believe?
3. Do your principles help you not to hurt others, or to take responsibility for your own actions? How do they do this?
4. Be aware that principles do not arise and develop by themselves. They need to be nurtured, developed and adjusted through life. And that right now you have created the space for that.
5. Rejoice in this positive action.
6. Make a resolution that in the future you will nurture and hold on to your principles. Not only for your own happiness, but also for the happiness of the people around you. Reflection on how this will enable you to serve as a role model for others.

Resources

There are many resources that can provide inspiration when preparing the sessions.

Some examples:

The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life: Up Close (hardback book available from www.amazon.co.uk)

The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life: The Basics (paperback book available from info@essential-education.org)

The 16 Guidelines website and wikipedia (www.16guidelines.org)

The website of the founder of Positive Psychology <http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/default.aspx>

Website of the Positive Psychology Center of Pennsylvania University <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/index.html>

Scientific research into individual Guidelines can be found using Google.