

The Stories We Tell about Happiness

Understanding the distinction between joy and happiness is only the beginning (see Part One of the Joy Series). The more complex question is what we believe about joy, and that is integrally connected with how we were taught to find joy.

Our relationship to joy and happiness is shaped by the environments we grew up in, the messages we absorbed, and the cultural beliefs we inherited about what happiness should look like and when/how we are expected to feel it.

Much of what we have inherited culturally centers on happiness, often tying it to achievement, visibility, and worth.¹ Yet, our experiences of true joy are deeply personal. Before we turn fully to finding our joy, let us examine our inherited beliefs.

During childhood, we absorb our deepest, core beliefs about ourselves and the world. During this time, we may have learned that joy should be:

- Visible and expressive
- Linked to achievement
- Shared publicly, sought through validation from others
- Reserved for special occasions

We may have internalized beliefs such as:

"I'll be happy when..."
"You have to work hard before you can enjoy life."
"Don't get too comfortable."
"Good things don't last."
"Happiness is a choice."



Over time, these messages can shape how safe we feel experiencing joy.

We may dim joy, question it, or delay it, not because joy isn't available, but because we were taught to relate to it cautiously. *Becoming aware of these inherited beliefs allows us to decide which ones still feel true for us... and which we are ready to release.* This is exactly what this guide is about.

¹ I want to note that I am speaking here from the perspective of growing up within Western culture, particularly in the United States and Europe. In other parts of the world, people may understand and experience happiness and joy in very different ways.

What we learned about joy

Many of us grow up with unspoken assumptions about joy. We may learn that joy must be earned through hard work, achievement, or sacrifice. We may also come to believe that joy is something to pursue, chase, or attain somewhere in the future. Before accepting these ideas as truth, let's take a closer look at them and consider how they have shaped our relationship with joy.

Joy as a reward for hard work.

For many of us, happiness is presented as something connected to effort, achievement, or success. We hear ideas like:

“Work hard, play hard.”

“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success.”

“Money can't buy happiness... but it's more comfortable to cry in a Mercedes.”

Messages like these suggest that happiness comes after effort or accomplishment - something we earn once we have worked hard enough or achieved enough. At the same time, we also receive another set of messages that suggest happiness is simply a matter of attitude or personal choice:

“Do what makes you happy.”

“Live, Laugh, Love.”

“Good vibes only.”

These sayings encourage positivity, but they can also create the feeling that we should always be happy and avoid or suppress difficult emotions. Social Media functions very similarly.

The pursuit of joy.

In the United States, happiness is even embedded in the country's founding language - the idea of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” From early on, many of us absorb the belief that happiness is something we should be actively chasing.

Over time, these ideas can shape how we relate to happiness. They may lead us to believe that happiness must be earned, maintained, or constantly pursued. In this process, something quieter can be overlooked ... the deeper experience of joy that does not depend on achievement, appearance, or constant positivity.

Exploring Our Joy Messages

The ideas we explored on the previous pages may feel familiar. Most of us grow up surrounded by messages about what happiness should look like and how we are supposed to find it. Sometimes these messages are spoken directly. Other times we absorb them through stories, television, movies, family expectations, and cultural traditions. Perhaps most powerfully, our understanding of happiness is shaped by what is modeled for us by our families and the people closest to us.

Take a few moments now to explore the messages that may have shaped your understanding of happiness.

Remembering Sayings

Many of us heard certain phrases repeatedly while growing up.
What phrases do you remember hearing about happiness?
Write a few below.

Think Back to Stories and Media

Movies, television, books, and music often tell us stories about what happiness looks like. Think about the stories you watched or loved growing up.
What did those stories suggest would make someone happy?
Was happiness connected to: success, romance, popularity, good looks, family, ...



Family and Life Moments

Sometimes our strongest messages about happiness come from lived experiences. Think about moments in your childhood or early life that seemed important.

