

Helping Children Thrive

**A toolbox of strategies
to help children flourish**

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By Kari Sutton

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From the Author

I designed this Guide for parents, and other adults who want to help their children be happier and avoid mental health problems later in life. I have tried to ensure that it is both quick to read, and easy to use. I wanted to make it user friendly, as if we were sitting down to talk and discuss the ideas over a cup of coffee. It is not meant to be highly polished – I have simply explained what I have learnt through my experience and research.

I have included lots of ‘take-aways’, ideas that you can implement in your everyday life straight away. Take what’s in here and use it in your own way to develop happy healthy habits for your family.

The best gift I could ask for is for you to implement some of these ideas in your everyday lives. Do something today as a result of ideas you’ve found in this guide, and we can work together to create a happier world for our children.

Wishing you health and happiness,

Kari Sutton

How to use this guide

You can use this guide in a number of ways. It includes:

- Advice about a range of topics such as the foundations of happiness, developing self esteem and confidence, encouraging character, and developing happy healthy bodies.
- Fun activities you can use with your child to develop healthy happy habits, and
- Sources of further information and support

There is detailed information in each of the sections and in many areas it is likely to reassure you that you are already on the right track. This guide is full of suggestions and ideas that will help you give your children the best opportunity to live happy, healthy lives.

Please feel free to take what you need from this guide. You can read it all the way through or simply pick and choose the areas that are of most interest to you right now.

We welcome you sharing this guide with family and friends as we hope all children can develop the skills and attitudes which allow them to cultivate their own happiness. Your feedback is valued, please feel free to email Kari or make a comment on the blog.

Introduction

Parents the world over want their children to be happy and healthy and grow up to be happy well-adjusted adults. However, many of us are not sure about what we can do to give our child the gift of life long happiness and joy. Sometimes we struggle to achieve happiness in our own day to day lives, so how can we teach our children to be happy? First, we need to understand what happiness is and how we can achieve more of it in our lives.

What does happiness look like?

Defining happiness can prove elusive as what makes people happy differs from person to person. Research has shown that the genes a child inherits at birth do have some influence on their level of potential happiness. However, I believe that all children begin their lives with an incredible potential to develop happiness throughout their lives. There may be some children who have to work harder to develop qualities such as confidence, self esteem, optimism, joy and a sense of mastery. However, parents can help children develop habits that make sure they get the most joy out of their lives.

It is extremely important to understand that we cannot make another person happy. True happiness comes from within and is something we make a conscious choice about every day. Like Sharp (2009, p2) I believe “these are the most significant qualities that contribute to happiness:

- having a clear sense of meaning and purpose in your life
- being active and healthy
- having meaningful relationships
- knowing and fully utilising your strengths
- living in the present moment rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future
- appreciating what you have rather than focusing on what you don't have and what you think you need”.

In today's society, children are surrounded by messages that underscore the need for instant gratification and that happiness is enjoying the pleasant life – wealth, fame, toys and gadgets and consuming as much as they can. However, research has shown that these things do not bring lasting happiness and positive emotions. The more we chase happiness the more it seems to elude us. It is our job to teach our children the attitudes and skills which in turn allow them to cultivate their own happiness.

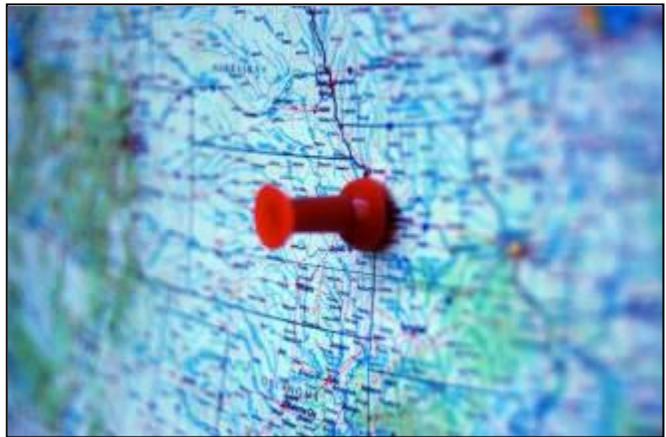
CHAPTER ONE

Foundations of Happiness

Being a parent is a complex and challenging role with many different priorities competing for your time. Each of us will have different ideas about how to raise a happy child. There are, however, some basic foundations that you can put into place to help your child grow up happy.

Have Direction

This means as a family you need to discuss what values are important in your lives – what does your family stand for, as this will help your children understand what is right and wrong and guide them in knowing what they need to do in different situations.



Another important part of direction is having a purpose, a clear plan and goals we want to achieve, these are like our road maps. If we do not have a road map when we are travelling somewhere new chances are we will end up getting lost and not making it to our desired destination.

