

THE JOY FACTOR



1. How content or happy are you today? Check one—

- Very content and happy
- Kind of content and happy
- Neutral
- Kind of discontented and unhappy
- Very discontented and unhappy

2. Put an arrow by the phrases that describe happiness to you.

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| A purpose in life | Good grades | Success |
| Salvation | Health | Great friends |
| Good looks | A positive family life | Being young |
| Service to others | Sex | Spending private time with God |
| A good job | Being loved | God |
| New clothes | A boyfriend or girlfriend | |
| Material things | Popularity | |

3. Read the statement and decide if you **A** (agree) or **D** (disagree).

- ___ Happiness and contentment are important goals in life.
- ___ Happiness and contentment are moods.
- ___ Happiness and contentment are easier for people with a lot of money.
- ___ Happiness and contentment can lead to selfishness they're your main concern.
- ___ Happiness and contentment aren't something everyone can have.
- ___ The happiness and contentment of teenagers is the responsibility of their parents.

4. Check your answer to each of the following questions.

	None of the time	Half of the time	All of the time
How often do you feel sad?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel lonely?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel afraid?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel stressed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel far away from God?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you feel down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Is this true for you or not?

I feel satisfied with the direction my life is going.

6. Read **Matthew 5:1-12**. Why are the people Christ described happy or blessed?

THE JOY TALK / UR [happiness]

THIS WEEK

More than any other age group, young people indicate their desire to be happy—but do they know what they want? What brings them happiness and why? This TalkSheet discusses happiness versus joy and Christianity versus the world's understanding of happiness.

Be sensitive to your group members during this discussion. Some of your kids aren't happy at all—they may be dealing with issues such as divorce, abuse, depression, failing grades, break ups, and more.

OPENER

Ask your kids how their perceptions of happiness have changed over the years. What used to make your kids happy when they were little? What about now? How will their perception of happiness change over the years? How does growing up alter happiness or change its meaning?

Or for something different, you may want to pass out newspapers or magazines and have the students find as many examples of happiness as they can in three minutes. What do the advertisements say about happiness? Why does society base their happiness on material possessions and money?

THE DISCUSSION, BY NUMBERS

1. Give the group the chance to share their feelings and give an explanation why. How often do they or others fake happiness? Point out how happiness is often circumstantial.
2. Put the list on the whiteboard or poster board and then ask the group to identify the top five or so items that people their age would say bring happiness. Now ask the group to share those they checked. Was there a difference between the average kid and your kids? Why or why not? Is there a difference between those who are and aren't Christians? Which of the things on the list are worth building one's life around?
3. The young people will likely think of additional things, so create a master list on a whiteboard or on newsprint. What items did your group members check and why?
4. Get an overall picture by asking the kids if they see a correlation or relationship between each of the questions. For example, did the people who felt sad also report feeling far away from God? Challenge your kids to look for patterns in their lives. Are there certain times when they feel down? All the time?

5. Ask the young people to explain their answers. Should the direction they are going stay the same or should it change? If it needs to change, are they willing to make the necessary changes?
6. Carefully study the list of happy or blessed people Christ described. Does the list have much in common with what we normally consider happiness to be? It seems Jesus described happiness as something totally foreign to most. Why is God's kingdom different than the world?

THE CLOSE

Happiness and contentment are conditional, but joy—given by God's Spirit—brings happiness even in times of doubt, pain, worry, and struggle. And while some people think of happiness as outward because of things or circumstances, that's just not God's way. The Bible says that happiness is an attitude that comes from being content. Paul, writing to the Philippians, said he had learned to be content with plenty or with little. He could live through either circumstance through the strength given by Christ (Philippians 4:11-13). Paul had learned to rise above his circumstances because he knew that they couldn't provide happiness. The Bible calls this joy.

What do your kids need to do to find God's joy? Pray more? Get closer to him? Get right with their friends or parents? Encourage your kids to find what is making them discontent and to fix it, with God's help.

MORE

- You may want to take some time to look more in depth at Paul's life. What a life this guy had! He was converted by becoming blind, had a "thorn in the flesh," endured a shipwreck, numerous floggings, and more. Read some chapters on Paul's life in Acts and discuss them with your group. How did Paul handle these situations? How can these be an example for our lives today? What does Paul's life say about God's faithfulness and love?
- Do you sense that there are larger issues within your group that is causing unhappiness? Are there kids dealing with the pain of divorce, depression, guilt, and more? Spend some time talking about these with your group and encourage them to pray about these. Encourage them to find someone to talk to—including you—who they feel comfortable with. For more information and links, see these TalkSheets—Got Faith? (page 109), Hooked on Drugs (page 61), Too Much Too Soon (page 69), "My Parents Split Up" (page 65), and Down and Out (page 73).