

# THE WAY OF THE DONKEY

Donkeys have many wonderful traits. Donkeys are very friendly and exceptionally smart. Donkeys are very laid back, but also very self-protective and have a mind of their own. Donkeys appear to be intuitive and have an excellent sense of how others are feeling.

Donkeys have ways of behaving that social scientists tell us help people feel happy and empowered—and to respond effectively when things get tough.

Positive psychology, also called the “science of happiness,” provides insight into strategies people can use to live more happy and empowered lives and respond effectively to stressful situations. Amazingly, it appears that donkeys already know these ways.

## Support Your Happiness and Empowerment

Some of the best ways to feel resilient, empowered, and happy are these:

- **Connect With Friends.** Donkeys have special buddies and connect with many friends.
- **Reach Out To Be Kind.** Donkeys scratch each other’s backs. They are kind and of service to others.
- **Build Your Strengths.** Donkeys like to learn new things.
- **Focus on the Good.** Donkeys are very thankful—especially if you bring carrots.

If you do these four things that donkeys do, this can help you feel resilient, empowered, and happy.

## If Things Get Tough...

Unfortunately, there may be times in your life when things get tough. Sometimes bad things just happen. If you follow the things that donkeys do, this can help you if things get tough. When donkeys sense danger or they are not sure. They do this:

- **Stop and Stay Calm.** Donkeys stop and stay calm. They do not overreact.
- **Stand Tall.** Donkeys stand tall to appear and feel powerful.
- **Think Things Through.** Donkeys think things through to decide what is best to do.

### The Way of the Donkey Resilience and Empowerment Strategies

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The Way of the Donkey is located in the Fern Ridge region outside of Eugene, Oregon.

For more information, our website is: <http://donkeyeeay.org>.

# THE WAY OF YOUR BRAIN

To understanding why following The Way of the Donkey can help you feel happier and empowered and to respond effectively when things get tough, it is helpful to understand more of how your brain works. Your brain is an absolutely wonderful part of your body.

The working part of your brain are the neurons. Neurons form connections, called synapses, with other neurons. The neurons communicate with each other through these synapses. Neurons will connect with each other to establish ways in which we normally think about and respond to things. When this happens, we say that the neurons are “wired together.”

## Flipping Your Lid

You can envision how your brain this way. Fold your thumb down into the palm of your hand. Then fold your fingers over this. This is like your brain. We will focus on two parts: The Little Brain, where your thumb is, and the Big Brain, where your fingers are.



The Little Brain part is the oldest part of your brain, the amygdala. The Little Brain goes into action when we think we are in danger. It sends hormones throughout our bodies to prepare us to go into flight or to fight so we can get away from that dangerous animal.

The Big Brain, the prefrontal cortex, is where we think things through so we can make good decisions.

A problem is that when we think there might be danger, this often causes us to “flip our lids” Open your fingers. If Little Brain has taken over, then you have “flipped your lid.” Your Big Brain is no longer communicating with your Little Brain.



Because of this you might not make the good decisions. If you “flip your lid” you can’t effectively think things through.

## Rewiring Your Brain

Unfortunately, our brains pay more attention to bad things that happen than the good things.

The reason for this was survival. Primitive people had to worry about dangerous animals along their path. So the human brain focuses more on the possible dangers than on good things.

Because of this, our neurons can “wire together” in a way that keeps our attention on these bad experiences or how bad we feel.

The really great news is that we can rewire our brains to focus more on the good things and less on the bad things.

There are some things to do to rewire the brain to be more happy. It will take some time to do this. But if you keep focusing on the strategies called The Way of the Donkey you can rewire your Brain to be more resilient and happy.

The human brain is far more sophisticated than a donkey’s brain. But amazingly, donkeys have some special traits that can help us to learn how to feel happier and more empowered and to respond when things are stressful.

# CONNECT WITH FRIENDS

I make positive connections with good friends and trusted adults.

Donkeys connect with their best “buddy donkey” in the pasture. It is said that “an only donkey is a lonely donkey.” In any larger group of donkeys, there are smaller groups of two or three donkeys who are “best friends.” Donkeys also make friends with other animals and their human friends.

## Good Friends

Having good friends can help you feel good about yourself and have more fun in your life. To have good friends, you have to be a good friend. Pay attention to making positive connections with others. Smiling sends a message that you want to connect with others.

