

ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

HOW TO LEAD A GET-TOGETHER

TUNE IN - CONNECT - TAKE ACTION

A GUIDE FOR LOCAL GROUP LEADERS



WHAT IS A GET-TOGETHER ?

Action for Happiness Get-Togethers are an opportunity to meet-up with like-minded people in our local area - to **Tune-in** to what really matters, **Connect** together and find practical ways to **Take Action** in our own lives and communities.

This process is based on the best bits of our **Exploring What Matters course** and uses the themes of our popular **Monthly Action Calendars** to create simple, inspiring and insightful sessions that any Action for Happiness supporter can pick up and run.

Exploring What Matters course: www.actionforhappiness.org/course

Our Monthly Action Calendars: www.actionforhappiness.org/calendars

Why run a Get-together?

When we have the chance to stop and tune-in to our experiences, with awareness and gratitude, we see things in a way that helps life make a lot more sense. When we connect with others to listen to their views and experiences - and share ours too - we discover that these conversations can make a big difference to how we think, feel and behave. And when we find small, personal ways to take action based on what we've learned, we can shift from theory to practice and create positive changes for ourselves and others.

So these Get-Togethers are all about **Tuning In**, **Connecting** and **Taking Action** together. They combine what we've learned about bringing people together locally with our monthly themes and the enthusiasm of local volunteers to create something special.

Thanks for helping to create a happier and kinder world :)



"Action for Happiness encourages each of us to live more compassionately - and put the happiness of others at the center of our lives. This is the path to lasting peace and happiness"

The Dalai Lama, patron of Action for Happiness

HOW TO GET STARTED

Here's what we suggest in terms of getting things started:

1. Get Excited

Tune in to why this feels like a valuable thing to do, for yourself as well as others.

2. Choose a venue

Find a nearby place to meet that is friendly, open and has some privacy too.

3. Invite people

Reach out to invite local people and encourage them to bring others along too.

4. Hold a Get-Together

Meet locally to Tune In, Connect and Take Action together.

5. Repeat

Plan together when to meet again - e.g. agree a regular day/time each month.

Where to run your Get-Together

There are lots of good places to hold a Get-Together. It's important that the venue feels comfy and friendly and has private space for people to chat openly. Examples include:

- A free room in a community hall
- Someone's large living room or garden
- A nice space in a local cafe or pub
- Your local 'Happy Cafe': www.actionforhappiness.org/happy-cafe

It's best to find somewhere free and encourage people bring along snacks to share with each other, but some groups prefer to use a paid venue and bring along donations to cover the costs, once they are large and established enough.

It's really nice if there is enough space for everyone to be in a circle so they can all see each other, but if this is not possible then try to find ways to get people to mingle and move about so that everyone makes contact with someone new.

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Who to invite

Start with your friends and others you know locally. It's important that the group has people you feel comfortable hanging out with and opening up to.

We recommend aiming for around 10-15 people for each session. Some Get-Togethers have just 3 people, while others can go up to 30, so go for whatever size feels right to you. Once your group is up and running you can start inviting a wider range of people.

It's great when groups decide to reach out locally to find new people to join them - remembering that all our closest friends were strangers once. However, we'd only recommend doing this if you've got some experience hosting public meetings, or have a core group already going that you can rely on to support you.

How to Host a Get-Together

You really don't need to be an expert facilitator to be able to hold a Get-Together - it's more about being able to be authentic, aware and willing to encourage others.

It can also really help to share the role with others - perhaps even get a different person to lead each section.

Here are our 3 golden rules for Get-Togethers (we suggest sharing these with your group):

1. We listen to what everyone has to offer

Everyone in the room has something valuable to offer which we honour with our full attention and non-judgment, giving them the space and time they need to speak.

2. We speak from the heart, not just the head

When we share our lived experiences and feelings, rather than just ideas and theories, we offer something really valuable to the group and ourselves.

3. We take care of ourselves and each other

It's up to us to decide how much or how little to participate, while being mindful of the needs of others. We only benefit when we are willing to put good ideas into action.

USING THE GET-TOGETHER PACK



The Get-Together Packs are put together by the Action for Happiness team and combine the latest evidence from the world of wellbeing and psychological science, with our experience of running thousands of life-changing experiences for individuals and groups.

They each follow the same simple but effective structure: welcoming the group and getting to know each other, tuning in with mindfulness and gratitude, connecting on important topic and setting actions to take forwards.

www.actionforhappiness.org/get-together

The packs contain simple instructions that can be followed directly, but the following sections have a few extra tips and thoughts about each element that might be helpful.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the introduction is to get people familiar with one another and to cultivate a sense of collective commitment to being together in the space.

With everyone sitting in a circle we simply go round and encourage people to say:

"Hello, my name is, and a recent Action for Happiness I have taken is ... "

NOTE: An 'Action for Happiness' is anything you do to increase or support the wellbeing and happiness of yourself or someone else (e.g. having a relaxing bath when I got home from work, trying not to criticise my kids, buying shopping for an elderly neighbour).

As host it can be really helpful to lead the way and show people how to do this by explaining what we're about to do and then demonstrating yourself with your own name and recent action (which could be setting up this group!).

