



# Happiness Summary

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## Why Happiness?

Two-year-olds are building their skills through loving interactions with you, other family members, and friends. Many of your child's joyful and happy experiences will occur within these important relationships. 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

- Each time there is an opportunity, share how you are feeling and ask your child how they feel: *"I am getting sleepy; are you feeling sleepy?"*
  - For example, if your child is with others who are all feeling very happy at a family birthday party, help them notice their own feelings and those of others: *"I notice a lot of children running and smiling. Many of them are singing and waving balloons, too. Do you think they feel happy?"*
  - You can also point out when your child is feeling differently from other children, and let them know that is ok: *"I notice that you are staying away from the balloons and standing in one place. Your eyebrows are squeezed together like this. I do not think that you are feeling happy right now. How are you feeling?"*
- When reading books, look at the images of people and talk about what you notice about their feelings. Ask, *"I think drawing makes that person feel happy. Does drawing make you feel happy too?"*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how to describe their feelings or how others are feeling, consider asking questions, naming what you notice, and leaving plenty of quiet space after your questions so they have an opportunity to share their ideas too.
  - *"How did you feel when you saw the balloons at the party?"*
  - *"I noticed some children were very excited about the balloons."*
  - *"I noticed other children stepped away from the balloons and got closer to their parents."*
  - *"Are you feeling nervous?"*
  - *"How do you feel now?"*
  - *"Is there anything we can do to remember what made you feel happy at the party?"*

- Each time your child expresses any big feeling, be sure and name it. *“You seemed really happy when you were listening to the music. You had a smile on your face. Were you feeling happy?”*

## 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 pretend we were animals in the forest yesterday? Do you want to play that 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 so hard to make cookies together today. It was fun! It made me smile, like this.”*
- Talk aloud about the ways in which you respond to your own big feelings: *“Singing with you makes me feel so happy. I want to give you a big hug.”*
- Help your child see that feelings will change and all emotions are important and welcome. For example, when your child uses definitive language like, *“I don’t like that,”* you may respond with:
  - *“Sometimes we don’t like something now, and that is okay. But we might like it later.”*
  - *“Do you remember last time when you did not like something? You took a deep breath and tried it, and it was ok.”*

## 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 playing with a new friend or trying a new experience.
- Create regular routines that build your child’s relationships with others. Even a daily walk around the block 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 liked singing songs at the library storytime today. You were smiling when you sang. 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 all talked together at the dinner table. It seemed like you felt happy."*
  - *"I remember last time when we were at the park you did not like being on the swings. This time, you went on the swings with your friend and had fun."*

## Step 5. **Recognize** Effort and Quality to Foster Motivation

- Recognize and call out when it 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.

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