The biggest barrier to making friends is fear that someone might not want to be your friend. To deal with this fear, just focus on getting to know other people better. If you both decide to become friends, this is great. If not, that is also fine. Thinking this way can help you to relax and just have fun.

The best way to make new friends is by doing the things you enjoy. Get involved in these activities with the idea of enjoying the activity—and possibly making a new friend. Focus on having fun doing what you like to do. Look around to find someone who also looks like they are having fun and start to talk to this person. People like to be friends with those who have fun doing the things they like to do.

Be the friend that you want to have. Treat people the way you want to be treated. Make sure that you are giving as much to your friend as you are receiving. Let your friends know that you believe in them and support them. Also, be sure to give your friends space. Everybody needs time by themselves.

Realize that friendships sometime end. This does not mean anything is wrong with either of you. Do not allow your sadness to turn to anger or attack. Keep yourself busy doing things that you enjoy. Be open to making new friends.

## Trusted Adults

If you are a young person or young adult, it is also helpful to have adult friends, especially some “trusted adults.” Trusted adults are adults you feel safe talking to when you are upset or scared and really need some guidance on what you might do. It is helpful to have a number of trusted adults.

Trusted adults can be parents, grandparents, or guardians. A teacher or a coach could be a trusted adult. The parent of a friend could also be a trusted adult. Look around and you will find adults who would love to be friends with you.

Conduct a friendship audit.:

- Who are your current friends?
- What interests do you share?
- What are the strengths of these friendships?
- How can you build on these strengths?
- How can you make new friends?
- What trusted adults do you connect with?
- How can you connect with other trusted adults?

At the end of the day, write in your journal: Who did I connect with today and how did this make me feel?

# REACH OUT TO BE KIND

I reach out to be kind to others. I act in service to others.

Donkeys scratch each other's back. This is called "social grooming." Animals who live in social groups, like packs or herds, engage in social grooming. Social grooming helps animals bond in their group. Mother animals use social grooming to bond with their children. Social grooming is a way to resolve conflict. This is a way that animals say, "I'm sorry."

Donkeys were first domesticated in ancient Egypt. They were used as service animals. Throughout time and even today, most donkeys in the world are being used to provide service to people by carrying heavy loads or pulling carts. Donkeys can teach us the importance of acting in a way that is in service to others.

One of the best ways you can increase your happiness is to consistently reach out to be kind to others. You might think that being kind to others is something you do for them. Being kind to others also is really good for you.

Being kind to others makes you feel as good as the person you were kind to. Being kind to others can significantly increase your happiness and decrease your feelings of being alone. Doing things in service to others also will make you feel really good about yourself. Being kind to others and acting in service results in other people being kind to you and makes our world a better place.

Here is a fun way that can help you focus on reaching out to be kind:

Get five bright copper pennies. Start the day with those pennies in your left pocket. When you reach out to be kind to someone, transfer a penny over to your right pocket. Try to transfer all of those pennies to your right pocket by the end of the day.

At the end of the day, think to yourself:

- Who did I reach out to be kind to?
- What did I do to be kind?

- How did this person respond?
- How did this make me feel?

Is there someone you would like to become friends with? Reach out to be kind to this person. Being kind to others is the best way to form new friendships.

Has someone been hurtful to you in the past, but isn't being hurtful now? Reach out to be kind to this person. This will help to reduce the possibility this person will be hurtful to you in the future.

Do you see that someone is being excluded or treated badly? Reach out to be kind to this person. When you regularly engage in these actions this will set you on a path of being in service to others—a path to social justice.

If someone has been hurtful to you, one way to respond is to create a "Ripple of Kindness." As quickly as you can, reach out to be kind to five people.

Tell them you are starting a "Ripple of Kindness" and ask each of them to help you spread this Ripple by reaching out to be kind to five other people. Watch the Ripple grow.

By shifting your focus from what happened to you to reaching out to be kind to others, this can help to take the pain of what happened away. This is a way to keep your positive personal power.

You could also help to form a Kindness Team at your school or any other group you belong to. Work with others to find ways to encourage everyone to reach out to be kind. This can be a great way to be of service to others.

At the end of the day, write in your journal: How did I reach out to be kind or to be of service and how did this make me feel?

# BUILD MY STRENGTHS

I use my personal strengths every day. If things get tough, I use my strengths. I build new strengths.

Donkeys are very smart and like to learn new things. When you use your personal strengths to do new things, this makes you feel more empowered. Below are the character strengths that scientists from throughout the world think are the most important. Everybody has different strengths.

