

# ★ GH little lab ★

Expert Advice + Inspiration for  
Your Family + Pets



## Five Ways *to Boost the* Bright Side

In her new book, *Your Fully Charged Life*, **Meaghan B Murphy**, formerly our executive editor, delivers a welcome dose of positivity along with smart, realistic ways to be a better parent, partner and friend. Here, Murphy, now editor in chief of our sister brand *Woman's Day*, shares her favorite tips on living with near-endless energy and deep purpose.



### Treat Your Family Like a Team.

When I'm out with my husband and kids and I yell "Team Murphy!" everyone comes together. And it has caught on; I got eight Christmas cards last year from "Team" families. Even more important is acting like a team. On Team Murphy, we understand our individual jobs, needs, strengths and weaknesses. We celebrate when one member shines extra bright and offer help and support when one struggles. When someone slacks off or makes

trouble (me included!), everyone gets a lecture and runs laps. (Kidding — usually just no Friday night movie or no video games.) We also give out awards for MVP and have benchwarmers and walk-ons too — grandmas, babysitters, cousins.

Even if you don't have kids, you can still field a team. At the end of the day, it's about appreciating that you're playing together, no one's out there alone and everyone does their part to make magic happen. A decade in, our team isn't perfect, but none ever is. It still feels like we're winning.

### Strive for Work-Life Synergy.

Here's the problem with work-life *balance*: It implies some degree of equality or even distribution of energy, time and importance. Trying for that is like trying for perfection — and we all know how that turns out. My job will never be as important as my family, but I sometimes have to sacrifice Team Murphy because my job also matters. Plus, the demands of life/family and work are so different and shift on a dime. How the heck can you keep score when everybody's

playing different games and the rules keep changing? You can't. I think the idea of synergy is better. Synergy allows for separation and the combining or sharing of resources or elements when doing so adds even greater value. That's what I strive for; I want different parts of my life to understand the others so they can cooperate. Because that helps me feel stronger, more equipped and like the whole complex, multifaceted person I am.

### Slip Happy Surprises into the Schedule.

I thrive on routine. Without it, my world and psyche would devolve into chaos and collapse. That said, knowing exactly what's going to happen day in and day out sucks the excitement out of life and can make relationships feel robotic. As psychologist Rick Hanson, Ph.D., author of *Hardwiring Happiness*, explains in his book, the brain tends to filter out what doesn't change (a process called habituation), and that can keep us from experiencing or creating opportunities for joy. Positive experiences, especially if they're new or surprising, release a rush of dopamine to our feel-good centers and force us to pay attention. Happy surprises also hit our positive-emotion buttons harder than predictable moments of joy. They make us feel cared for and loved. And engaging in novel and exciting activities (vs. routine ones) with those we love improves how people view the relationship. Even if only for yourself, spontaneity is linked to better well-being, say other experts. Think of

simple ways to shake up the everyday or add a surprise, like when my friend Lindsey turned the bathtub into a ball pit for her toddler and his expression said it all: *Best day ever!* Or when I surprised my kids with a mystery bike ride to a rope swing over a pond (followed by a crumb cake breakfast!) — lightning bolts and hearts shot out of their ears. Try the new ax-throwing place, instead of your go-to date-night spots, or have a trivia night. Or do a chore your partner usually does or has been putting off. Routine saves your sanity; surprises add spark.

### Celebrate the Little Things.

Major holidays are easy to celebrate — they acknowledge worthy things like tradition, family and religious beliefs as well as gratitude, giving, love, mothers, fathers and independence. Don't stop there. Embrace the minor and made-up holidays, and the ridiculous and random ones too. They offer opportunities to recognize and appreciate simple and silly things in life. Think Taco Tuesday, National Donut Day, the Super Bowl. (A holiday that celebrates snacks, parties, polarizing halftime shows and oh, yeah, sports? Yes, please!) One year I showed up for my April 1 workout in head-to-toe boring black, and everyone kept asking if I was OK before I yelled, "April fool!" Celebrating something makes the usual routine feel special and more fun. It's essentially positivity in practice — an excuse and a way to focus on and savor what's good.

I know people find rando holidays frivolous. But the harder things are or the more the world disappoints us, the more we need a reprieve. "Holidays" like National S'mores Day and Groundhog Day give you permission to prioritize fun, even just for a minute. It doesn't take much effort or time to, say, get excited that graham crackers, marshmallows and chocolate found each other and we can eat 'em together. And those little hits of happiness are one more thing to help stop the world's dumpster fires from burning up your energy and joy.

### Support Good Stuff Too.

My friend Francene is the most amazing hype woman. Although we've never actually met — we're virtual friends who connected on Instagram — she high-fives all my wins and the everyday good stuff I share. It feels incredible, and I cherish this unlikely, special friendship. We all deserve a Francene, and we all should try to be a Francene for at least one other person. Most of us are better at showing up for friends in bad times — with a listening ear and a hug, a bottomless glass of Malbec or a freezer casserole. Aim to offer the same level of urgency, enthusiasm and support when things go right. When we take the good for granted, we're missing a huge opportunity to capitalize on a person's good vibes. In one study, researchers watched couples discussing both positive and negative happenings and asked how understood, validated and cared for they



felt, then followed up on their relationship later. It turns out that responding actively and enthusiastically to the good stuff a partner shares is what best predicts relationship well-being, even more than responding supportively to bad stuff. So when someone shares good news, get excited, ask questions, compliment, congratulate, talk about it. Because no matter how big your confidence or pride, no matter how much you recognize and appreciate when things go well, having someone cheerlead and megaphone your "yays" back to you drives those feelings — and the relationship — deeper into your heart. ★

#### READ IT!

For more inspiring ideas, pick up *Your Fully Charged Life* by Meaghan B. Murphy (Penguin Random House), \$26, booksellers.

