The hidden power of smiling, Ron Gutman

B1–C2

Discussion

1 Work in groups. Discuss the questions.
1 How much do you smile? Do you think other people think you smile a lot?
2 What (or who) makes you smile? Why?
3 In what professions is someone’s facial expression – including their smile – particularly important?
4 Is it possible to smile too much? Why / Why not?

Key words

2 Work in pairs. Follow the instructions.
1 Student A, try to make B smile. Student B, try to suppress your smile. Swap roles.
2 Student B, try smiling in different ways. Student A, try to mimic your partner’s smiles. Swap roles.

3 Work in pairs. Choose the best motivational message(s) for the staffroom of a hospital. Discuss the reasons for your choice.
   a A smile is contagious – pass it along!
   b Healthcare is an attitude. Patients can tell a fake smile from a real one.
   c Every human culture expresses joy by using the same language – the language of smiling.
   d Given a choice between a smiling nurse and one who is frowning, who would you approach?
   e Your level of patient care is measured in the span of your smile.

4 Match the words in bold in Exercises 2 and 3 with these definitions.
   1 false
   2 spreading quickly from one person to another, like a disease
   3 copy someone’s behaviour, voice or facial expression
   4 length
   5 shows
   6 showing unhappiness, anger or concentration by bringing your eyebrows down and closer together
   7 stop yourself feeling or showing an emotion

Comprehension

5 Watch Ron Gutman’s TED Talk, The hidden power of smiling, on TED.com. Then decide if these statements are true or false.
1 When he was a child, Ron Gutman wanted superpowers. _____
2 A study in California looked at the relationship between people’s smiles in their old college yearbooks and their future success. _____
3 Baseball players who didn’t smile in their pictures lived longer than players who had big, beaming smiles. _____
4 According to Gutman, we learn to smile from our parents. _____
5 Different cultures use smiles to express different emotions. _____
6 Children smile on average more than adults. _____
7 If you put a pencil in your mouth it is harder to judge whether another person’s smile is real or fake. _____
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8 Smiling shows happiness, but Darwin suggested that smiling can make you happy, too. _______
9 According to Gutman, studies have found that one smile stimulates the brain almost as much as a bar of chocolate. _______

The big idea

6 Work in groups. Discuss the questions.
1 Ron Gutman claims that smiling is a superpower. In what ways is it a superpower?
2 Look at the following pieces of evidence that Gutman uses to support his point. Which are the most convincing, in your opinion?
   a the research comparing people’s smiles and their later lives
   b the information about babies smiling
   c the information about smiling in different cultures
   d the information about how often people smile
   e the research about how smiling affects other people
   f the evidence that smiling stimulates the brain
3 Overall, are you convinced by his argument that smiling is so ‘super’?

Language focus – describing health benefits

7 Work in pairs. What information is missing in these facts about smiling? Watch the TED Talk again from 3.22 to the end to check your answers.
1 It’s very difficult to __________ when you look at someone who is smiling.
2 Seeing other people smile suppresses the control we usually have on our __________.
3 Charles Darwin said that smiling makes us feel __________.
4 Smiling stimulates the brain’s reward mechanism even more than __________ or being given __________.
5 Smiling can help reduce the level of stress-enhancing __________, like cortisol, adrenaline and dopamine.
6 It __________ blood pressure.
7 Smiling can help you and everyone around you live a longer, __________, __________ life!

8 Complete the text with words from the box.

| benefits | help | improve | keep | likely | lower | stimulates | suppresses |

Smiling is just one of many surprisingly simple steps we can take to 1 __________ our health and quality of life. For example, a growing number of studies 2 suggest that having a pet such as a dog or cat in the home can 2 __________ you live a healthier life. Children from homes with dogs are more than a third less 3 __________ to have allergies – it is thought that the presence of dogs and cats, which bring dirt into the house, 4 __________ a stronger immune system and generates higher levels of some chemicals involved in the immune system in babies and young children. Another study found that having an animal in the home 5 __________ anxiety and panic attacks in elderly patients with Alzheimer’s, by helping to reduce the level of stress-enhancing hormones. Petting a dog can 6 __________ blood pressure more than chatting to a friend. And let’s not forget the health 7 __________ of all that dog walking; doing exercise for just thirty minutes per day could 8 __________ you happier for as long as twelve hours.

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Speaking

9 Work in groups. Decide which five of these simple lifestyle habits would be most effective in improving the health of the general population.

- Walk for thirty minutes every day.
- Turn off screens and mobile devices at least an hour before you go to bed.
- Take up yoga or a similar activity.
- Take the stairs (not the lift).
- Smile more.
- Slow down – take five minutes each day to do nothing at all.
- Get a pet.
- Eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.
- Drink water instead of caffeinated or alcoholic drinks.
- Cut out sugar from your diet.

10 In your groups, choose one of the lifestyle habits and plan a promotional advertising campaign to promote the idea.