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## New Year, New Attitude

Experience **More Joy** in 2023

**New Year's resolutions  
don't work?**

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**Ways to Thrive**  
in Times of Change



A person wearing a brown jacket and an orange cap is seen from behind, with their arms outstretched towards a bright, hazy sky. Numerous birds are flying in the sky, some appearing as silhouettes and others as bright, glowing shapes. The overall mood is one of hope and optimism.

# NEW YEAR, NEW ATTITUDE

HOW TO EXPERIENCE  
MORE JOY IN 2023



There's no better way to start the new year than with a fresh perspective.

By Christa M. Hines



**W**ant to bring more joy into your life this year? Try shifting your mindset. Not only can adopting a more optimistic attitude help you create a happier life, but it will also influence how well you respond to life's daily challenges.

A positive outlook boosts productivity, energy, and motivation; helps reduce stress; enhances confidence and self-esteem; benefits overall health; and even improves relationships with others.

"A positive attitude is contagious—as is a negative attitude," says psychologist Kristen Hensley, PhD, University of Kansas, Lawrence. If you have children, they are likely picking up on your mood, which can affect the happiness level of your entire family.

"A positive attitude can also help us be more flexible in our thinking and make seeing solutions to problems easier," Hensley says. "Looking for silver linings in life can help build mental resilience and general optimism."

Sounds great! But how do we make that shift if we often find ourselves stuck with a glass half-empty kind of attitude? Here are some good places to start:

## GIVE YOURSELF THE GIFT OF QUIET TIME.

Chronic stress makes it harder to stay positive, which is why self-care practices, like quiet, unplugged time, are instrumental to embracing a more positive mindset. Quiet time helps nurture creative thinking, problem-solving, and stress reduction. Wake up early before the rest of your household, and journal, meditate, or pray.

Also, make time to gear down before bedtime, which is part of healthy sleep hygiene. Turn off the television, unplug from your phone, and read a book or magazine you've been anticipating. Treat yourself to a warm bath with your favorite bath salts.

If you have children, engage in a quiet activity together, like reading or drawing, while listening to soothing music. Quiet time provides kids with a sacred space to learn to decompress after a busy day and reflect on the day's worries, concerns, or stories.

## KNOW YOUR POWER ZONE.

Often, the things that cause us the most frustration, anxiety, and unhappiness are those things that we have little to no control over. Jen DuBois, a certified life and empowerment coach, recommends drawing a circle and listing everything about a situation that you have actual control over. Outside of the circle, list all the things about the situation that you *don't* have control over. When doing this exercise, DuBois's clients often discover that most everything is outside of their control. Identifying what you have control over helps you know what to do and what to release.

## WATCH FOR PATTERNS.

Try tracking your moods to better understand how to take care of yourself each day. *What things darken your mood or make you feel worse? What lifts your spirits?*

A positive attitude is contagious—as is a negative attitude.





Jessica Mostaffa, LPC, an early childhood mental health specialist and therapist who works with mothers suffering from depression, says that by being aware of and understanding their moods, her clients are better able to manage their day-to-day emotional well-being.

## MAKE A HAPPINESS LIST.

Brainstorm a list of activities that help you feel better when you're feeling depleted. Your list might include taking a warm shower, gardening, or taking a walk with a friend.

"When the moms I work with started working on increasing time for themselves, it not only decreased depressive symptoms, but they also reported having better, more positive relationships and interactions with their children, partners, and others in the home," Mostaffa says.



Happiness lists can be helpful for kids too. When they're angry or upset, they can turn to their list for a strategy to help them manage their emotions in a healthy way. For example, they might draw, listen to music, shoot hoops, read, or call a trusted friend.

## REFRAME NEGATIVE THOUGHTS.

Rather than trying to ignore them, work with cynical thoughts that creep into your head.

Mostaffa suggests asking yourself questions like:

- "What's the evidence that this thought is true?"
- "What's the evidence that this thought is *not* true?"
- "What's the worst thing that could happen?"
- "What's the best thing that could happen?"
- "What's the most likely thing to happen?"