If we have a clear picture of where we want our family to go and what we want to achieve as individuals, we will be good role models for our children. Working towards goals is an important step on the road to happiness. We need to help our children set clear realistic goals, based on what is important to them, that are attainable within a realistic time frame. We can then encourage them to work towards these goals and help them celebrate their success when they are achieved.

Be a positive role model

You are your child's first and most important teacher. They will learn how to be happy and how not to be happy by watching, listening to and copying you. Children learn best by example, this is called modeling (Shanahan, 2005, Sharp, 2009). Parents are the primary role models our children see and therefore our primary teaching device is the example we set. If they see us exercising every day they will come to see that as a normal part of life, if they observe us worrying and hear us focusing on the negative side of things and what can go wrong that will become part of their repertoire of how to handle things. Ensure that you look after yourself, if you are healthy and happy the majority of the time this is a great role model for your child.

Acknowledge and respect emotions

Children experience the same range of emotions as adults. It is our role as parents to help them understand these emotions, manage them and express them in acceptable ways. We need to let children know that it is ok to experience and express negative emotions as long as we do not express them in ways that hurt others or intrude on their rights. Parents can also be a good role model by openly talking about our feelings - discussing times we have experienced different emotions – both positive and negative and how we dealt with them.

CHAPTER TWO

Home – a Happy, Positive Environment

One of the most important things parents can do is establish a happy positive home environment where children feel safe and secure. The following are some ideas to make your home a happy positive environment where your child feels safe:



1. **Develop routines** – no matter what type of parenting style you have a routine helps children feel safe and secure. Routines help children predict what is coming next and learn what is expected of them. This does not mean you can't be flexible and spontaneous at different times simply that you are consistent with what you expect. You can also develop routines for how you deal with negative thoughts, think more optimistically, or relax at the end of the day.
2. **Set clear consistent boundaries** – clear boundaries and rules that are applied consistently help children learn what is expected of them. Ensure the boundaries and rules are clear, easy to understand and framed in a positive way. Remind your children of your expectations and consistently enforce them.
3. **Encouraging desirable behaviours and attitudes** - model the behaviours and attitudes you want your children to develop, actions speak louder than words. Avoid situations that might trigger challenging behaviours and when these do occur try using other positive alternatives before jumping straight to discipline, remember children can have 'off' days too (Hallowell, 2003, Sharp, 2009). If their behaviour is not what you desire, remind them of the type of behaviour you prefer and implement

appropriate consequences – remembering the aim of consequences is to teach not punish.

4. **Use Descriptive Praise** - When praising children use specific descriptive praise to let them know exactly what it is you have appreciated e.g. “Jamie, I really like the way you picked your clothes up off the floor”. This sense of recognition fosters children’s feelings of being valued by others.
5. **Communicate** – it is vital that you and your children to develop good communication habits. If this occurs from a young age you will be more likely to be able to continue this as they grow. Really try and be present when you are talking with your child as they will be able to tell if your mind is somewhere else. Actively listen – pay close attention to what your child is saying and then paraphrase what they said and how they are feeling to check if you have it right. This way they will know you are listening and want to understand.
6. **Responsibilities** – provide your children with opportunities to be involved in different activities around the house they have responsibility for e.g. cleaning their bedroom, packing up their toys. This allows them to learn about responsibility for their actions and feel important and valued.
7. **Spend time** - due to hectic lifestyles and other pressures it can be difficult for families to spend time together on a regular basis. Often it seems like there are many other things that need to be done instead of simply spending time with the kids. However it is vitally important for parents to spend both quality time and a good quantity of time with their children. When you are doing this try to be present and just focus on what you are doing with them, enjoy the moment other things can wait and will be there when you finish.

Activities that help to create a happy, positive home environment:

- Try to keep to a consistent but flexible daily routine – children like to know what to expect next and enjoy having a structure to their day

- Establish healthy sleep habits and routines – many children frequently do not get enough sleep and this can affect their development and learning, as well as their level of happiness.
- Develop family rituals- certain things you do as a family e.g. having a special breakfast every Saturday or Sunday morning, playing in the park Sunday afternoon, putting the Christmas tree up together
- Have frequent dates with each other – parents with each child and parents with each other. This time spent one-on-one is extremely special and helps your children, as well as your partner feel valued and loved.
- Celebrate achievements together – big or small, let your children know that you notice what they have achieved and are proud of them.
- Limit the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen, whether it is the TV, computer or game console. There need to be rules about the amount of time they can have which are then consistently and fairly applied. Instead of sitting in front of a screen encourage them to read, spend time with you, their siblings or friends, get outdoors and enjoy the fresh air, as these things contribute to their happiness and well being.

CHAPTER THREE

Developing Your Child's Self Esteem and Confidence

As children grow they develop perceptions of themselves, i.e. beliefs about their self worth and what they are good at from the feedback of others, primarily their parents. This self image is what makes up a child's self esteem. When parents demonstrate that they believe in, appreciate and value their child's abilities their children will also learn to appreciate and value themselves.