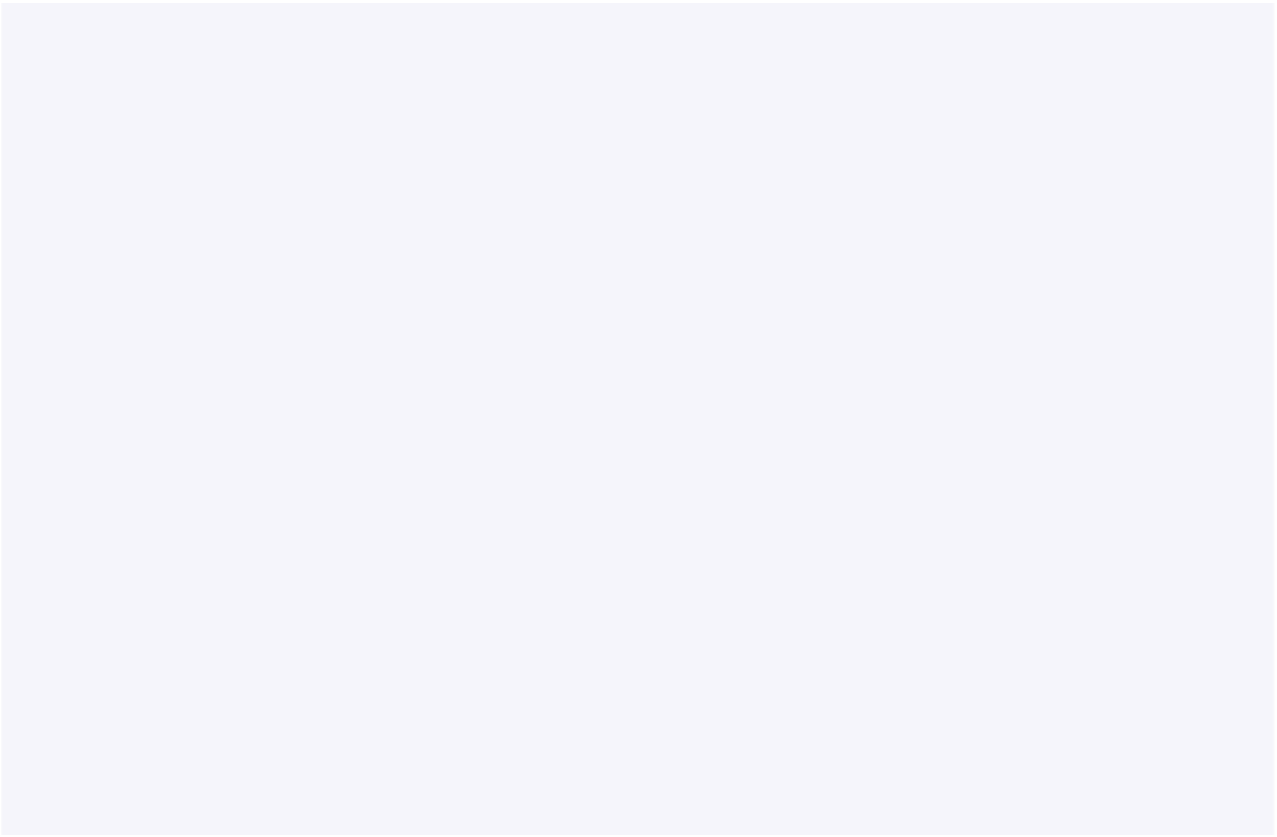
For example:

- celebrations
- achievements
- family expectations
- times when someone was praised
- times when someone was disappointed

What seemed to matter most in those moments?

What appeared to bring happiness or approval?

How important was it to feel happy, whether you truly were or not?





