

## International Day of Happiness

There's more behind the International Day of Happiness than you might think. Find out more by reading the article and answering the questions.

### Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

#### Vocabulary

1. .... to measure
2. .... psychological
3. .... an orphan
4. .... to adopt a child
5. .... human rights
6. .... healthcare

#### Definition

- a. a person whose parents have died
- b. medicine, hospitals and doctors
- c. to find out how much, how long, how tall, etc.
- d. to become the legal parent of a child who is not yours
- e. about your mind and feelings
- f. things we all agree everyone should have

## International Day of Happiness

You might think the International Day of Happiness is a day to practise positive thinking or to give thanks for the things in your life that make you happy. But it's actually a United Nations (UN) project which has a more serious purpose. The UN thinks happiness will only be for everyone when the people of the world are equal.

### Why 20 March?

On this date (and also on 23 September), the centre of the sun is directly above the Earth's equator, which is called an equinox. On the equinox, day and night last for almost equal time all over the Earth. The equinox is felt by everyone on the planet, which matches perfectly with the idea behind the Day of Happiness. Since 2013, the Day of Happiness has been celebrated in all 193 United Nations member states.

### How did the idea start?

The idea goes back to 1972, when the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, said that we should measure a country's progress by its happiness and not just how much it produces or how much money it makes. He called it Gross National Happiness (GNH). Again, it is more than just a nice idea. Bhutan developed a system to measure happiness based on things like people's psychological health, their general health, how they spend their time, where they live, their education and their environment. People in Bhutan answer about 300 questions, and the results are compared every year to measure progress. The government uses the results and

the ideas behind GNH to make decisions for the country. Other places use shorter, similar versions of this kind of report, for example the cities of Victoria in Canada and Seattle in the USA, as well as the state of Vermont, USA.

## The man behind the International Day of Happiness

In 2011, a UN adviser called Jayme Illien suggested the idea of an international day to increase happiness. His plan was accepted by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in 2012. Jayme was born in Calcutta, India, and he became an orphan when he was a child. He was adopted by an American nurse, Anna Belle Illien. She travelled the world to help orphans and she took Jayme with her. He saw children like him, but who were not as lucky as him because they were often escaping wars or they were very poor. He wanted to do something about it, so he worked in the areas of children's and human rights.

## The World Happiness Report

The UN measures and compares the happiness of different countries in the World Happiness Report. It bases its report on social, economic and environmental well-being. The UN also sets goals for countries to achieve to increase happiness because it says happiness is a basic human right. Happiness should not be something people have because they are lucky to live in a place where they have basic things like peace, education and access to healthcare. If we agree that these basic things are human rights, then it is not a very big step to agree that happiness is a basic human right too.

### Source

- <https://dayofhappiness.net>