Research has indicated that children with high self esteem can deal with challenging situations more easily, are willing to try new things, take risks that place them outside their comfort zones, and frequently find learning new things easier than other children (Biddulph, 2002, Goleman, 1995).

Parents can help develop their child's self esteem and confidence by: *I wanted to bullet point these next sections but something happens to them and I can't fix it - sorry*

Telling your kids you love them and how special they are to you, that you like them and why they are important e.g. "I really enjoyed the time we spent together today", "You worked through that problem really well and I was so proud of the way you handled a tough situation".

Treat your children with respect, talk to them politely and use manners, as you would expect them to use with you.

Show an interest in your child's activities and interests, if they have made something display it at home and let them see you are proud of their efforts.

Talk about the positive things your child does, to your child, your partner and other people who are close to them. This will illustrate to your child that you are proud of them and take notice of their good points.

Allow your child to make age appropriate choices. This permits them to have some power and a sense of control, rather than always having to do what other people say.

Talk with your child about the similarities and differences between people and explain that these are what make people unique and special. Discuss the fact that your child does not have to be like everyone else and it's ok to be different, as you love them just the way they are. Do not compare them to others or discuss their behaviour in front of them.

Ask your child's opinion and advice about family matters that are significant to them e.g. how to decorate their room, where to go on a family outing. Children feel very empowered when they know that their opinion and desires are taken into account when decisions are being made.

If you have to discipline your child it is vital to remember to make the distinction between their behaviour and them. You do not like the behaviour but you love them unconditionally and understand that mistakes sometimes happen.

Spend time with your children doing what they want to do, when you show that you value them enough to spend time with them in their favourite activities it sends a very clear message that you believe they are worthwhile and valuable.

Do not do everything for your children. This may be hard due to time constraints but if you do everything for them it can give them the message that you do not believe they are capable.

Encourage your child to find solutions to problems they encounter. Discuss their difficulties with them and encourage them to ask for help if they need it. Help them formulate possible solutions and weigh up the pros and cons of each one. Explain that it

is ok if they feel as if they have made a mistake, as long as they learn from their experiences.

Scaffold for success – allow your child to experience success and mastery by giving them tasks that you know they can do well, then praise them for the job well done.

Encourage your child to try new things e.g. learning to ride a bike, completing a challenging activity as this will help them learn and develop new skills

Encourage and support your child in front of other people, praise their efforts and achievements and let others know how proud you are. These things show your child that you care for them deeply and believe in them.

Activities that promote self esteem and confidence

Make a collage of your child's art work or photos of them. Have your child help choose what they would like on the collage. Talk with them about each item; discuss the photos and what they are doing in them, or the art works you are putting up.

Have a memento book in which you keep your child's drawings, letters and stories. Look at the book with your child and tell them how much you enjoyed and appreciated their efforts.

Make presents with pictures of your child or their art work on them for family members - grandparents, uncles, aunts. Your child can choose the photos or pieces of art work and then help you get them made up.

Allow your child to help you shop for groceries, encouraging them to find items they know in the aisles.

Make an "about me" poster with your child – have photos of them doing they are good at, pictures of their favourite things, and reminders of special times they have had.

Discuss and research a family holiday with your child. Let them help you find information out from the internet or other sources and decide where to go together.

Make a list of what you will need to take and then let your child help you plan and pack for the trip.

Plant a vegetable garden with your child so that you can grow and enjoy your own food. Let your child help you choose the vegetables you are going to grow and then help plant them.

Play games with your children that you know they are good at and allow them to win so you scaffold success (however do not do this all the time as they also need to experience how to lose in a game).

Write a book with your child about their interest/ hobby. Take photos of them undertaking different aspects of their hobby. Have your child write about what they are doing and why they like it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Connecting with Others

Humans are social beings who thrive on interaction and connection with others. Research has illustrated that adults and children who feel deeply connected to others in healthy relationships are happier, healthier and more positive about life (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Diener & Biswas Diener, 2009).



Children learn early emotional competencies and how to connect with others through their relationships and interactions with significant care givers. “Connections with others, in the form of unconditional love from significant adults in their lives, help foster children’s self confidence and happiness” (Hallowell, 2003, p.75). This in turn leads to a more optimistic outlook on life and a positive attitude towards developing relationships with other people.

Children who feel connected to the important adults in their life and have strong healthy social relationships are less inclined to act out, display attention seeking behaviour and seek acceptance through anti social behaviour (Biddulph, 2002).

Some children find it easy to get along with others, whereas others need to work on developing skills that enable them to interact successfully. Possessing the skills to get along with other people is important, as it will allow your child to connect and make friends with others and function successfully in a variety of social situations.