Messages You Notice Today

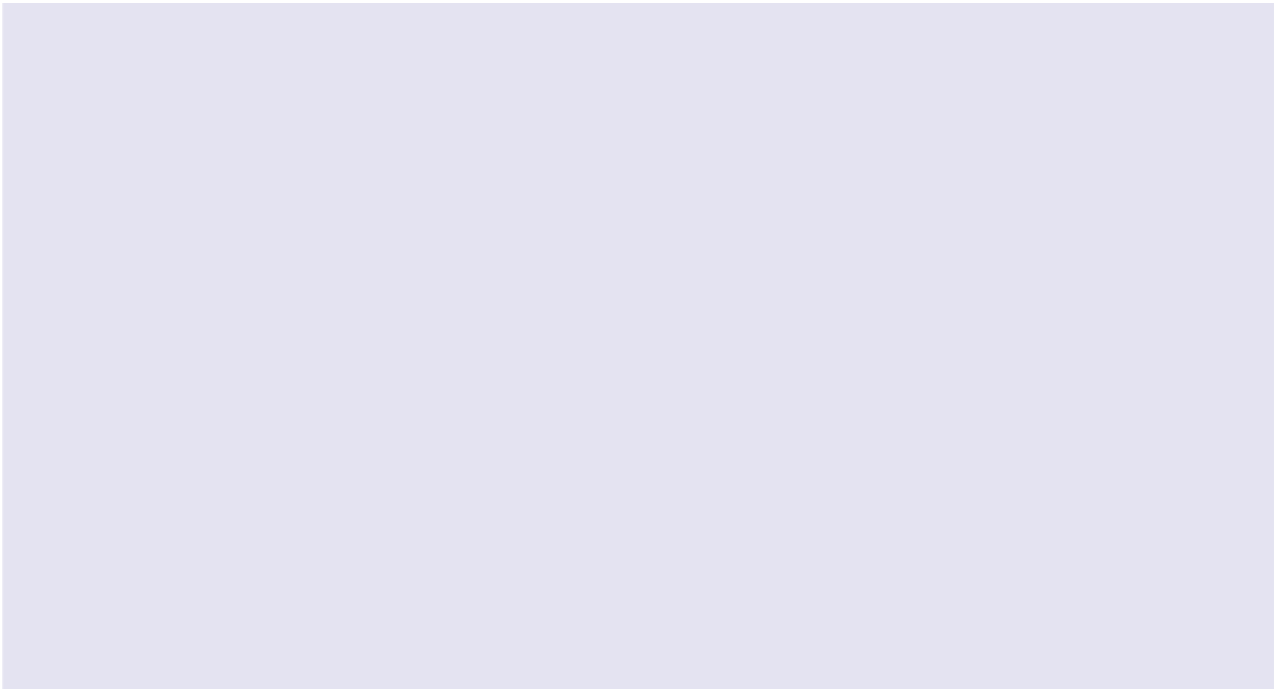
Now shift your attention to the present.

What messages about happiness do you see around you now?

You might notice them through:

- social media
- work culture
- advertisements
- conversations with friends
- family expectations
- lifestyle trends

What does the world around you suggest happiness looks like today?





