

THE HAPPINESS PROJECT

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

by Olivia Wood
illustrations by Amit Mohanta



The Happiness Project is inspired by the true story of a young girl in India who aspires for a world where wellbeing and mental health are a priority for every school, educator, and young person.

This children's picture book is the result of a collaboration between Ashoka and Worldreader. It is intended to inspire children everywhere to become Changemakers and encourage adults everywhere to support them in their journey.

Apoorvi and her older sister, Riya, always loved the same games.

They would chase each other in the garden. They would play hide and seek. And when they got a little older, they shared the same books and clothes.

“My sister is my best friend.” Apoorvi would think, sitting next to her at dinner.



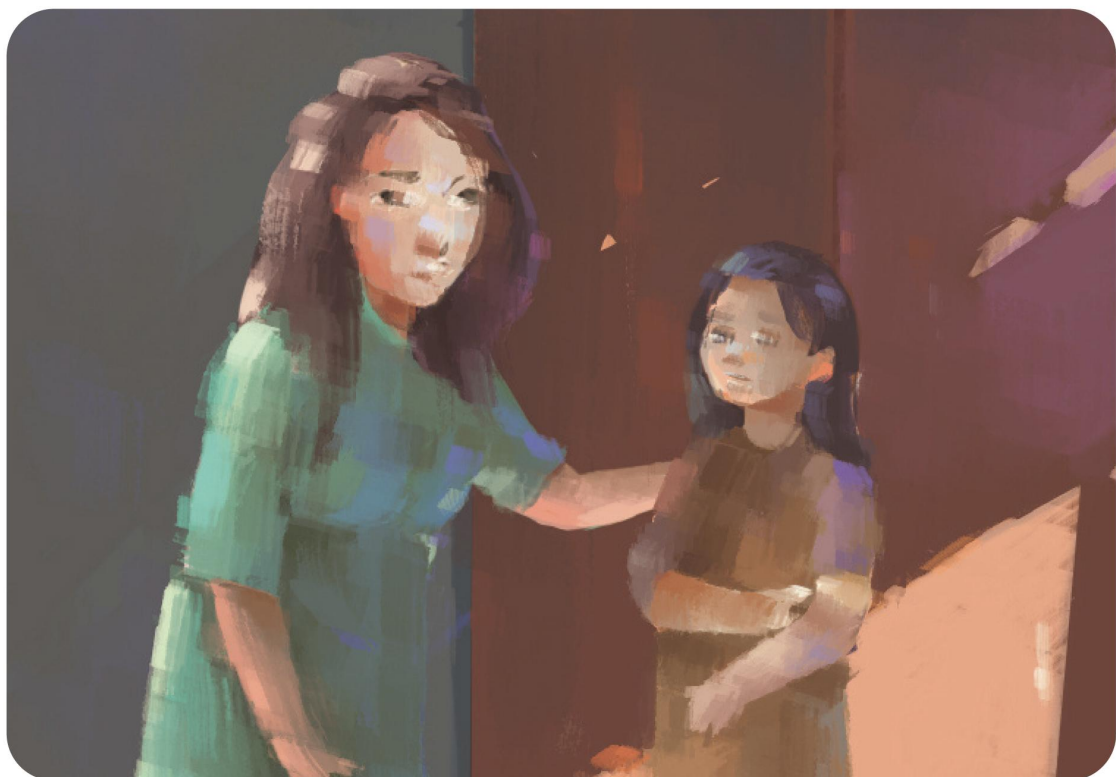
But one year Riya changed. She stopped wanting to play, and talk, and laugh. She was always looking down at the ground. And she spent a lot of time alone in her room.



“What’s wrong with Riya?” Apoorvi asked her mother. Apoorvi’s mother seemed sad, and she gave Apoorvi a big hug.

“Riya has depression. Depression is an illness that makes you feel very sad, and tired. It can make you feel lonely, even when you are surrounded by family and friends.”

“But what can we do to help her?” Apoorvi asked. She felt ready to do anything.



That night at dinner, Apoorvi's father asked Riya to tell them about how she was feeling. Everyone listened to her, and tried to cheer her up.

"We will love you and help you no matter what," he said.



After this, Apoorvi asks her sister how she is feeling all the time. When she is sad, she tries to make her day better.

She brings her sweet treats, or takes her outside for a walk in the sun. Sometimes this helps Riya. But it doesn't always.



Riya starts to go see the school counselor, Miss Anika. Miss Anika's job is to help students who are having a difficult time, to listen to them and give them support.



One day Apoorvi and Riya are sharing a snack, and Riya thanks Apoorvi for all of her help.

“Without talking to you, I would have felt so much worse. Lots of kids have no one to talk to. And lots of schools don’t have counselors. I feel very lucky.”



That night Apoorvi puts her head on her pillow, but her eyes stay open. She can't sleep!

Apoorvi is glad that she was able to help her sister. But what about all the other kids, who don't have supportive families or counselors in their schools?