Parents play a critical role in helping their children understand how to get along with other people. Parents need to model how to connect and interact with others. Showing your child unconditional positive regard is one of the best ways to connect with them. It shows them that you love them no matter what, you sometimes may not like their

behaviour but you always love them. Express your gratitude and appreciation to your friends in front of your children, allow them to see you connecting from the heart and they will learn that this is an important part of happy healthy friendships.

Parents can also model kind considerate behaviour and being friendly towards others. Children will observe these behaviours and then practice them with other people. When you see them using these skills praise their attempts to make friends.

By helping your child develop specific skills e.g. how to join a group or game/ be a friend/ share with others/ start a conversation, you are developing the building blocks of connection and friendship that they will have for a life time. You also need to provide your child with the opportunity to practice their new skills in a variety of different situations.

Activities that help strengthen connection and build relationships

- Say “I love you” to each other and look into your children’s eyes when you say it.
- Make a photo album with photos of the children doing things with you, their grandparents and their friends as a gift for grandparents or other family members at Christmas time.
- Decide on a special treat that you can share with friends in the neighbourhood, make it together and then take it to those friends.
- Encourage your children to call their grandparents at least once per week/ fortnight to stay in touch. This could also be done by email and sending photos your child has chosen to share with their grandparents.
- Organise family get togethers where everyone brings food and shares in good times. Encourage grandparents or other senior relatives to tell stories about the family growing up and what the children were like when they were little.
- Plan a play date with your child and other children, discuss which friends they would like to invite and plan what types of things they want to do, then go together to

purchase these items and prepare for the date. (Begin with one friend at a time for a short time frame 1-2 hr)

- Teach your children to always write a thank you note to family members or friends who have given them a present or done something nice for them.
- Go to the park with friends and their children to play games and have a picnic.
- Invite your friends and their children over for a pizza party where you all make pizzas together.

CHAPTER FIVE

Encouraging Character

Character is a hard quality to define as it is not as tangible as a child's achievements or abilities. It is only when we witness the absence of character through senseless violence, addictions and self-harming behaviours that we understand why it is critically important for us as parents to "recognize and encourage the qualities associated with character" (Sharp, 2009, p39).



Parents can help their child develop character by creating an environment which fosters the habits of honesty, generosity, and fairness, and modeling kind and considerate behavior towards others, self-discipline, good work habits and the management of their negative thoughts.

Children can be negative occasionally without parents becoming concerned. However, when negative thinking becomes a habit this is a cause for concern, as a pessimistic style of thinking is a major cause of unhappiness. Parents need to help their children see challenging situations from different angles and not focus on the negative aspects without looking for positive aspects of the situation.

Another way parents can foster their child's character development is by helping their children recognize and build on their strengths (Sharp, 2009). One way of doing this is by noticing your child's strengths and then talking about these with them e.g. "I like the way you took time to help that person - you are very kind and generous". Children can build on their strengths by being involved in activities that are of interest to them and require them to use their strengths and skills.

Children who have developed character are more likely to be able to value their relationships with family and friends, put themselves in others' shoes, take responsibility for their actions, treat their family, friends and others with respect and courtesy, be honest (even when this is hard to do), persevere with tasks that are challenging and take more initiative at home and school. These traits help children tackle every day challenges and cultivate their own happiness.

Activities that encourage character development

- When you have new neighbours move into the street go and welcome with your children.
- If your child expresses a fear, acknowledge their fears and then encourage and support them to face their fears.
- If you have promised to do something follow through with it – show your child that when you give your word that means you will follow through.
- Be clear about your family values tell your children where you stand on issues that are important to you and then discuss these with your child.
- Have meals together and make these a time when you share, talk with and listen to your child.
- Encourage your child to take part in acts of service/ kindness within the community e.g. taking a meal to a sick elderly neighbor, picking up a neighbours paper for them, giving away toys they don't play with anymore to charity.
- Assign chores/ responsibilities to each member of the household and discuss who is going to do what chores. Then make sure you model the behaviour you want your children to exhibit by doing the chores within the set time frame.
- Keep your children busy in positive activities such as sport, hobbies, music, drama, art, or group activities such as scouts, guides or church groups. These foster cooperation and caring as well as a sense of accomplishment.
- Have family celebrations and traditions that you share together, whether these are focused on holiday times or other special times of the year for your family, they will help bring your family together.

- Teaching children how to behave appropriately in a variety of different social settings by taking them out to dinner at restaurants, going to the theatre, spending time with adults etc.
- Model good manners – children learn what they observe so make sure you always say please and thank you as well as showing respect and tolerance for others.
- Encourage your children to read good literature and non-fiction books. These expand their mind and help them see things from another person's point of view.
- Practice random acts of kindness with your children as well as allowing them to see you doing them for others. Explain what they are to your child and discuss what random acts of kindness they can do.

