

# How to Raise Happy, Loving Kids

*When There's Never Enough Time*

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One of the biggest concerns of working parents is that they can't seem to find enough time to spend with their children.

Interestingly, how much time you spend with your children has little impact on how happy they are or how well adjusted they will be. More important is how you spend whatever time you have with them.

My wife and I have raised six children, and we think that we've been very successful—if love and happiness are any indication. Here is what worked for us...

◆ **It isn't your job to make your children happy.** You don't have to save you children from unhappiness. Not only is it an impossible task, it's not even helpful. When you try, you wind up sending the message that your children cannot cope with uncomfortable feelings and that you cannot deal with seeing them upset. Also, you may teach them to use tears and expressions of sadness to manipulate you.

**Better:** Be relaxed when your children experience sadness. Take a deep breath, if necessary. If you can be comfortable and calm even when your children are not, they won't be afraid to reveal their deepest feelings. Such sharing can lead to the kind of intimacy you have always yearned to have with your kids.

**Helpful:** Don't let your buttons get pushed when your child seems to be using unhappiness to get a certain response from you.

**Examples:** Crying for a cookie or whining that *Everyone else in my class has seen that movie...except me!*

Say in a loving, sincere way: *It's fine to feel that way and I'd love to talk with you about it, but your screaming, whining and nagging are not going to motivate me in any way.* Follow through on this and your child will choose such troubling behavior less and less.

◆ **You don't owe your children anything.** Once you have provided food, clothing and a roof over your children's head, do not act as if you are obligated to them.

You don't have to give your children less, just shift your vision. When you view what you give as a gift rather than something you owe to your children, you teach them to be grateful and to honor your relationship as reciprocal rather than being a one-way street.

◆ **Gratitude is a powerful form of happiness and love.** Most of us are stingy with gratitude. But our withholding of it teaches the next generation to mimic us and be stingy with gratitude.

Feeling thankful creates a wonderful internal experience. Expressing gratitude makes your love tangible.

**Helpful:** Find some aspect of each child to honor, and then share your insight. The power of appreciation comes through actions.

Participate in an informal gratitude exchange with members of your family. Mealtimes and bedtime provide wonderful opportunities for this special type of family activity. Create a quiet moment, and tell your children something you appreciate about each one of them. Be specific.

**Example:** *I loved the way you shoveled the snow with such enthusiasm...or, Thank you for telling me how angry you were. Your openness is a gift in my life.*

Express gratitude that this friend will always remain close in your hearts. This way, you teach your children that they don't need to respond to every loss with sadness.

◆ **Quality time starts when you want to be there.** Spend only as much time with your children as you want.

Assess how much time you want to spend with your kids and how much time doing other things.

Quantity time is not quality time when you wish you were somewhere else. Children know instinctively if you're present in body only...and tend to reward you at those times with their most challenging attention-getting behaviors.

When you are there by choice instead of feeling you *should* be, you will enjoy it a lot more, and so will they.

**Helpful:** Turn your ear in your child's direction. When you aren't listening, you miss the chance to really know your children and deprive them of the opportunity to get to know you. When you tune out, so do they.

While interacting with your children, allow time to give them your undivided attention. Make frequent eye contact...hold hands...tickle...and cuddle.

When they talk, listen, Let your kids help you rediscover the joy of playing and simply enjoying life in the moment.

◆ **Loving your children is more important than anything else.** Prioritize how you feel and express love, and then go for the behaviors that you want from your children, such as good grades...neat rooms...and appropriate appearance.

**Example:** You come home from a hard day at work to a messy house. You believe, *If they really loved me, they would have cleaned up*, and react accordingly.

When you become angry, you act as if your love for them, or at least your approval (which feels like the same thing to children), is tied to their behavior. No one feels loved, and the house is still a mess.

Now imagine walking into the same situation with this perspective: *They love me, and they don't care about neatness—I do. This disarray means nothing about how they feel about me, nor how I feel about them. Then we will work on the mess.*