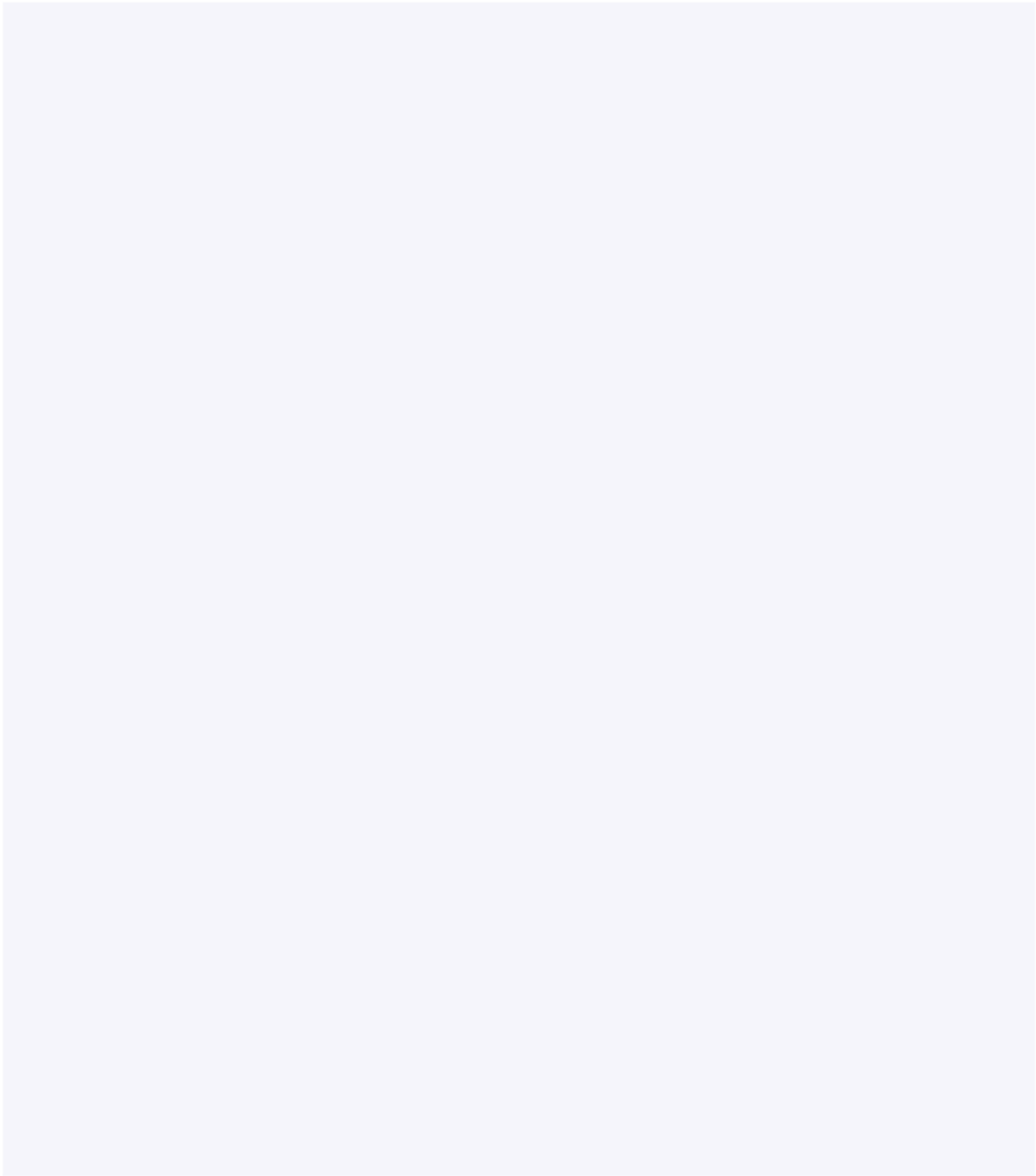
Reflection Prompt

After exploring these memories, pause for a moment.

Are there patterns in the messages you received?

Are there beliefs about happiness that you still carry today?

Write down any insights or observations that stand out to you.



About Me



Christine's passion is to help others reconnect with their souls, awaken to who they truly are, and live the lives their souls intended for them in this lifetime. Her offerings guide you to awaken to your true self in this moment and connect more deeply with your divine Higher Self and Soul. Through this connection, you can access your inner wisdom and begin expressing your life's purpose and gifts in the world. Christine serves as your facilitator, guide, and channel – helping you find your dharma, your unique spiritual essence and path.

Christine holds a Ph.D. in Medieval and Romantic German Mysticism from the University of Pennsylvania and has extensive training in Western Astrology, Holographic Sound Healing, Usui Reiki – Master level, Metatron Colour Healing, Mindfulness (MBSR and other approaches), and Kabbalah. A former professor at Southern Connecticut State University, she also supports educators through her Uplift Teachers work, bringing mindfulness and soul-centered awareness to classrooms and beyond.

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