Many humanists believe that finding happiness is one of the most important things in life. They believe we only have one life so we should make the most of it in the here and now. We should also support other people to find what makes them happy.

‘The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to make others so.’

ROBERT INGERSOLL, (1833-1899)

Many humanists believe we should also be tolerant of those who make choices that are different from our own. Many believe it is a good thing that we all have different tastes and talents as it can lead to a diverse and interesting society. Diversity can be celebrated.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT, political activist

A happy life doesn’t have to mean feeling happy all the time. Eating a cake or watching a good film can make us feel happy, and these can be important ingredients of a happy life. But a happy life can include things that might not make us happy in the moment, such as tidying the house, trying to learn a difficult new skill, being told the truth even if it is painful, or having the freedom to make mistakes. Some humanists talk about a sense of fulfilment – feeling happy with our life overall.

Some possible ingredients of a happy life

- Relationships with family and friends
- Being creative
- Curiosity and exploration
- Experiencing nature or the arts
- Achieving our goals
- Making other people happy
- Helping make the world a better place

What makes you happy?
Some people say that we should focus not on being happy but on being good. For humanists, both can be important, and one can often support the other. It can be difficult to be good to other people if we are not happy ourselves. There is also evidence that making other people happy can make us happy. We are social animals who live together in communities. Our happiness and the happiness of other people are often closely linked.

‘The happy life is to an extraordinary extent the same as the good life.’

BERTRAND RUSSELL, humanist philosopher (1872–1970)

Many humanists believe that we should be free to do whatever makes us happy as long as we don’t cause harm to other people. We should think about the consequences of our actions. If other people’s choices lead to harm, we should be able to argue against those choices and encourage them to act differently.

‘I would like to live to the full, right now, and I hope that I live in such a way that the world is a little bit better after I leave it than it was when I arrived.’

PHILIP PULLMAN, author

Not everyone is happy. Many people around the world do not have the freedom or opportunity to find happiness. Many humanists believe that we should try to create a world in which everyone has the opportunity to find happiness in the here and now.

‘Think for yourself, act for everyone’

‘It’s not enough to be a happy individual; we should also try to think of ways in which others – perhaps everyone – can be happy.’

MICHAEL ROSEN AND ANNEMARIE YOUNG, authors

QUESTIONS

• Why is happiness important to humanists?
• What might a humanist believe can make us happy?
• Do humanists believe it is more important to be happy than to be good?
• Do humanists believe we should be free to do whatever we want?