AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 5

TOPIC 5.2

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology studies the factors that support well-being, resilience, positive emotion, meaning, and psychological health.



WHAT POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY ASKS

EXPERIENCE

What supports positive emotion and life satisfaction?

CHARACTER

How can strengths and virtues support functioning?

ADAPTATION

How do people cope, recover, and make meaning?

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Explain subjective well-being, gratitude, resilience, and signature strengths.
2. Organize character strengths around six broad virtue categories.
3. Explain posttraumatic growth without treating trauma as beneficial or growth as required.

BIG IDEA

Positive psychology does not ignore distress. It studies protective factors and positive functioning alongside difficulty and loss.

1 Well-being and strengths

Positive experiences and character strengths may support psychological health, but claims still need careful research evidence.

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

PERSON'S OWN EVALUATION

How a person evaluates life satisfaction and emotional well-being; it is related to, but not identical with, objective health indicators.

GRATITUDE

Expressing appreciation can increase subjective well-being for some people.

SIGNATURE STRENGTH

A personal character strength used in a meaningful and effective way.

SIX VIRTUE CATEGORIES

WISDOM

knowledge and judgment

COURAGE

facing difficulty

HUMANITY

care for others

JUSTICE

fairness and community

TEMPERANCE

moderation and restraint

TRANSCENDENCE

meaning beyond the self

EVIDENCE CHECK

An increase after a gratitude activity does not prove the activity caused the change unless the study design supports a causal conclusion.

2 Resilience and growth

People can adapt after difficulty, and some report positive change after trauma, but neither outcome erases the harm experienced.

A POSSIBLE PATH AFTER TRAUMA

TRAUMA OR STRESS

A harmful or deeply difficult experience occurs.

COPING + MEANING

A person processes, adapts, and may find meaning.

POSSIBLE GROWTH

Positive psychological change may be reported.

WHAT POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH MAY LOOK LIKE

NEW PRIORITIES

Changes in what feels important.

STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

Greater value placed on connection.

GREATER MEANING

A changed sense of purpose or significance.

RELATED, NOT IDENTICAL

RESILIENCE

Adapting or recovering after stress or difficulty.

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

Positive psychological change that may occur after trauma or major stress.

USE THIS IDEA CAREFULLY

Posttraumatic growth does not mean trauma is good, growth is guaranteed, or a person has failed if growth is not reported. Harm and positive change can coexist.