TUNE IN

Each session starts with a period of 'tuning in' with **mindfulness** (calm, non-judgemental awareness of whatever is happening in the present moment) and **gratitude** (which science shows can be practiced to cultivate a more appreciative state of mind).

Mindfulness Exercise (5 mins)

Each Mindfulness exercise is slightly different and tuned to the theme of the session. However, they all involve sitting down (or standing or laying down if people prefer) together in silent contemplation for about 5 minutes.

You don't need to be a mindfulness teacher to run this - although if you are and want to offer your own guided meditation that's fine too. It is helpful to let people know what we're about to do, invite them to be as comfortable as possible and let people know that they don't have to take part if they would rather not (eyes open or closed is fine). Then read out the exercise before timing about 5 minutes and then bringing people back.

Experiencing a period of mindful reflection can sometimes be very affecting for certain people, so try to bring the group out of the exercise in as gentle a way as possible. Some leaders like to use a small bell, or gently tap a glass with a pen, while others may just end the exercise by saying "Okay, thank you everyone" in a soft voice.

Gratitude Exercise (10 mins)

The Gratitude exercises also change slightly each time to suit the theme, but they all involve reflecting on something we feel grateful for and then turning to a partner (or group of 3 if necessary) to share what came up for us.

People can sometimes find it a little tricky to think of something specific if they're not in the mood - so it can be helpful to remind them that this takes practice, there is no rush and that it can be something small and simple (like the fact I am currently breathing).

If possible invite them to partner with someone they've not spoken to before. We suggest you give people about 10 minutes to chat and it can be helpful to remind them to swap over after 5 minutes and to let them know 1 minute before the exercise is about to end.

CONNECT

Across all of our work with Action for Happiness so far, we've found that it's always the face-to-face conversations that people find most fulfilling and inspiring.

When we have a conversation about something that matters, we have the opportunity to share our own experience and be listened to in a way that helps us realise that we are not alone. We also to hear views and approaches that we might not have thought of before.

Group Discussion (30 mins)

In leading the group discussion we begin by introducing the topic, perhaps sharing a little about how the theme resonates with us personally. We then introduce one or more of the questions provided. Each page has four questions to use, one on the front in the Connect box and three others overleaf in the Questions section.

The questions are designed to cover a few different angles and as host you can choose whether to pick one to start with, or to offer all of them for the group to discuss. It can help to get the ball rolling by sharing briefly your own experience with the question and asking if any in the group feel similarly or have other experiences to share.

Remember, people in your group will have different levels of comfort when it comes to sharing their thoughts and feelings with others. So try to do what you can to encourage more confident people to give space to listen to others - and to encourage quieter people to feel comfortable about speaking up, without feeling judged or under pressure.

It may be helpful to remind everyone of the three golden rules:

- 1. We listen as if everyone has something to offer**
- 2. We speak from the heart, not just the head**
- 3. We take care of ourselves and each other**

After around 25 minutes, let people know that there are just 5 minutes left and that now is a good time to speak up if you haven't had the chance already.

TAKE ACTION

There is a reason we included the word 'action' in the name Action for Happiness: when we take action - rather than just thinking and talking - we feel, learn, affect and change much more than we would otherwise.

Taking action helps us because we gain first-hand experience of doing something differently, which is stored in our minds in a more tangible way than by just thinking.

Our actions can also be witnessed by others - which may bring helpful or encouraging feedback. It may also motivate them to try something different themselves. It is often be more effective to 'be the change' for others to follow, than making requests or demands.

Action Setting (10 mins)

Begin the action setting by offering another 30 second pause for people to unwind from all the discussion and invite people to reflect on something they have heard or thought about today that has really touched them that they might enjoy putting into action.

Remind them that their action doesn't have to be anything big or significant, and that it can be helpful for them to try and think of the smallest, simplest way they might make this action happen in the world. But it does need to be something specific.

It may be useful to reflect on when they will do their action and where they will be, to help make the visualisation of it more real. If anyone struggles to think of an action, you can let them know about the suggested actions in the Action section overleaf.

Once it seems like everyone has something (including you) then get everyone to share a few words about their action, if they feel comfortable doing so. It can be helpful to model this for them by going first and sharing what your action is going to be.

Optional: if you want to, and the group gives permission, you can note down the different actions people commit to and either follow up with them by email as a helpful reminder or ask them to share how they got on at next session.

FOLLOW UP

EXTRA RESOURCES



Each Get-Together pack includes extra resources on the second page, including related action calendars, videos, book suggestions and links to research articles.

You may like to let people know about these during the session and share the links. Or if people are interested, you could send them the whole pack by email afterwards.

We aim to release a new pack every month to match our popular Action Calendar themes. You can find these here (and also sign up to get them direct to your inbox):

www.actionforhappiness.org/get-together

STAYING CONNECTED

Some Get-Togethers may just be a one-off thing - and that's fine - but lots of groups like to stay connected and meet regularly (e.g. each month) to cover the next theme. Between sessions it can be helpful to stay connected, for example by creating a group email list, Facebook group or WhatsApp group. So perhaps get a show of hands in the room to see how people would like to stay in touch - and do what you can to help make this happen.

THE **WORLD** IS CHANGED BY *your example* NOT YOUR OPINION

