

COLLOQUIUM SERIES

**Positive Affect Facilitates Flexible Thinking and Effective
Problem Solving: Broad and Narrow Focus as Needed**

Date: April 30, 2010

Location: Somerville House, Room 3345

Time: 3:00 pm - 4:00 pm



Dr. Alice Isen

Psychology Department
Cornell University

ABSTRACT:

This presentation summarizes the results of several lines of research showing that mild happy feelings, induced in everyday ways that people often encounter in the course of their daily lives, promotes effective problem solving by enabling flexible thinking that allows the person to respond to the situation in context. One reason this occurs is that positive affect facilitates openness to useful information (even if it is negative in tone), and the ability to see multiple aspects of a situation and switch attention among them. Most recently, research is focusing on positive affect's beneficial effect on self-control of several types, including cognitive control that enables both broadened focus and narrow focus on a target task. This ability is reflected in superior incidental learning and divided attention, without impaired performance on a target task. These effects have been theorized to result from release of the neurotransmitter, dopamine, which activates frontal brain regions containing dopamine receptors, which in turn promotes processes of thinking, switching and maintaining attention, working memory, and thus problem solving.

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