

How to live more positively

In modern society, it's often considered cool to pretend like you don't care about anything—what people think, what's going on in your community, and even how your own life is going to unfold. But when you don't care, you miss out on a l...

Part 1 of 3:

Figuring Out What You Care About

1.



Make a list of things that interest you. Maybe it has been so long since you've really cared about something that it feels like you've lost the ability. But no matter how deep your feelings of caring are buried, they're in there somewhere, and it's time to uncover them. To care is to "feel concern or interest; attach importance to something," to "feel affection or liking."^[1] By that definition, who and what do you care about? Make a list of anything that causes you to feel interest, concern, or attachment of any kind.

1. Write down the names of people you feel attachment to—parents, siblings, friends, and anyone else who has a pull on your heart. If you think about the person often, and you'd miss them if they weren't there, you probably care about them. You don't have to love or even like them to care.
2. By the same measure, write down things besides people you care about. Don't write down the things you *should* care about, just the things you actually do. Maybe your life is better because you play soccer, or you can't imagine a world without Warcraft. Maybe you care about poetry, or you love a certain movie star. There's no limit to how long your list can be—write it all down, big and small.
3. Be honest with yourself as you make your list, and don't leave anything out. Maybe you've been conditioned to act like you're "above it all," or to hide the things that make you tick. People will try

to tell you what you should and shouldn't care about, but you'll have to learn to ignore them for the sake of your own happiness. And in most cases, sticking to your guns and expressing that you care will eventually win you others' admiration.^[2]

2.



Look at how you spend your free time. Still aren't sure what matters to you?^[3] Take a look at what you do with your time once all your obligations have been fulfilled. When your homework is complete, the workday is over and the chores are done, what do you usually do? The way you spend your free time can be quite telling. You probably use it to do something you care about.

1. Do you spend your free time calling someone for a long chat, texting your friends, or writing comments on Facebook? This might show that you care about social connections, staying in the loop, and strengthening your relationships.
2. Maybe you spend your free time working on your art - writing, music, painting, or whatever moves you. Or perhaps you spend it running, lifting, gardening, or cooking. If it's something you're doing of your own accord, you probably care about it.
3. What you read about or watch can also help you define your interests. For example, if you read world news every day, you probably care what's happening outside your local sphere. Even the TV shows you watch can point to what you care about. Look for common themes or genres you gravitate toward.

3.



Pay attention to what you think about as you're falling asleep. During the day you probably have to talk over subjects that you don't care about very much. Between making small talk, trying to impress people, and discussing subjects related to work or school, you might be confused about what really drives you. If that's the case, pay attention to your thoughts during the time right before you fall asleep at night. During this private, uninterrupted time, your cares will probably rise to the surface.

1. Which people do you think about most as you're falling asleep? Whether thinking of them makes you feel good or bad, the fact that they're in your mind means you care about them.
2. Do you have thoughts about what you're looking forward to, or what you *aren't* looking forward to about the next day?
3. Sometimes cares take the form of worries. If you realize that right before you fall asleep you're worried about how you'll perform during tomorrow's presentation, you might be worried because you care so much about it.^[4]

4.



See what piques your interest. What situations, ideas, stories or concepts elicit a strong reaction from you? What makes you want to learn more, speak up, or help out? Paying attention to things that cause you to an urge to get more invested can help you understand your own capacity for caring.

1. For example, maybe the sight of your little sister being teased causes you to feel a burning urge to step in and protect her.
2. Or perhaps you learned that the river in your city is being polluted, and you feel moved to participate in a river cleanup or find another way to stop pollution in your area.^[5]
3. Less serious investments count as caring, too. Maybe you watched a hilarious stand-up routine and fell into a Youtube rabbit hole watching every routine the comedian has ever recorded, or you read a news story about a cat that saved its owner from a fire and clicked over to several more articles on the subject.

5.



Figure out what tugs on your heartstrings. When you care about something, you have an emotional response to it. It makes you feel happy, excited, nervous, guilty, afraid, sad, or something else entirely. You might be the type to have very subtle emotions, or maybe they're big and overwhelming. Either way, they're like signposts pointing to what you care about.

1. Depression has been described as feeling like you just don't feel anything or care about anything—you're empty.^[6] If this is how you feel, and you're trapped in a state of not feeling or caring, look into getting treatment for depression.^[7] With proper treatment, you'll be able to experience emotions and caring once again.^[8]

Part 2 of 3:

Learning How to Care More Deeply

1.