CHAPTER SIX

Fostering Optimism and Resilience

Children who are optimistic expect to get the best out of life – they expect good things to happen and always seem to look on the bright side. Children who are resilient are able to stick to a task and persevere even when they find it hard. These are traits and attitudes that every parent would like to foster in their child.



Optimism and resilience are closely correlated to happiness and research has shown that children who have developed these qualities are healthier, more successful in school, less likely to suffer depression and less anxious. Current research has also illustrated that both are teachable skills (Seligman, 2004, 2007).

You can teach your children about optimism by actively looking for and concentrating on the positives even when tasks or situations are challenging. The world will present your child with challenges however you can assist your child by helping them look at these in a constructive way – searching for positive solutions, rather than focusing on the negatives.

Resilient, optimistic children have the ability to bounce back and keep trying when things do not work out. They believe in themselves, build on their past successes and welcome challenges as exciting opportunities.

Activities that foster optimism and resilience

- Allow your child to have many opportunities to try new things and practice new skills. When your child experiences successes they will start to believe that they can achieve whatever they set their mind to.
- Avoid stepping in too quickly to help your child if they are having difficulties. Observe them and watch how they solve the problem, see if they can fix it themselves or need gentle guidance.
- Try not to “cotton wool” your child and be too over protective. They need to be able to take risks and try new things and maybe even fail, as the ability to deal with challenges; frustration and failure contribute to the development of resilience and optimism.
- Be a good role model – as children learn the most by observing what you do and say and how you react when you are confronted by challenges.
- Each night ask them to tell you about 3 good things that happened to them during the day.
- When you are providing positive feedback to your children specifically talk about their effort e.g. “I am really proud of the way you stuck at it and kept trying even though it was difficult for you”.
- Begin discussing the idea of “self talk”, what we all say to ourselves throughout the day, with your child. Help them develop positive self talk by encouraging them to think things like: “I was good at this before and I am going to be able to do it again now.”
- Rephrase your child’s negative talking/ thinking if it becomes a habit. For example if they come home and say “I never have anyone to play with at school everyone hates me”. You can help them rephrase this by saying “I can understand that it’s sometimes hard to find friends to play with at school, but last week you told me you played with Sarah and Ashley and really enjoyed the game so I know you can do it”.
- When things do go wrong for your child, as they sometimes will, reinforce their optimism by discussing what happened with them and underscoring the fact that

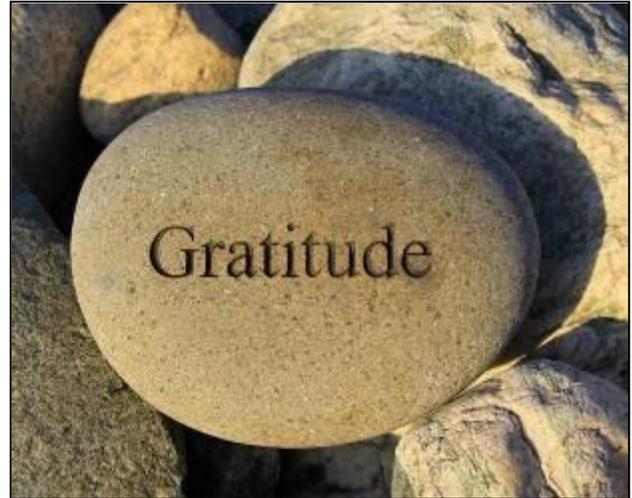
“the situation won’t last forever, that only one thing has gone wrong – not everything and that it is probably not their fault” (Sharp, 2009, p57).

- Discuss the positive attributes you see in other people with your child as this will encourage them to look for positives in others as well.
- Tell your child about how you worked through things growing up, so they can learn from your example (do not be too graphic just a general “I had to work at finding friends story is good).
- Plan exciting events together e.g. a birthday party or a special get together with family. Focus on them and talk about them with anticipation.
- Have one day where the whole family only says positive things (yes this can be challenging). Catch yourself or the children when a negative comment slips out and reframe it into a positive.
- When your child is experiencing negative emotions acknowledge them and discuss their feelings with them. Help them identify the emotion and uncover positive ways of managing the emotion and dealing with the events that have triggered the emotion.
- Help your child make a happiness journal where they can keep memories of happy times they have had. These may be photos, journal entries, pictures they have drawn, cards they have received, a program they got at a special show - anything that reminds them of the happy times they have had.
- Make sure you encourage healthy competition – you can do this by playing games with your child at home or getting them involved in a team sport. This way they will experience both victory and defeat and you can help them learn how to handle both.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Art of Gratitude and Giving

Gratitude is a crucial component of happiness. Robert Emmons (2008) defines gratitude as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness and an appreciation for life”. Emmons research established that practicing, and expressing, gratitude can make you significantly happier.