As you read this list, ask yourself: Is this a lot like me? Somewhat like me? Not much like me at this time?

- **Creativity.** I like to think of new and better ways of doing things.
- **Curiosity.** I am always asking questions. I love to discover new things.
- **Judgement.** I look at all sides of an issue to come up with the right answer.
- **Love of Learning.** I love to learn new things.
- **Wisdom.** I am considered wise, because I think things through.
- **Bravery.** I speak up for what is right, even when others do not agree with me.
- **Persevere.** I finish what I start, even if it becomes difficult.
- **Honesty.** I speak the truth. I take responsibility for my feelings and behaviors.
- **Zest.** I live life as an adventure filled with excitement.
- **Love.** I value the close relationships I have with others.
- **Kindness.** I enjoy helping others, even if I do not know them well.
- **Social Intelligence.** I pay attention to how others are thinking and feeling.
- **Teamwork.** I always do my part on a team. I work hard for the success of my group.

- **Fairness.** I treat all people fairly.
- **Leadership.** I am good at leading others.
- **Forgiveness.** I am willing to forgive someone who has done something wrong.
- **Humility.** I am humble. I let my actions speak more than my words.
- **Prudence.** I am careful about what I do. I try not to do things I might later regret.
- **Self-Control.** I am in control of what I do and say.
- **Appreciate Excellence.** I appreciate the beautiful and wonderful things in life.
- **Gratitude.** I pay attention to the good things that happen to me. I say thanks.
- **Hope.** I believe that good things are coming to me now.
- **Humor.** I like to laugh, smile, and see the fun in all situations.
- **Spirituality.** I feel my life has a higher purpose.

Use The Way of the Donkey Strengths Cards or just ask yourself:

- What are my best strengths?
  
- What strengths would I like to build?

At the beginning of each day, pick a strength you want to use or build. That day, do something that uses this strength.

If there is a problem you have to deal with, think things through to decide what to do that uses your strengths.

At the end of the day, write in your journal: What strengths did I use and how did this make me feel?

# FOCUS ON THE GOOD

I focus on the good things that are happening in my life. I am thankful and express my gratitude.

Donkeys are very thankful when they receive treats—especially carrots. They are also very thankful when they are being petted or groomed and when they can find a log to rub against. Most of all, they are thankful when they have loving people who take care of them.

Being thankful for good things makes you feel happy. When you intentionally focus on the good things that are happening in your life, this will help you to be happier. If life has been challenging for you, intentionally reminding yourself every day to focus on the good and be thankful is one of the best ways to regain happiness.

Here is a process you can use to be thankful for the good things that will help to wire or rewire your brain to be happy:

- **Have a Good Experience.** Either notice that a good thing that has happened or do something good for yourself.
- **Enrich It.** Keep thinking about this experience for just a bit of time. Enjoy it. Think about how wonderful this is. Take the time to feel really happy.
- **Absorb It.** Think about this good experience as being absorbed into you. Let this happy feeling travel deep into your mind and warm your heart.

If you have a negative thought or something challenging has happened, think to yourself “cancel.” Then, focus on a positive experience you recently had—one of those happy times you absorbed into your mind and heart. Let the good thoughts of this positive experience erase the negative.

If someone has done something that has made you feel happy, express your gratitude. Send a message to this person thanking them. This will make both you and them feel happy.

Try this experiment: Think about how happy you feel right now on a scale from 1 to 5—from “not very happy” up to “very happy.”

Then, think about three things that have recently happened that made you happy. Take the time to enrich your feelings and absorb them into your body.

Now, think about how happy you feel right now.

At the end of each day, write in your journal: What happened today that made me feel good?

# STOP AND STAY CALM

I sit quietly, am mindful, and achieve calm. If things get tough, I remind myself to remain calm.

When donkeys sense possible danger they do not “flip their lids.” They do not run away. They stop and stay calm.

This is the best thing you can do if things get tough.

## Learn to Stay Calm

The practice of mindfulness helps people achieve calmness and focus. When you practice being mindful this will rewire the neurons in your brain so that you are less likely to “flip your lid” if things get tough. Practicing mindfulness also will increase your happiness.

Spend some time each day practicing mindfulness. These are some simple steps you can take to practice mindfulness.

