

Learning Happiness

Recently we wrote an article talking about the Growth Mindset and how it helps us to foster an “I can do” mentality in our children by using the words “I can’t do this **‘yet’**” to help them move through failure to eventual success and building resilience and self-belief in the process.

This week we would like to talk about helping our children to be happy. We have written on this subject before but believe Christmas time is a good time for a refresher. At this time of the year it is easy for children to invest so much of their happiness in “things” by believing that a new x box, bike or iPhone is all they need to be happy. What’s more, sometimes as parents, we can fall for it!

Is it possible to teach children how to be happy? We believe it is. With research to back him up, Martin Seligman, author of the Happiness Trap, talks about how personality traits like kindness and humour enhance our capacity for happiness but he also reveals to us that it is in giving that we really find true happiness. He doesn’t mention iPhones, x boxes or overseas holidays. In fact once our basic needs have been met (food, shelter, love) additional money/toys/stuff does not impact on reported levels of happiness very much at all.

Martin Seligman believes it is in living a meaningful life that true happiness can be found, and that using our personal strengths in service of something that is larger than ourselves is the key.

In helping our children to be intrinsically happy when they are being constantly bombarded with advertisements and catalogues at this very exciting, gift receiving time of the year, you might consider the following:

- Start by discouraging your children from comparing themselves to others (and what others have). Help them to count their blessings and to focus on what they have already rather than on what they perceive to be lacking.
- Encourage them to be nice to others. They will soon notice that others will be nice back to them. People who care about others are happier than those who are preoccupied with their own needs. If necessary, teach them how to be kind to others:
 - teach them how to listen when others are speaking
 - teach them how to pay a compliment and to be appreciative of a kindness shown to them
 - teach them how to be a supportive friend when a friend is troubled
 - teach them it is polite to greet people they may know and to say hello if they pass them in the street; or to wave or nod or smile to acknowledge someone from a distance. (They will be warmed by the responses they get in return.)
- Teach your children that it is their responsibility to find what it is that makes them happy (and it doesn’t come in a box). Give them opportunities to try and learn new things.

- Teach them to give. Christmas is the perfect time. Parcel up toys for St Vincent de Paul or the Giving Tree. Encourage them to spend some of their own money buying a gift for a needy child or donating to a Christmas appeal.
- Encourage them to write a card or note to some important people in their life. Christmas is a really good time to do that.
- Help/allow them to make a cake or some biscuits for an elderly relative or neighbour and allow/enable them to deliver it in person.
- Help them to set realistic goals and encourage them along as they achieve them.
- Cultivate a sense of fun, and a sense of humour. Teach them to laugh off minor frustrations and how to manage their emotions around more serious ones by emotion coaching.

Having happy children goes a very long way towards having a happy household. We hope you are able to see the value in teaching them that happiness comes from within. If they can master this, then they can be happy wherever they are and with whatever they may have. What a wonderful gift.

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