

Awe Appears To Be Awfully Beneficial

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20 years ago, scientists began to study a mysterious emotion known as awe. Now they believe awe offers a range of benefits when practiced regularly, calming our nervous systems and relieving stress.

ARI SHAPIRO, HOST:

Towns and states are reopening. Families and friends are gathering again, but many Americans still feel down, anxious or sad. To help people find more joy in their lives, NPR is launching an app called the Joy Generator. You can find it at npr.org/joy. There's one emotion in particular the app helps evoke that could be especially useful for shaking off the pandemic blues.

NPR's Michaelleen Doucleff reports.

MICHAEELEEN DOUCLEFF, BYLINE: Throughout the pandemic, Michelle Shiota has been working from home, doing one activity over and over again, all day long.

MICHELLE SHIOTA: I will be honest and say that for the last 14 months, I have spent most of my waking hours looking at a screen.

DOUCLEFF: Shiota is a psychologist at Arizona State University and an expert on emotions. After about six months, she noticed she wasn't feeling like herself.

SHIOTA: By sometime last fall, my mind had shrunk. It literally felt like it was being locked down in this very, very tight clothing.

DOUCLEFF: Luckily, as a psychologist, she had an idea of what could help her. She had to take a few minutes each day, go outside and cultivate a particular emotion. She had to search for awe.

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