Let yourself be more affected. Engage with the world and let it make an impact on you instead of brushing things off or being dismissive. When you acknowledge that something matters to you, you open the path to caring about it more deeply. Sure, it might be cooler to act like you just don't care. But when you ignore how much something means to you, you're losing an opportunity to gain wisdom from the situation.

1. Sometimes taking things personally might mean you have to be outside the norm. For example, maybe a group of people in your English class never do the required reading. They think it's ridiculous to waste time reading novels, and they sit in the back of class chatting and texting instead of paying attention. If you care about getting a good grade, and you see the value in studying literature, you'll have to be brave enough to do your work and pay attention in class, even if it doesn't win you points with your classmates.

2.



Be less dismissive. Are you sarcastic a lot? Is your default response to something new you learn usually dismissive or cynical? You aren't alone. But think about the most interesting people you know—the self-assured ones who know where they're going in life. They probably all share the quality of being earnest and positive when they discuss what they care about. Instead of trying to hide their passions behind a veil of sarcasm, they proudly display what makes them tick.

1. Don't be afraid to try new things. Instead of instantly dismissing something new to you, give it a chance to move you.
2. Instead of acting like you don't care about things, try talking proudly about what drives you. Frame what you care about as something to show off instead of something to hide.

3.



Feel emotions instead of trying to escape from them. Caring doesn't always feel good. In fact, it can feel downright lousy, like when it comes in the form of guilt or sadness. But letting yourself feel deeply—even when you emotions are painful—is what caring is all about. As a reward, you'll have better relationships and be more engaged with the world around you.^[9]

1. For example, it might be tempting to ignore the feelings of sadness you have about your grandmother who is in a nursing home and loves when you come to visit her. But when you let yourself care, when you have the courage to deal with the sadness and go visit your grandmother, you won't regret your decision to follow your heart.

4.



Work on strengthening your relationships with people. Some of your most important cares are probably related to people in your life. Caring about people is what drives relationships forward and makes them fulfilling. Sometimes just spending more time with people close to you can influence how much you care about them. The better you get to know them, the more you'll care about them.^[10]

1. In romantic relationships, people often hold back emotionally because they're afraid of being hurt. No one wants to be in the position of caring more than the other person. Caring takes courage. It requires putting yourself out there, even if you're not sure what you'll get in return.

5.



Spend time with other people who care. You can learn a lot about caring by spending time with other people who do. Surround yourself with people who are caring and helpful, rather than people who are callous or self-centered. Watch how caring people interact with others and approach new situations, and emulate their behavior. Once you start caring, you'll find it comes more naturally to you.^[11]

Showing that You Care



Go through the motions even if you don't really feel it. If you're really out of practice, you might have to fake it til you make it.^[12] Sometimes just going through the motions of caring will put you in the right situation to develop feelings about something until you actually do start to care. This isn't to say you should pretend to care about things just because other people do, or pretend to care about something you actually can't stand. But in some circumstances, it's OK to practice caring in hopes that you'll start feeling something soon enough.

1. Going through the motions can put you in closer proximity to something or someone you normally wouldn't have the chance to get to know very well. For example, maybe you don't feel very strongly about your next door neighbor, but you shovel her driveway when it snows, just to be nice. After awhile, the polite conversations the two of you have, which were sparked by your courtesy, could lead to a truly caring relationship.
2. Going through the motions can also help you learn more about something, leading you to care. You might think you don't care at all about biology, but you're doing your best in class so you can get a good grade. After studying hard and engaging in class discussions, you might find that the subject is actually compelling to you.

2.



Be a joiner instead of standing on the sidelines. It's really hard to start caring about something when you're watching instead of participating. Every chance you get to try something new or get more involved, try saying "yes" more often than "no." You never know where your positive attitude will take you. You might discover hidden talents and passions you never would have known were there.^[13]

3.



Care about yourself, too. If you have bad self esteem, you might need to start your mission to care more by valuing yourself first.^[14] Caring about yourself means treating yourself with kindness and being concerned about the way your story ends up.^[15]

1. Practice self-care on a daily basis to keep yourself in good physical and mental health. Do things every day to help you feel less stressed out and more self confident. Many people find that simple things like eating wholesome food, getting some exercise and treating themselves every once in a while make life feel more positive overall.
2. Set goals and stick to them. Part of caring about yourself means caring what happens in your future.

4.



Know when you should pull back. It's possible to open your heart too much and find that it gets swamped, abused or manipulated. Sometimes we feel the pain too much and want to help others without taking into account our own well being. It's important to know when to pull back a little. If you find that you're devoting all of your energy and time to something you care about, with little left over for yourself or other important things, it might be a good idea to devote less time to that particular obsession.

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