In school the next day Apoorvi goes to visit Miss Anika.

“I want to help spread the word about depression to other schools. I want to help children like Riya, my sister.”

“It will be hard,” Ms. Anika says. “People are afraid to talk about mental health in India. And many don’t believe it’s an important problem.”

Apoorvi is determined to try to do something to help, even if it will be very difficult.



Apoorvi and Ms. Anika think of solutions together. How can they show the school and the government that mental health is an important issue?

“We can do a survey!” Apoorvi shouts excitedly. “We can ask students questions about how they’re feeling.”



1. How do you feel today?

2. Have you been sleeping regularly?

3. Do you have trouble paying attention in class?

4. Do you often feel worried?

Apoorvi and Ms. Anika visit a nearby school. They give the survey to hundreds of students, and the teachers are surprised at the answers they see.

Many students feel sad, anxious, or lonely. Many students need help.

“We must support our students.” One teacher says.
“Mental illness can affect anyone.”



The teachers agree to start teaching students and their families about mental health and illnesses like depression and anxiety. They come in after school hours, and hold extra classes.

After one of these classes, a student named Ishaan introduces himself to Apoorvi.

“I think what you’re doing is so important,” he says. “I have seen a change in how my teachers support students. How can more students at my school get involved with this project?”

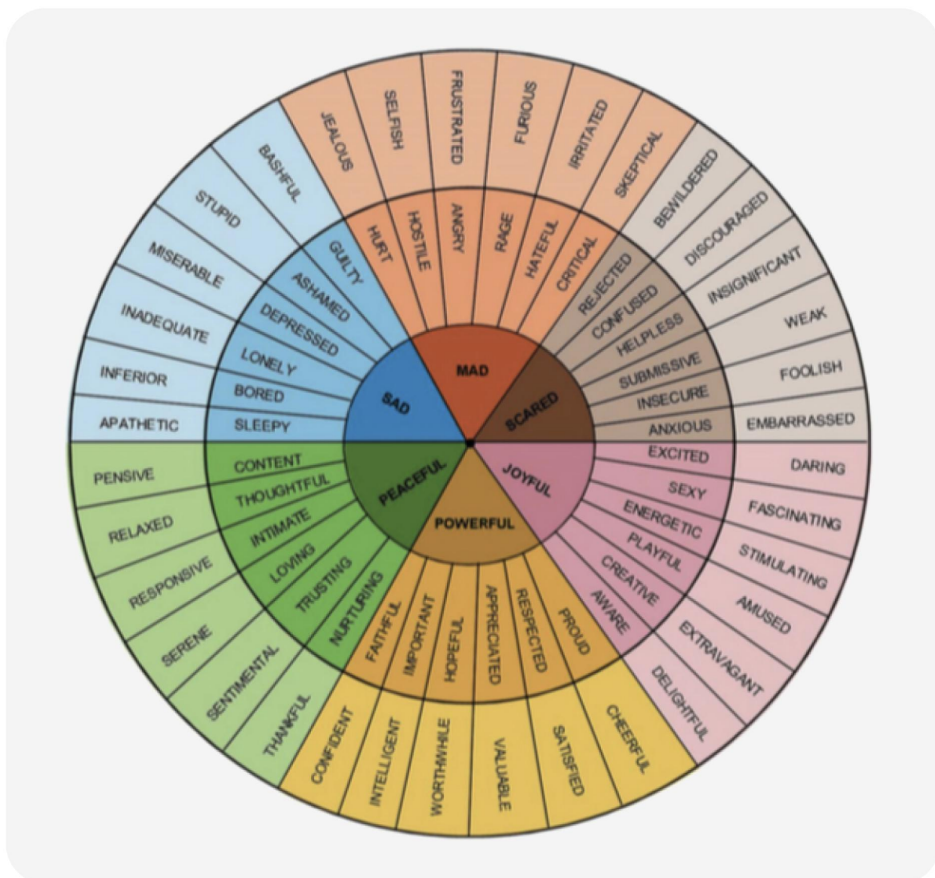


Soon there are several other students who want to help. Together with her team of student volunteers, Apoorvi takes her survey and mental health classes to seven more schools. In total, she helps over 3,000 students!



“But there’s still more to do.” Apoorvi thinks to herself. “When I grow up, I want to be a counselor. Then I can keep helping, and making change.”

The Feelings Wheel:



Most of us have a limited language or range of words that we use to describe our feelings. Expanding our range of feeling words is powerful and a part of increasing our emotional intelligence. For each activity, review the feeling wheel to think through your emotions more closely.

The Happiness Project Activities



Activity 1: Morning Gathering

Age Group: 3-12

Skill: Empathy, teamwork

Materials: A group of people

Why? By reinforcing the idea that young people are a part of a community in which everyone has each other's back, we can nurture the kind of maturity and encouragement that kids need to act on empathy. These communities can be formed at school, at home, at a public library, with a sports team, and more.

