

Happy Boxes

We've heard jokes about bottling happiness as a miracle cure for depression, but have you thought about boxing it? Here's how...

The idea for keeping a happy box came from one of our first Stitchlinks members. She suffered from depression, and during low periods found comfort in a happy box which was filled with 'stuff' that brought a smile to her face. I think it's a great tool for raising your mood when all else seems bleak.

The first step is to find, or make yourself a box which is big enough to hold photos, small items of clothing, newspaper articles, basically anything that evokes happy memories and feelings. The size of your box is determined by the size of your 'happy collection', so it can range from a shoe box to suitcase!

Personalise it!

The box itself can be part of the mood enhancing experience. Why not find yourself a little treasure chest or make an ordinary box look extraordinary so that just looking at and handling it immediately makes you feel

good? Start with a shoe box and see where it develops from there!

In one of our first Stitchlinks Newsletters (News 11) we had an article entitled Worry Dolls. In it, Stitchlinks Member MaryAlice described the belief behind the South American practice of using Worry Dolls to 'magic away' the worries of children. She developed her own idea for a doll pattern which could help those suffering from depression, anxiety or panic attacks (see our Worry Dolls article on the Personal Development page of the Stitchlinks website).

The idea is to 'dress' the pocket-sized doll in colours, textures and fabrics which hold special memories for you. You can then attach further items of significance such as a button from your child's first cardigan or a piece of lace from your wedding veil for example. Touching and stroking these familiar items in your pocket can bring about feelings of calm and improved mood to

help you deal with stressful situations at any time.

Your happy box could be decorated in the same way. Attaching strips of favourite fabrics and colours, wonderful textures, beads, jewels and even photographs to make your box into a feelgood treasure trove you'll love to handle, open, and rummage through when you're feeling sad or depressed.

Fill it!

Items for your box need to be chosen carefully. It's important to stress here that this is not a memorabilia box and there is a fine line between memories that trigger feelings of sadness and those of happiness. For example, you may remember your childhood as wonderfully happy, but having a photo of your parents, who may have since passed away, may make you feel tearful if you're having a down day. As this is the precise time your happy box should come into its own, choose your items carefully.

Perhaps having a photo of your favourite toy or group of childhood friends might be a better way of remembering those days for the purposes of a happy box.

Make it your own

Begin making your own personal treasure trove by writing a list of what's made you happy in the past and what makes you happy now. Next, think about ways you can link to these memories in your happy box to trigger those same positive feelings. Set about maximizing the sensations by using items that stimulate all your senses through sight, sound, smell and sensation

For example, photographs of spring flowers can trigger memories of that walk in the spring sunshine. A piece of yellow fabric pinned to a photo of daffodils can stimulate strong sensations. Try dipping some fabric in a little aromatherapy oil, such as lavender or lilac to bring back those feelings of warm summer evenings. Your sense of smell is strongly linked to memories, so a little essential oil can evoke highly emotional feelings. Combine photographs with tactile experience and smell for a powerful effect.

You may choose to use items with a story behind them, perhaps a poem (as long as it's a happy one!), a card or note from a loved one or friend, a stone from your favourite beach, or a leaf from the park. The choice is yours and can be as weird and wonderful as you like. Remember no-one else needs to understand why

they're there. They are uniquely personal to you.

You'll find some of my happy box musts below. They'll give you some ideas to get your imagination flowing and thinking about the happy times you've had. Explore ways of linking to these experiences through sight, sound, sensation and smell to create a happy box unique to you. Enjoy the process of creating and experiencing it as it grows.

What's in my box?

This discussion stimulated me to think about what would be in my box, so I thought I'd share some of them – they might make you smile!

There are the fairly standard things such as the christening shawl I knitted for my children and a tiny, cabled cardigan with ladybird buttons I made for our eldest son, which was passed down and enjoyed by all four of our children. It makes me smile to think how big they are now and how small they used to be.

Among the more unusual items I have are a 'laughing smiley face' which was given to me one Christmas. It always

makes me chuckle no matter how stressed or low I feel. It's yellow and furry and about the size of a cricket ball with a smiley face and tuft of hair. When you tap it, it emits peals of hilarious laughter which is highly infectious!

I was brought up near the sea and I really miss being able to escape to the beach for a walk, so I have a CD called Ocean Surf. It's a wonderfully relaxing and uplifting CD featuring the sound of waves gently lapping on a shoreline. Listening to it brings warm, sunny, happy feelings flooding back and evokes memories of a wonderful Greek holiday we had when we were first married. I also have a small bag of dried rose petals collected from mum and dad's large garden many years ago when I first left home – I have a pretty glass jar full. They remind me of endless childhood days playing in the garden – I was quite a dab hand at making my own 'perfume' and mud pies! We also had our own version of 'catch me if you can' which involved a hose pipe and lots of water – I can still hear the

The Rules

There are only two!

- **Only include items with 100% happy memories.**
- **The box remains personal to you - it's your special box so no one else should have access to it without your permission. Stow it away somewhere safe.**

shrieks of laughter as we chased each other around the garden, hose pipe in hand!

Bizarrely, I'd also have a picture of a toad with the word 'ribbet' attached. It makes me laugh and reminds me of long summer evenings sitting in our current city garden. We have a resident toad which croaks away in the darkness, so it brings memories rushing back of sitting and chatting to friends into the early hours. So you see your box can include anything that brings back those happy feelings and is uniquely personal to you.

If somebody has done something or given you something to make you happy today, save the memory by

putting it in your happy box. You can do this by including a special note to remind you of the deed or a photo of the gift. If you're given flowers, why not save the bow or a small snippet of the ribbon that holds the bouquet together?

Holidays and days out can provide wonderful memories. Keep the special ones alive by storing some tickets or postcards in your happy box.

Once your imagination gets going you'll find no shortage of items and you'll find this planning process alone can bring a smile to your face.

What's in yours?

As we've mentioned in other articles, negative feelings and

low mood can be habit forming and like other habits can become very difficult to break. Negative thought cycles can easily feed on themselves to plunge you into a spiralling downward cycle. It's important you learn how to recognise these feelings as soon as they begin. This will enable you to take action to stop them in their tracks. Using your happy box before this downward cycle sets in can encourage positive thoughts and feelings which may reverse the slide.

There's no better time than the present to get started, so what will be in your happy box? Why not share some of your chosen items with us on the Stitchlinks Forum?

We asked a number of people what made them happy.

These are the top answers they gave :-

- Sunshine in the spring time
- Smelling the flowers
- Listening to birds, especially the resident blackbird
- Achieving something
- Meeting friends
- Listening to music that reminds them of happy times
- A walk in the fresh air
- Scuffing through leaves on an autumn day
- Sitting by a real fire
- A mug of hot chocolate
- Building a snowman
- Giving to others
- A deserted beach and the sound of the waves
- My knitting and stitching
- My family
- Children laughing