

**Happiness**

Exercise



10-15 min



Client



No



Exploring Flow Experiences

Flow can be defined as a psychological experience when one is performing an activity in which he or she is fully immersed with an energized focus. In some professions, such as in the case of athletes and musicians, flow is also known as “being in the zone,” characterized by full absorption in what one does.

According to flow theory, flow contributes to people's well-being and personal fulfillment (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). In line with this, research on adolescents has shown that increased flow experiences are associated with increased intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and time spent doing schoolwork (Hektner & Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). This tool can help clients gain more insights into personal flow experiences and provide a useful starting point for experiencing an increasing amount of flow in daily life.

Goal

The goal of this exercise is to bring awareness to the moments of experiencing a flow-state.



Advice

- It is possible to use a daily variation of this exercise. In this daily version, the client recalls activities that caused him/her to experience flow at the end of the day. Preferably, the client keeps track of these experiences (either digitally or using pen and paper) so that they can be discussed during the subsequent therapy or coaching session. Together with the client, the practitioner can then look for characteristics that are shared by the activities and explore potential ways to increase flow experiences.



References

- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, I. S. (Eds.). (1988). *Optimal experience: Psychological studies of flow in consciousness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hektner, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *A longitudinal exploration of flow and intrinsic motivation in adolescents*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City.
- Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2009). *Flow theory and research*. In C. R. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 195-206). Oxford University Press.



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Instructions

1. Explain the concept of flow to your client. For this purpose, you can mention the characteristics of flow according to Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009), which include:
 - An intensely focused concentration on the present moment and a loss of relative self-consciousness.
 - A sense of deep focus and effortless involvement that makes other needs negligible.
 - The experience that action and awareness are merged.
 - Intrinsically rewarding activity.
 - Immediate feedback on the progress as the participant engages in the activity and the belief in potential success.
 - Clear goals.
 - No concern about the judgment of others.
 - A sense of personal control or agency in the activity.
 - A sense of distortion of time (e.g., time seems to slow down or pass quickly).
2. Invite the client to think of a time where he/she was completely absorbed and focused on what he/she was doing, a time when your client felt positive and secure about his/her abilities, and was not worried about failing. Allow your client some time to recall this event.
3. Have the client write about the experience on a piece of paper. Ask him/her to write down their thoughts, feelings, and impressions of the experience. Alternatively, discuss the experience with the client. Guide the participants with the following questions.

What was going on? When did you have this experience? Where were you?



Who were you with?

What was happening?

How or what did you feel?

How did the experience start?



How did you feel after the experience was over?

4. Evaluate the exercise. You may address the following questions:

How did the exercise of recalling your flow-state feel?

Are there more examples of activities that you recognize as flow states in your life? If so, what are these activities?



Do the examples that you mention share a specific characteristic? For instance, creativity may be involved in all or most of the examples. Or the activities are always carried out alone/with others.

Would it be possible to do these activities more often?

If so, what could be the first step to do these activities more often?