## WATCH HOW YOU SAY IT.

Notice how you describe your obligations to yourself or others. For instance, instead of saying, "Ugh, I have to clean my house," try "It's my privilege to have a clean, healthy, and safe home."

"It's those subtle shifts that have profound effects on our lives," says Carla McClellan, a certified life and organizational coach based in Kansas City, Missouri.

## CATCH A VISION.

Imagine what you would like to accomplish in the year ahead. This can be an activity you do on your own, with your family, or with a group of friends. Grab a stack of old magazines, scissors, glue, and poster board, and create a vision board. Cut out inspiring words, quotes, and pictures, and paste them on the board.

DuBois, who facilitates vision board workshops as part of her coaching practice, has made vision boards for herself since she was a child. To make

## What to Do When You Can't Find the Positive

Seeing the silver lining can sometimes be difficult, especially if you're dealing with a personal crisis or grieving the loss of a loved one. If you're experiencing that, be gentle with yourself, give yourself time, reach out to others, and seek support.

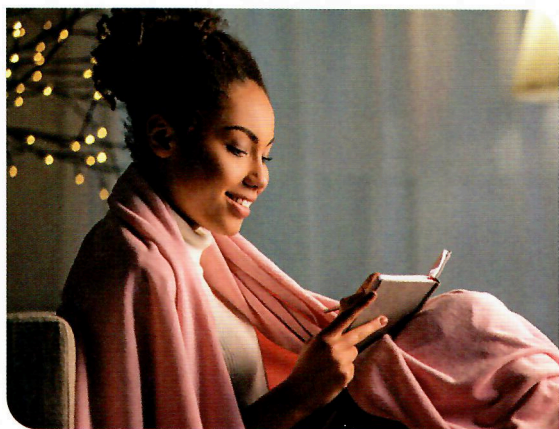
Consult your family physician if you or a loved one experience persistent sadness, loss of appetite, inability to sleep, decreased energy level, or thoughts of suicide. These are signs of depression, which is a serious illness.



your board work for you, include what your life looks like right now and where you want to go. To help you focus, ask yourself questions like: “What are my dreams for the coming year?” “What do I want to see happen in my life?” “What kinds of qualities do I wish to possess?”

For example, if you want to become more confident engaging with others in social settings or at business events, be specific and look for words and images that reflect that desire.

DuBois also encourages her workshop participants to choose one word for the year to put on their boards next to a photograph of themselves. For example, you might choose “joy” as your word.



## EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE.

Even on the worst days, when you’re slammed at work, the refrigerator is on the fritz, and the dog threw up on the carpet, there’s at least one thing you can find to feel grateful about. Start a practice of expressing your gratitude in either your planner or a journal, and you’ll be surprised at how much more positive you feel.

“You can’t be frustrated with yourself and grateful at the same time. That’s impossible. Embracing gratitude and celebrating the little wins every day is really important,” says DuBois.

Foster positive thinking at mealtime by inviting everyone to share three things they feel grateful for and why. Bedtime is a good time to reflect on the day too.

“These don’t have to be major things either,” Hensley says. “A five-year-old might say she’s

grateful for the cupcake she got at school for a classmate’s birthday celebration because it made her happy. The purpose is to teach this kind of thinking and help it become a more natural part of everyday life.”


## SCHEDULE RECESS TIME.

Experts agree: People who make time to play tend to be happier and healthier. Take time for hobbies and activities that don’t necessarily result in any particular outcome, other than they bring you fulfillment and joy.

Look for fun ways to engage your family too. Families who play together tend to be more deeply connected. Whether you throw the football, compete in a game of cards, or ask each other silly questions on a car ride, play will strengthen your relationship with each other.



Most of all, experiment with what works for you. “All of these types of activities and rituals are very important because they’re modeling a positive attitude and building a healthy way of thinking and interacting with the world,” Hensley says.

Now, that sounds like a New Year’s resolution that we could all stick to! 

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Freelance journalist Christa M. Hines is a nationally published writer who is passionate about discovering creative ways to embrace a healthier, more joy-filled life.