How? Step 1: Greet one another | Gather in a circle. Have everyone greet each other by name. As a group, take notice of who is present and who is absent; whether it is raining or not; who is smiling and who is having a hard time smiling.

Invite everyone to share whatever is on their minds.

Step 2: Promote sharing | Share some news of interest to the group and respond to each other positively.

Step 3: Make it unique | As a group, create a daily ritual that is unique to you. Practice this action every day when the group is together.

For example:

- Develop a secret handshake.
- Ask a personal question each day. For example, “What is your favorite holiday?” or “If you could be any animal, what animal would you be?”
- Give a compliment to the person next to you.
- Share your word of the day. For example, “calm”, “kindness,” or “laughter.”

Repeat this activity every time your group is together, whether it is every weekend morning with your family, every Monday with your class, or every evening with your soccer team.

Activity 2: Journaling our Emotions

Age Group: 3-15

Skill: Self-esteem and self-awareness

Materials: Journal, writing utensils (pens, paper)

Why? Feelings are a part of the human experience. We should not judge ourselves based on how we are feeling. It is okay and normal to feel sad, angry, or frustrated at times. That is why writing down our feelings can help us identify specific triggers and reactions that are causing us to feel a certain way, which helps us be more self-aware.

How? Step 1: Introduce the Prompt | Read through the list of sentence starters below. Pick one to start with and write or draw your response. Repeat this exercise every day until you have responded to every sentence starter.

- I feel powerful when...
- When I feel lonely, I...
- In five words, I would describe myself as...
- When I see someone who is hurt or sad, I...
- What makes me happy is...

Step 2: Write | Spend 15 minutes responding to the prompt. See where your mind takes you.

Step 3: Reflect | Talk with a friend or family member about your experience. How do you feel now? What memories are you thinking about?

Activity 3: Self-Awareness Charter

Age Group: 3-12

Skill: Emotional intelligence and self-awareness

Materials: Paper, writing utensils (pens, pencils, markers)

Why? Self-awareness is all about how clearly we can see ourselves - our own aspirations, values, passions, thoughts, behaviors, feelings, and reactions. Self-awareness is also about how clearly we can see how others perceive us. Self-awareness is critical for cultivating empathy because we must be able to understand our emotions and the emotions of others. Developing a classroom or home “charter” enables us to name what matters the most and how we want to feel. These charters help us set boundaries, be more aware of our own actions, and reflect on how these actions affect others.

How? Step 1: Brainstorm Words | Write down an adjective that describes how you would like to feel each day. For example, you could list words like “included,” “excited,” and “respected.” Write down as many adjectives as you can think of.

Step 2: Share and Decide | Share your list of words with others. Put all your words together on one big list. Once everyone has contributed, sort through which words relate to one another. What words stick out to you? What words does everyone agree on? Now, *pick the top 5 words that everyone can agree on.*

Step 3: Match Feelings with Behaviors | Discuss the things that each person can do for one another to have that feeling. Think, “what can I do to make someone feel this way?”

For example, if the word is “kind”, talk about what you can do to be kind to one another. Smiling or asking “how was your day?” over a meal are behaviors that everyone can see.

Step 4: Draft Your Charter | Together, list the feelings and the corresponding behaviors that everyone intends to practice. Write down the 5 feelings and a list of behaviors that match the feelings. You can list behaviors under each feeling or put all the behaviors Together. ***Be creative! Make your charter bold and bright with color.***

For example:

Our Family Charter

We all want to feel safe, supported, loved, valued, and respected.

1. We will actively listen to each other.
2. We will spend quality time together.
3. We will have a positive attitude.
4. We will respect each others’ personal belongings and space.
5. We will work as a team to solve a problem.
6. We will smile and greet each other every morning.

Meet Apoorvi



Apoorvi is a young changemaker from India. As a teenager, she created the Happiness Project to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and increase access to mental health resources in public schools. She and her team of like-minded peers developed a Happiness Quotient to shine a light on student wellbeing and inform new ideas for creating happier classrooms. In learning peer activation, teamwork, and leadership, Apoorvi now aspires to pursue a career in public health or psychology where she can further put her changemaker skills into practice.

About Ashoka

Ashoka believes the ability to adapt to and drive change is essential for everyone to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Ashoka is building a global community that is laying the foundation for a world where everyone is a changemaker. At the heart of the Everyone a Changemaker movement is a vision to transform the way children and young people grow up so everyone has the power and skillset to create change for the good of all.

www.ashoka.org

About Worldreader

Worldreader believes that readers build a better world. We work with partners globally to support vulnerable and underserved communities with digital reading solutions that help improve literacy and learning outcomes for children.

www.worldreader.org

*We want to hear from you!
Share your feedback here:*





2021 Ashoka and Worldreader

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

For inquiries please contact privacy@ashoka.org or publishing@worldreader.org