

She avoids eye contact by looking at her hands, shifting uncomfortably in her seat while she explains how she can't quit smoking. She's tried everything; it just doesn't work for her. She really wants to, but she just doesn't see how it's possible. She has smoked for years. She doesn't like it, but it's just part of who she is now.

What can we do for our participants who have resigned themselves to being smokers or drinkers, even though they don't want to? There is a realm of psychology which gives us a few exercises which might help in these situations called *positive psychology*. Positive psychology is a field which focuses on promoting and supporting positive emotions and strengths, as opposed to dwelling on negativity and flaws. The overall model compliments the non-judgmental, client-centered approach which First Breath and My Baby & Me are based on.

Recently a [small study](#) was done to examine the impact of positive psychology exercises on smoking cessation. The participants of the study were given a series of exercises to complete in addition to behavioral counseling and nicotine replacement therapy. Overall, nearly a third of study participants were able to remain smoke free for over six months. In an evaluation, the participants rated each of the positive psychology exercises based on their usefulness. Two exercises stood out as being the most effective, according to participants: "Savoring" and "Three Good Things".

Savoring

Many people use smoking as a means to chemically enhance the pleasure they normally receive from enjoyable experiences. Savoring can be an alternative method to derive additional pleasure from these (as well as other) experiences. In the study, participants were encouraged to savor at least 2 experiences daily, for 2-3 minutes at a time. Participants were encouraged to 'slow down', 'enjoy the moment' and 'take in' all that a given experience could offer.

If your participant is unfamiliar with the concept of 'savoring' an enjoyable experience, the following prompts might give them some direction.

1. Find an activity you enjoy, or have enjoyed in the past. Something small that fits into your day-to-day life is recommended.
2. The next time you engage in it, make sure it has your full, undivided attention. You will want to be able to focus on the details of the experience.
3. Focus on sensations. What are you seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, and smelling?

Three Good Things

While quitting, many smokers might feel as though they are missing out on something they really enjoy. To help them maintain their focus on the positive experiences they are still having, they write down three good things that happened to them that day. These things can be small or large, but they should each be positive. Also, if the concept of writing down these three things is not appealing, ask your



participants to record them in other ways. Using a smart phone to take notes on an experience, or even taking a picture of the “good thing” are other ways of recording these positive experiences. If doing this daily seems like too much, it can be completed every other day, or even once per week as a starting point.

Both of these techniques can be outstanding tools for participants working on stress management, as they help individuals focus and reflect on positive experiences from their day to day life. Try asking your participants if they would be able to try either of these exercises when the topic of stress comes up at your next visit. If these two particular techniques/exercises don't resonate with you, the concept of positive psychology still offers a unique area to focus our time on during First Breath and My Baby & Me sessions.

When a participant has a lapse or slips up, instead of just talking about their moment of weakness, you can spend your time discussing how well things were going before the slip up and how they felt during this time. Instead of focusing on what specific changes a person is going to make, spending time to help them improve their overall outlook can yield dividends, even outside the realm of tobacco or alcohol use.