



## **Well@Work Podcast Season 2, Episode 4: The Science of Hope**

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is brought to you by grant from SAMHSA. On this episode, Dr Scott LaJoie discusses the science of hope and gives some tips for staying hopeful during the pandemic.

I'm Dr Scott LaJoie, a cognitive psychologist and professor of health behavior at the University of Louisville and a member of the Well@Work team at the University of Kentucky's Center on Trauma and Children. In this podcast, I'll talk about the benefits of being actively hopeful and intend to show you how to counter some of the risks of being passively optimistic. Lessons shared can be used by anyone, at any time, but are particularly relevant during times of uncertainty and upheaval. Being hopeful and having strong social support during stressful periods are among the best predictors of resiliency and post-traumatic growth. Social support, a topic for another podcast, makes us feel connected and cared for; it helps us feel less lonely and provides us with access to tangible and intangible resources that we need. Hopefulness, on the other hand, is internal to us and to an extent under our own control, that is we can choose to hope.

Optimism, the older sibling of hope, is less under our influence. Evidence suggests that people inherit traits of optimism or pessimism from our parents. Optimistic people tend to see the glass as being half full, while pessimists see it as half empty. Optimists focus on potential gains in the future, while pessimists are more concerned with potential losses. Hope, compared to optimism, can be an intentional and purposeful. I'm not talking about the common definition of the word hope, I can hope tomorrow won't rain, or that the stock market will continue to be bullish, but I really don't have any control over these outcomes. Hope, as theorist Charles R Schneider conceptualized it, is a goal-oriented cognitive feature that has implications on emotions and behaviors. Schneider said that the key to hope is the presence of something for which to hope, a goal, something obtainable, and importantly strategies for reaching that goal exist and are feasible.

According to hope theory, also captured in the science of hope literature, hope has two main components: pathways thinking and agency thinking. Pathways thinking involves the planning of how to reach one's goal and planning on how to overcome existing and any new obstacles that may arise. If I hope to have enough money to retire, I should plan how to keep my money safe should the stock market decline. If I hope to keep my staff functioning effectively during times of surge, I should plan for contingencies and build in activities to lessen the emotional burdens and physical burdens, and create resiliency for them. Agency thinking is related to the concepts of self-confidence and trust. When I engage in agency thinking, I am believing in my ability and the abilities of those around me to carry



out the activities of my pathways thinking. I trust my capacity for planning and have confidence in my ability to adopt or adapt.

Tip number one: what to hope for. Do you have influence over the object of your hope? If what you hope for comes true, will it make a big difference to you? And if it does not come true, can you still find some comfort in meeting the goal partially?

Tip number two: set a goal. Be realistic and be specific. How will you know if your goal is met? How will you know when to evaluate for it?

Tip number three: plan to meet your goal. Hope implies confidence in your ability to overcome debt and obstacles. What obstacles can you imagine? How will you circumnavigate these obstacles?

Meeting your goal will instill hope in you and those around you. Thank you and remember, stay Well@Work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast. Follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work, home, and school.