When you are feeling grateful it is difficult to focus on negative emotions and thoughts as gratitude is incompatible with these and “may actually diminish or deter such feelings as anger, jealousy, envy, fear, defensiveness and greed” (Lyubomirsky, 2008 p 94).

Parents can teach their children about gratitude by recognising and acknowledging that there are many good things, both big and small, in their lives that they are grateful for. This will encourage your children to identify things they are grateful for in their lives even when things may not be going their way.

Research has shown that our happiness and physical well being increases when we give to others, rather than simply focusing on ourselves. Giving is a key part in developing long term happiness, as it is an attribute all happy people share (Jamal & McKinnon, 2009, Ryan, 2000). When we give to others it makes a positive difference in their lives and can bring more meaning and happiness into our lives.

Activities that foster gratitude and giving

- Focus on the good stuff – recognize and acknowledge the things you are grateful for with your children.
- Develop a ritual at family dinner times of asking your child about 3 things they are grateful for from today, if they struggle with 3, start with one.
- Volunteer with your child at an organisation that is important to your family.
- Help your child develop a gratitude journal or scrap book where they can document the things they are grateful for.
- Help a neighbor clean their yard or rake their leaves, this teaches children about giving their time.
- Talk to your child about sharing and how they feel when someone shares with them. Then discuss what they can share with others.
- Make giving/ sharing fun by giving your child a special snack that they can share, just ensure that there is enough for each friend.
- Make cookies for your child's teacher as a way of expressing your gratitude for them.
- Help your child pick flowers from your garden and take them to an elderly or infirm neighbor.
- Talk with your children about how fortunate you are to live in a free country and to have a home to shelter in as well as fresh water and enough food and clothes.
- Sponsor a child in a third world country as a family project.
- Participate in the 40 Hour famine – reduce the hours for your child if they find it difficult (follow the guidelines from the organisation for age of participation).
- Explain to your child how they can really make a difference by giving of their time, talents or money to a worthy cause.
- Make it easy for your child to get involved in organisations that mean the most to them – e.g. the local animal shelter or the World Wildlife Fund if they love animals.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Creating Opportunities for Mastery

Mastery is when your child feels that they have a degree of control over a certain area of their life, and that they have a high level of skill in this area e.g. when playing an instrument or a game of sport that they love.



Research has shown that when children feel a high level of mastery they are have increased levels of

happiness and are more optimistic about life (Hallowell, 2003; Seligman et al 2007).

In order to promote mastery parents need to foster learning and curiosity as these are the stepping stones towards mastery and are closely related to happiness (Sharp, 2009). When children are excited by learning they are willing to try new experiences and keep trying even if they find them difficult. When children continue to practice their skills until they develop mastery they are learning how to set goals and achieve them.

As children develop mastery they also develop self confidence and the confidence that they have control over their lives and can make good things happen. They develop the belief that they have control over outcomes in their lives and this belief has a significant correlation with a child's level of happiness and optimism (Hallowell, 2003; Seligman et al 2007).

Activities that create opportunities for mastery

- Allow your child to pick out books to read to you when you have your reading time together.
- Explore a subject you are both interested in, allow your child to research it and then share the information with you.
- Plan visits to planetariums museums and aquariums – allowing your child to choose which one they would like to visit.
- Discover what your child is interested in and then find ways to help them pursue these interests and develop mastery in these areas.
- Choose family jobs/ chores that your child can complete fairly independently – putting clothes into the laundry basket, putting their toys away, putting books back onto the shelves where they came from.
- Be patient when your child first starts to help with these jobs - it may be quicker if you do it but your child will develop mastery only if they complete the task.
- Break activities down into small achievable steps (wherever possible) so your child can experience success.
- Provide your child with lots of opportunities to choose – whether it be the food that they are going to eat, places you are going to go, or books to read, this gives them a sense of control and mastery.
- Give your child lots of opportunities to practice activities they want to master.
- Help your child plan and plant a garden of their own that they tend to and harvest when the crops are ready.
- Buy books about your child's hobbies/ special interests so they can improve their knowledge and skills at their own pace.
- Sit down with your child and let them tell you about their special activity, how they are mastering it and how they feel about their achievements.
- Play board games with your children e.g. chess, backgammon, Monopoly and encourage them to master the skills of the game (if they are interested in them).
- Provide opportunities for your child to undertake more and more challenging tasks (that you know they can successfully accomplish) and praise them when they are successful.

CHAPTER NINE

Healthy Happy Bodies

A child's physical health and well being has a direct impact on their emotional well being and happiness. Habits that children form in childhood determine their level of health and well being as adults. It is therefore crucial for parents to assist their children to develop healthy habits that will stand them in good stead for their entire life.



Sleep is extremely important for children's health and well being. Most children need between 8-10 hours of sleep each night (maybe more depending on the age of the child). If they do not get sufficient sleep at night they display more challenging behaviours, are less happy and function poorly the next day.

