

“Happiness”

The scripture teaches that “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22) and it turns out science is supporting this notion. For many parents, raising happy children is the measure parenting success. But too often, we think happiness is about those fleeting moments of getting what you want. Lasting happiness is actually much more rewarding. And yes, you can dramatically increase your child's chances of being happy, just by the way you raise him or her.

What makes a happy child who grows into a happy adult? Happiness is a by-product of emotional health. The largest determinant of our happiness turns out to be our own mental, emotional, and physical habits, which create the body chemistry that determines our happiness level.

We all know that some of us tend to be more upbeat than others. Part of this is inborn but much of our mood is habit. It may seem odd to have happiness referred to as a habit. But it's likely that by the time we're adults, we have settled into the habit of often being happy, or the habit of being largely unhappy.



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Happiness is closely linked to three kinds of habits:

- How we think and feel about the world, and therefore perceive our experiences.
- Certain actions or habits, such as regular exercise, eating healthfully, connecting with other people, even — proven in study after study — regularly smiling and laughing!
- Character traits such as self-control, industry, fairness, caring about others, citizenship, wisdom, courage, leadership, and honesty

In practice, these character traits are just habits; tendencies to act in certain ways when confronted with certain kinds of situations. And certainly, it makes sense that the more we exhibit these traits, the better our lives work, the better we feel about ourselves, and the more meaning we find in life — so the happier we are.

How can you help your child begin to develop the habits that lead to happiness?

1. Teach your child constructive mental habits that create happiness.

Managing our moods, positive self-talk, cultivating optimism, celebrating life, practicing gratitude, and appreciating our connectedness to each other and the entire universe. Build these into your life together so you model them regularly, talk about using them, and your child will copy you.



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2. Teach your child self-management routines that create happiness.

Regular exercise, healthy eating, and meditating on God’s Word are all highly correlated with happiness levels. And, you and your child may have your own, more personal strategies; for many people music is an immediate mood lifter, for others a walk in nature always works.

3. Cultivate fun.

The old saying that laughter is the best medicine turns out to be true. The more we laugh, the happier we are! It actually changes our body chemistry.

4. Help your child reflect on how valued they are to God.

Research shows that happy people recognize the gifts God has given them. Jesus loves us so much that He died for us. Remind your kids everyday of how valued they are to Him.

5. Cultivate optimism.....it inoculates against unhappiness.

It’s true that some of us are born more optimistic than others, but we can all cultivate it.

6. Help your child find joy in everyday things.

Studies show that people who notice the small miracles of daily life, and allow themselves to be touched by them, are happier. Daily life overflows with joyful occurrences: The show of the setting sun,



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no less astonishing for its daily repetition, the warmth of connection with the man at the newsstand who recognizes you and your child, the joy of finding a new book by a favorite author at the library, a letter from Grand-ma, or the first crocuses of spring. Children learn by our example what's important in life.

7. Support your child to prioritize relationships.

Research shows that people who are happiest have more people in their lives, and deeper relationships with those people. Teach your child that while relationships take work, they're worth it.

8. Help your child develop gratitude.

"We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have." —Frederick Keonig. Many people think they can't be grateful until they're happy, meaning until they have something to be grateful for. But look closely and you'll find that it's the opposite: people are happy because they are grateful.

9. Accept all emotions.

Life is full of joy, but even for the happiest person life is also full of loss and pain, and we have daily reasons to grieve, large and small. Acknowledging our sad feelings isn't focusing on the negative, it's opening ourselves to the full range of being human. Accepting those uncomfortable sad feelings actually deepens our ability to take joy in our lives.



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10. Help him learn how to manage his moods.

Most people don't know that they can choose to let bad moods go and consciously change their moods. But practice in doing this can really make us happier. You can practice this by:

- Monitoring your own moods.
- Allowing yourself to feel the emotions while you hold yourself with love.
- Noticing any negative thoughts that are giving rise to the emotions. (*"My child shouldn't be acting this way! He'll grow up to be a terrible person if he does this!"*)
- Choosing a thought that makes you feel a little better. (For instance, *"My child is acting like a child because he IS a child. He won't always be like this."*)

11. Counteract the message that happiness can be bought.

As parents, we need to remember that we are not the only ones teaching our children about life. They get the constant media message that the goal of life is more money and more things. Ultimately, what we model and what we tell them will matter more, but we need to confront those destructive messages directly.

12. Help your child learn the joy of serving.

Research shows that the pride of contributing to the betterment of society makes us happier, and it will make our children happier too. Our job as parents is to find ways for them to make a positive difference in the world so they can enjoy and learn from this experience.



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“Happiness is a by-product of character. In people who are developing a strong character, there is a dramatically higher level of happiness than in those who live to chase after the next good time.” —Pat Holt and Grace Ketterman, MD

Reference

Markham, L. (2020). Teaching Your Child the Art of Happiness. Downloaded from: <https://www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/emotional-intelligence/happiness>



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