- Take a seat on the floor and cross your legs, sit in a chair and make sure your feet are flat on the floor, or lie down on your bed or a couch.
- Straighten your upper body but do not be stiff. Put your hands onto the tops of your legs or beside you.
- Drop your chin a little and either look down or close your eyes.
- Breathe in slowly. Hold your breath briefly. Slowly let your breath out.
- If your mind wanders, just return to thinking about your breath.
- Do this for at least a minute and work up to being able to do this for 5 minutes.

## Stay Calm

If things get tough, it is important to remain calm and to “self-regulate.” Self-regulate means that you have the ability to keep yourself calm.

There are stages of “flipping your lid:”

- **Calm.** You feel calm and relaxed.
- **Trigger.** Something happens that starts making you feel upset.
- **Upset.** You become increasingly upset.
- **Outburst.** You become out of control. You have “flipped your lid” and cannot think clearly.
- **Confusion.** You now feel confused and embarrassed.
- **Recovery.** The time it takes for you to calm down.

Trust your gut instincts. When you have triggered or are about to trigger, pay close attention to staying calm. Use your mindfulness skills. Breathe in slowly, hold your breath briefly, slowly let your breath out. Walk away from the situation, if you can. Practice mindfulness until you have calmed.

At a time when you are calm, think about what makes you trigger. Think about how and where this might occur.

Next, think about your strengths and how you can use each of your strengths if something starts to trigger you. What steps can you take to stay calm?

If something happens and you start to trigger, stay calm by breathing slowly. Use one of your strategies to effectively respond.

# STAND TALL

I stand tall and walk with pride. I do not allow what happens to control how I think about myself or respond.

Donkeys are animals of prey. This means that other animals might eat them. A donkey who is feeling threatened or is not sure what might be happening will stand very tall to appear more powerful.

## Stand With Power

By standing tall this indicates to others that you are empowered. Hunching over, looking down, and keeping your arms crossed over your chest says to others that you do not feel empowered. Standing tall communicates "I have the power to effectively handle this."

Try this experiment for yourself:

- **First, "feel small."** Stand or sit in a hunched over manner. Hang your head low. Look down at your feet. Fold your arms across your chest. Take a breath and sigh. How does this make you feel?
- **Now, "stand tall."** Stand up as straight as you can. Hold your head high. Look directly in front of you. Hold your arms high in a "success pose"—like you would hold your hands if you just scored a soccer goal or got an "A" on a paper. Say, "Yeah! Right on!" How does this make you feel?

When you stand tall, this makes you feel more powerful—even when inside you might be feeling small. Stand tall whenever you feel you need more personal power.

Every morning, before you leave your house, take a minute to practice standing tall and feeling empowered.

If something happens that might cause you to "flip your lid," first breathe slowly to stay calm and then remind yourself to stand tall.

# Control Your Thinking

You will never be able to control when or if someone is hurtful to you or something else bad happens.

You do have the ability to control your thinking about how you feel about yourself and will respond.

Feeling sad or angry is not just caused by the bad things that happen to us but also by our beliefs about those things. We can't control what might happen. We can control our beliefs.

Think about this as A-B-C:

- **A is the "adversity."** Adversity is the bad thing that has happened.
- **C is the "consequence."** The consequence is how you feel or the outcome.

But A is not the only thing that causes C.

- **B is your "belief."** Your belief is what you think or believe about A, not merely that A happened.

Thus,  $A + B = C$ . While it is not possible to control A—what happened, it is possible to control B—your beliefs, and in this way be in control of C—the outcome. When you know you can control C you will feel more empowered.

In other words think to yourself: "I don't always have control over what happens to me but I can control how I feel about myself and respond. In this way, I can control the outcome. I can stand tall despite what happens. I can be positively powerful!"

# THINK THINGS THROUGH

When things get tough, I think things through to decide what to do.

Donkeys are sometimes considered to be stubborn. What they are doing is protecting themselves. Before they do something, they will think things through to decide if this is the best thing for them to do. Donkeys want to be in control of what they will do.

When you learn how to effectively think things through, you are better able to take care of yourself and come up with a good approach to respond if things get tough.

## Think Things Through

This is how you can think things through to decide what is best to do:

- **What has happened?** Take the time to think about what has happened to make sure you have an accurate understanding.
- **What is my goal?** Know what you want to achieve. If you made a mistake and were hurtful or acted inappropriately, be sure to accept responsibility and take steps to make things right.
- **What strategies could I use?** Identify several different strategies that you could use. Identify strategies that use your strengths..
- **Is each strategy in accord with my values?** Evaluate the strategies based on your own values.
- **For each, what might happen?** Think about what might happen if you followed each strategy.
- **What is my best choice?** Decide which strategy would be your best first choice.
- **How should I proceed?** Determine what steps are necessary to implement this strategy.