To establish good sleeping habits in your child it is best to have a routine that you follow every night. This will make it easier for your child to get ready for bed and relax into sleep. Ensure you have a regular set bed time and give your child a warning that this time is approaching. Then follow a routine when getting ready for bed e.g. changing into PJ's, brushing of teeth, reading a favourite story then going to sleep.

Healthy eating is another key habit to develop for your child's health and well being. Over the past decade the levels of childhood obesity have increased around the globe and many children have also developed poor self esteem and low self confidence due to teasing and bullying stemming from their size. Children need to be educated about healthy food choices and the impact each of these types of foods can have on their

bodies. “Sometimes foods” such as lollies, chips, soft drinks and ice cream, are better viewed as treat and not everyday snacks.

Physical activity, whether it is incidental or planned, is vitally important to your child’s health and happiness. Extensive research over the past 2 decades has shown that increased levels of physical activity can significantly increase a person’s level of happiness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Seligman, 2004). Physical activity improves children’s mental and emotional well-being by producing endorphins, the body’s feel-good hormones, and by reducing stress hormones. Children who are physically active are generally happier than those who are not.

In the past 2 decades stress has crept into our lives and is now recognized as a significant problem. Unfortunately stress is not confined to adults some children also suffer from stress and anxiety. As parents we need to help our children deal with stress by teaching them simple relaxation techniques. Relaxation is a skill that will enable your child to combat negative disabling emotions.

Activities that create healthy habits for happy kids

- Be a good role model – children observe and then copy their parents’ habits and beliefs. If you are a regular exerciser they will be more likely to exercise regularly, if you eat healthy food as snacks they will too.
- Get rid of bad health habits you have e.g. eating take away 5 nights per week, smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, being physically inactive (a couch potato).
- Develop a routine of eating dinner together as a family – removing distractions such as TV and toys and talking together – topics may include everyone share something good about your day, or tell us something funny you saw today.
- Get children into the habit of eating a healthy nutritious breakfast
- Make healthy eating fun – children can be allowed to make faces with a piece of bread that they decorate with grated carrot, cherry tomatoes, slices of cucumber and cheese.
- Try serving a new food with something familiar that they like.

- Involve children in the preparation of the food e.g. washing the vegetables, getting the food out of the fridge
- Help the children plant a garden so they can grow their own healthy foods - the ones they like to eat
- Encourage the drinking of water by keeping a bottle in the fridge, putting slices of fruit in the water, putting pieces of fruit in ice blocks that can go into their drink of water
- Allow your child to have “sometimes food” at their birthday party or on special occasions. They can help plan what “sometimes foods” they want to have and can be encouraged to include healthy food on the menu as well
- Make healthy foods available as snacks at home and keep the unhealthy snack food items as special treats (don’t even buy them as temptation is great if they are sitting in the cupboard).
- Teach your children how to breathe deeply and focus on their breath when they feel stressed or worried, this slows down the physical symptoms that come with anxiety.
- Teach your child how to physically relax their body - get them to tighten all their muscles for 5-10 seconds and then relax/ go floppy.
- Teach your child to think about happy things – remembering a happy time, visualizing a place where they felt happy or a relaxing scene such as the beach.
- Discuss with your children how to recognize when they are feeling worried, anxious or stressed (what physical symptoms do they feel) and then when they feel these coming on they can apply simple relaxation techniques.
- Walk to places that are close by rather than drive.
- Provide plenty of opportunities for active play
- Reduce screen time to 1-2 hours per day – this includes the TV, Wii, computer, and other interactive devices with screens that stop them from being physically active and engaging with people or in other more creative activities
- Make it a family affair – the whole family can participate in fun activities such as going for a walk after dinner, dancing to music that everyone likes, walking the dog
- Kid-friendly forms of exercise include:

- Hopscotch, Leapfrog, Duck, duck goose, Playing tag, Playing hide and seek with a home base, Jump rope, Riding skateboards, Rollerblading - don't forget the helmet, wrist guards, elbow guards and kneepads., Riding bikes - don't forget the helmets. Playing with hula hoops, Playing Frisbee, Walking; this includes walking the dog, Playing at the beach: swimming, surfing, skim boarding, boogie boarding, kite-surfing/boarding or wind surfing

CHAPTER TEN

Have Fun

Playing and having fun is how children learn. Through play children explore, experiment, develop creativity, share thoughts and ideas with others, learn how to cooperate, develop problem solving skills and learn how to tolerate frustration. Unstructured play also helps develop children's mastery as they learn that doing things over and over again leads to improvement (Hallowell, 2003).

Play is a fun way for children to develop body co-ordination, balance and flexibility. It allows children to develop confidence in their physical abilities and provides relaxation and stress relief. Sharing fun, laughter and play with others encourages children to bond and strengthens their sense of connectedness, which is critical for happiness and well being.

