

Don't Fall Into the 'Cynicism Trap'

Expecting the worst is actually bad for our health.

There are days when the world can bring out our pessimistic side.

But we should fight against what Jamil Zaki, the author of "Hope For Cynics: The Surprising Science of Human Goodness," calls the "cynicism trap."

Cynicism — the belief that people are generally selfish, greedy and dishonest — can make us feel safer and smarter, he explained. But there is evidence that a cynical worldview may also have a negative effect on our health, making us more likely to suffer from depression, heart disease and burnout.

And research suggests that beliefs stemming from cynical thought are untrue, said Dr. Zaki, who is also the director of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Lab. We can check our cynicism by balancing our perspectives, he said. The world isn't a perfect place, but it isn't all bad either. He encourages readers to become "hopeful skeptics" who think critically about societal problems while recognizing how kind and generous others really are.

Cynicism, he writes in his book, is a lack of faith in people, while skepticism is a lack of faith in our assumptions.

So, the next time you have a cynical thought, he said, fact-check the beliefs behind it instead of relying on fears or vague feelings. Ask yourself: What information do I have to back up this claim? Am I making blanket statements?

I asked experts for a few more ways to stave off cynicism.

Look for moments of 'moral beauty.'

We tend to pay more attention to negative events than to positive ones, a psychological principle known as negativity bias.

"If a person cuts me off in traffic, my kids will hear about that person all day," Dr. Zaki explained. "But I don't notice the thousand motorists who are politely obeying traffic laws all around me."

When you're losing faith in people, he says to take 15 minutes out of your day and pay attention to the moments of kindness all around you — what Dacher Keltner, the author of "Awe," calls "moral beauty."

I tried it, and those moments added up quickly: A guy in a truck stopped at a light, joking with a stranger in the car next to him; a woman at the supermarket let someone go ahead of her because he had only two items. Afterward, I was persuaded that people are inherently good.

Spread 'positive gossip.'

We tend to highlight the negative when we gossip about others, Dr. Zaki said. Instead, he said, do the opposite: Spread positive tidbits about someone. Maybe it's a little-known but admirable fact about that person, he said, or perhaps a kind act you catch them in.

Publicly pointing out good deeds not only lowers your own cynicism but also that of others, Dr. Zaki said, "because you're sharing real information with them about real, positive things that people are doing."

You can also spread the word about how a person has made an impact on your life, "like, 'She never broadcast this, but she went out of their way to mentor me,'" said Y. Joel Wong, a professor of counseling psychology at Indiana University who studies positive psychology.

Passing along good-hearted gossip may even prompt others to follow suit, Dr. Wong said. Social contagion, or the spread of behaviors or attitudes through a group, isn't always negative, he said. It can be positive, too.

I'll start: My colleague Talya Minsberg is running in the New York City Marathon for the 10th time this year!

Fight against a 'social shark attack.'

Shark attacks are rare, but our outsize fear of them can keep us from venturing into the water, Dr. Zaki explained.

When we think about taking a chance on somebody else, Dr. Zaki said, "our mind immediately goes to the most vivid and awful outcomes." Maybe people will reject you, or ignore you. Cynics can also become guarded after a bad experience with someone and become what he defines as "pre-disappointed." They decide that no one can be trusted, so why bother?

Dr. Zaki recommends breaking that cycle of cynicism by taking small risks. Think of something you want to say to someone you care about but have been hesitant to express. Or imagine striking up a conversation with a stranger tomorrow.

In either case, predict how positive, from a scale of one to 10, you think the interaction would be. Then take your social risk, and compare the reality with your predictions. (Research shows that people tend to like us more than we presume they do — what researchers called a "liking gap" in a 2018 study.)

Cynicism, Dr. Wong said, can be self-protective, but it prevents you from taking emotional chances that could potentially be more rewarding.

Yesterday, I went in search of more “moral beauty.” My favorite moment: A young father with a newborn in a carrier was gingerly walking through my town. I could tell by the way he glanced around that he was dying for people to comment on the baby.

At least half of us who passed him understood the assignment: We made a fuss. It cheered my cynical heart.

By Jancee Dunn, Wellness writer

NAMA now issues Digital Certificates for all new certification applicants

Digital certificates for mental health professionals are electronic documents used to certify the identity, qualifications, and credentials of individuals in the field of mental health. NAMA will begin issuing digital certificates to new Specialists in 2024. Here's a summary of their advantages:

1. **Identity Verification:** Digital certificates help in verifying the identity of the mental health professional. They contain personal information like name, professional title, and the organization they are affiliated with.
2. **Credential Authentication:** They confirm the professional's qualifications, such as degrees, licenses, and certifications. This assures clients and colleagues that the individual is qualified to practice in their field.
3. **Security and Privacy:** Digital certificates often include cryptographic keys for secure communication. This is particularly important for protecting sensitive client information and ensuring confidentiality in digital interactions.
4. **Electronic Signatures:** These certificates can be used to digitally sign documents, such as treatment plans or consent forms, validating their authenticity and integrity.
5. **Compliance with Regulations:** They help mental health professionals comply with legal and ethical standards, such as HIPAA in the United States, which mandates the protection of patient health information.
6. **Online Verification:** Clients, insurance companies, and other professionals can verify the credentials of a mental health professional online, enhancing trust and transparency in the profession.
7. **Ease of Use:** Digital certificates simplify the process of credential verification, making it more efficient compared to traditional paper-based methods.
8. **Elevate professional identity** with prestigious, easily shareable digital certificates that announce your achievements and expertise.
9. **Experience the confidence** of validated expertise with digital certificates that recognize professional growth and commitment to mastering a specific specialty.
10. **Enhance your online presence** with digital credentials that seamlessly integrate with professional profiles, websites, and email signatures.

Digital certificates for anger management and mental health professionals are essential tools for establishing trust, ensuring privacy, and maintaining compliance in the increasingly digital landscape of healthcare. For more information go to <https://sertifier.com/>