- **Did this work?** Evaluate the effectiveness. Realize that the first thing you try might not work.
- **If not, what else could I do?** Repeat this process if the first strategy you tried did not work.

## Create Goals and Plan Your Actions

Another way you can think things through is by creating goals and an action plan. Create goals that you want to achieve, because this is important to you. Make sure your goals are specific and something you can do. Put your goals in writing.

Then plan your actions. Think things through to identify the steps necessary. Decide what needs to happen first and then next. Identify when each step has been taken. Evaluate the effectiveness of your actions. Revise your plan as necessary.

Take time at the start of each day or week to identify a goal for what you want to do and create an action plan. At the end of the day or week, think about how you did. Then create a new goal or revise your action plan.

## DAILY PRACTICE

One way you can practice The Way of the Donkey strategies is when you are practicing mindfulness.

- Become calm, by breathing deeply.
- Think to yourself about a recent time you reached out to be kind and how this made both you and the other person feel.
- Think about something that happened recently that made you feel good.
- Think about something you did recently that made you feel proud— a way that you used one of your strengths.
- Identify one of the things you want to do today or tomorrow.
- Think about someone you love and send loving thoughts to this person.
- Open your eyes, raise your hands high, stand up tall.

## IF THINGS GET TOUGH

- Breathe slowly to stay calm and remind yourself to stand tall.
- Think to yourself, “I will not let what happens control how I think about myself or respond.”
- Think things through to decide how you can quickly get away from this situation or what to do that uses one of your strengths.
- Go to a place where you can connect with a friend or trusted adult. Think things through together about what else you might do to respond that uses one of your strengths.
- Take the time to think of something good that recently happened to help you feel better.
- Reach out to be kind or start a “Kindness Ripple” to change the energies around you to more happiness.

## THE WAY OF THE DONKEY RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT SURVEY

This is The Way of the Donkey Resilience and Empowerment Survey. You can figure out how resilient you are. Here is how to do this. Rate how you feel on these statements and then do a calculation. Note that each column has a number: 1, 2, 3, 4. For every check you placed in each column, add up the numbers for that column. If you placed 4 checks in column 4, this would be 16. Then, add all of the numbers together. Lastly, divide by 10, because there are 10 statements. What is your current Resilience and Empowerment Score?

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
I am pleased with the way I am.				
I am satisfied about most everything in my life.				
I am happy most of the time.				
Usually other people are happy to be around me.				
I feel that I am in control of my life.				
I can do most things if I try.				
I can work out my problems.				
It is easy for me to make decisions.				
I have fun with other people.				
Others are there for me if I am having a challenge.				
Add the numbers in each column.	Add up 1's:	Add up 2's:	Add up 3's:	Add up 4's:

# THE WAY OF THE DONKEY DAILY JOURNAL

Get a notebook that you can use for a Daily Journal. This Daily Journal will allow you to track how you are following The Way of the Donkey strategies. Write in this Journal every day for 40 days. Then complete the Resilience and Empowerment Survey again.

These are the questions to respond to in your Journal:

- What was one of my goals for the day? Did I accomplish this?
- Who did I connect with today and how did this make me feel?
- How did I reach out to be kind or be of service and how did this make me feel?
- What strengths did I use and how did this make me feel?
- What happened today that made me feel good?
- Did I have to stop and stay calm, stand tall, and think things through? If so, what happened and how did I handle the situation?

# THE WAY OF THE DONKEY RESILIENCE AND EMPOWERMENT SURVEY — AGAIN

This is The Way of the Donkey Resilience and Empowerment Survey. After you have used The Way of the Donkey strategies for 40 days, complete this Survey again. Rate how you feel on these statements and then do a calculation. What is your Resilience and Empowerment score now?

Statement	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
I am pleased with the way I am.				
I am satisfied about most everything in my life.				
I am happy most of the time.				
Usually other people are happy to be around me.				
I feel that I am in control of my life.				
I can do most things if I try.				
I can work out my problems.				
It is easy for me to make decisions.				
I have fun with other people.				
Others are there for me if I am having a challenge.				
Add the numbers in each column.	Add up 1's:	Add up 2's:	Add up 3's:	Add up 4's: