



Happiness Summary

Why Happiness?

Your child's connections with you and others and their ability to engage in meaningful learning and play are essential to developing lifelong happiness. As a parent or someone in a parenting role, you play an essential role in your child's success. There are intentional ways to grow a healthy parent-child relationship, and developing feelings of happiness is a great way to do it.

Step 1. Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Consider how your child reacts when they are happy or excited. How do they show you? Children at this age clap their hands, imitate others, smile, squeal, and laugh when they are happy or excited.
- Consider how your child reacts when they are scared. How do they show you? Children at this age are more aware of their surroundings, which can make them afraid of new things or sounds. They may cry, withdraw, or hide.
- Consider how your child reacts when they are upset, angry, or frustrated.
 - How do they show you? Children at this age may cry, yell, hit, bite, or throw things. They can still be soothed by cuddling and rocking and are learning to self-soothe when upset.
 - If a child is crying, offer to hold them or provide comfort items like a favorite teddy bear or a blanket. Do not attempt to talk anything through when a child is highly upset. Focus on calming down first.
 - If a child hits or bites in anger or frustration, stop and say, *"Ouch. That hurts my arm, and it makes me feel sad"* or *"I see you are frustrated."*
- Each time your child expresses any big feeling, be sure and name it: *"You have a smile on your face. You seem happy."*
- When reading books, look at the images of people and point out what you notice about the characters feelings: *"I think that character is feeling happy because he likes to play with his friends? Does playing with your friends make you feel happy, too?"*

Step 2. **Teach** New Skills by Interactive Modeling

- Read and “pretend play” together.
 - During reading time, select a book with faces to help your child learn to identify different feelings. Point out how you can tell what each face is feeling and practice recreating those cues with your child.
 - After reading a story together, act out the story and use feeling words and expressions to match how the characters were feeling throughout the story.
 - Replay moments that made your child feel joy during pretend play. *“Do you remember how much fun it was to play hide-and-seek yesterday? Do you want to play again?”*
- Make your thinking and feelings explicit. Talk about what you notice, how you are feeling, why you are feeling it, and what signs you are giving. *“We worked hard to build that block tower. It was fun! It made me smile, like this.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *“Playing together with toys makes me feel so happy. I want to give you a big hug.”*

Step 3. **Practice** to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Provide opportunities for your child to do things that are more challenging than what they have done before. This may be a challenging social situation like waving hello to a neighbor who they felt too shy to wave to in the past.
- Create regular routines that build your child’s relationships with others. Even a daily walk to get the mail with a parent can become a cherished routine that is comforting, connecting, and joyful.
- Use your child’s dolls or stuffed animals to act out moments of happiness so that they become part of your child’s stories and memories. This is a good way to relive special moments and remind your child about the roles that family members and friends have played in their happiness.

Step 4. **Support** Your Child’s Development and Success

- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like: *“I noticed that you were able to put your clothes into the basket like we practiced. We were both smiling. I love seeing that.”*
- On days with extra challenges when you can see your child is not feeling particularly happy, let them know that it is ok to not feel happy sometimes, and that they are likely to feel happy again sometime soon. In a gentle, non-public way, you can whisper in your child’s ear, *“We thought this would be fun, but it is ok if you don’t like it.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when they are doing something that brings them joy. You can offer reflections like: *“You smiled a lot while we played with the bucket of water in the backyard. It seemed like you felt happy.”*

Step 5. **Recognize** and Celebrate

- Smile at your child.
- Make eye contact.
- Use caring facial expressions.
- Be physically gentle and caring with your child.
- Recognize and call out when all is going well. If your child had more fun at the park because they took a nap beforehand, help them notice that connection so they can understand that being rested will make it easier to have fun. *“I notice you have a lot more energy to play and have fun since we took a nap earlier.”*
- Build celebrations into your routine. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

Tip This year is filled with amazing changes -- and not just for your child. Don't forget to recognize and celebrate your own development and milestones as a parent.

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