Playing and having fun also helps children foster a sense of humor. "A sense of humor is one of our greatest protections against depression and one of the best guarantees of being able to rise above difficult situations"(Sharp, 2009, p96). Allow your children to be children do not burden them with adult worries and responsibilities or enforce the need to be serious. They need to play, imagine and dream in order to develop into happy healthy adults.



Fun Activities

- Joke with your children – laugh with them, read or tell funny jokes and listen to theirs.
- Rent funny movies and watch them together – laugh out loud with them.
- Blow bubbles together in the sunshine and watch them float away.
- Dance and sing with your kids – play their favourite music and dance the afternoon away
- Make a volcano with your children and watch it erupt (vinegar and bicarb soda work wonders)
- Have a family scavenger hunt – your children can help make a list of what everyone needs to find and then the fun begins
- Find out about parks and playgrounds in your neighborhood and city, then go and visit a new one.
- Go for a picnic in your yard or a park.
- Find a river or lake where there are ducks to feed.
- Go for a ride on a bus or train to somewhere different and explore this new environment.
- Go and fly a kite
- Learn yoga as a family
- Playing miniature golf
- Play Hide and Seek with piles of leaves – hide an object in one of several piles of leaves and the children then race to find it (raking the leaves back up later)
- Build a cubby house inside
- Play Pooh Sticks on a bridge
- Have a day in the kitchen, let your child choose the healthy recipe they want to make and then cook it with them
- Collecting seeds or other items in nature to make necklaces from
- Help your child make up funny poems or stories that resemble members of your family
- Learn magic tricks together
- As a family make a list of fun things you all want to do and then when you have the time set aside the children can choose which ones they want to do.
- Do nothing and relax as a family maybe watching clouds float by and seeing what shapes they are e.g. animals, or people.

KNOW WHEN TO GET HELP

This guide is designed as a resource to promote happiness and well being in children. However there are times when children may experience psychological disorders and you need to seek assistance from professionals.



If you do believe something is not as it should be, “if a problem persists more than you’d expect it

to, if an issue is significantly impacting on your child’s daily functioning –their mood, sleep, appetite, energy levels, attendance at school or social activities or if other people around your child are concerned” (Sharp, 2009 p .161) it is time to seek professional help.

Go to your family GP and discuss your concerns, they can refer you on to a specialist if they believe it is necessary. Find out more about the services and resources available to help you and your child.

As a general rule of thumb early intervention is the best way to get help for your child. It will ensure your child is assessed early and a plan for the future can be implemented if required. This along with your support, love and encouragement will give your child the best possible chance of developing good mental health and well being and the best opportunity to live happy, healthy lives

RESOURCES

Online Resources

American Public Health Association: www.apha.org

Australian Consumer's Magazine: www.choice.com.au

Child and Youth Health: www.cyh.com

Center for Health Promotion www.chdf.org.au

Diabetes Australia: www.diabetesaustralia.com.au

Get Up and DO Something: www.getupanddosomething.org

Happiness and It's Causes Conference www.happinessanditscauses.com.au

Health Insite www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/child_health

Healthy Child Healthy World: www.healthychild.org

Kids Health: www.kidshealth.org

Keep Kids Healthy: www.keepkidshealthy.com

National TV turnoff week: www.tvfa.org

Parenting Blog online: www.theparentingblog.org

Professor Martin Seligman www.authentichappiness.com

Positive Psychology News Daily <http://positivepsychologynews.com>

Public Health Association of Australia: www.phaa.net.au

Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au

TED Ideas Worth Spreading <http://www.ted.com>

The Australian Psychological Society www.psychology.org.au/ReferralService/About

The Centre for Confidence and Well Being <http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk>

The Pay It Forward Foundation <http://www.payitforwardfoundation.org>

The Happiness Institute www.thehappinessinstitute.com

The Well Being Institute at the University of Cambridge www.cambridgewellbeing.org

World Health Organization: www.who.int

Books

Authentic Happiness and Flourish *Martin Seligman, Ph. D.*

Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth *Ed Diener and Robert Biswas Diener*

Kitchen Garden Cooking for Kids *Stephanie Alexander*

Stumbling on Happiness *Daniel Gilbert*

Thanks *Robert Emmons*

The Art of Happiness *His Holiness the Dalai Lama & Howard C Cutler*

The Childhood Roots to Adult Happiness *Dr Edward Hallowell*

The CSIRO Wellbeing Plan for Kids *CSIRO*

The Happiness Handbook *Dr. Tim Sharp*

The How of Happiness *Prof Sonja Lyubomirsky*

The Optimistic Child *Martin Seligman, Karen Reivich, Lisa Jaycox & Jane Gillham*

The Secret of Happy Children *Steve Biddulph*

The Seven Habits of Happy Kids *Sean Covey and Stacy Curtis*

100 Ways to Happiness *Dr Tim Sharp*

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