

Promoting Happiness by Giving

In an article we wrote last November we focussed on the importance of being resilient as part of the quest to being happy. In this article we will explore the importance of engaging in meaningful service beyond oneself which helps to guide children to be happy.

Bill O'Hanlon is a psychotherapist, prolific author and workshop presenter from U.S.A. and in his paper, *The Science of Happiness: A Positive Psychology Update* which can be found at http://www.reachinginreachingout.com/e-newsbrief/documents/ResilienC-Issue9-Science_of_Happiness_Report.pdf he concludes the most assured way to happiness is four pronged:

- Have lots of good social interactions and relationships
- Develop an optimistic thinking style
- Practise appreciation and gratitude
- Engage in meaningful service beyond yourself.

He quotes some highly regarded philosophers and world leaders who have also advocated for the importance of helping others which in turn goes a long way to achieving a happy life for oneself.

He writes:

It's all about others

"When a man is wrapped up in the self," says John Ruskin, "he makes a pretty small package."

Albert Schweitzer: "You must give something to your fellowmen even if it's a little thing. Do something for those who have need of help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of giving. The only ones among you who are really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Martin Luther King says, "Life's most persistent and urging question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"

Gandhi says, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

The Talmud says, "The highest form of wisdom is kindness. Deeds of kindness are equal in a way to all the commandments."

"People who want to live a more fulfilling life," says Laura King of the University of Missouri, "should quit reading self-help books and start helping others."

W.H. Auden says, "We're here on earth to help others. What on earth the others are here for? I don't know."

Daniel Dennett, who's a consciousness researcher says, "Do you want to know the secret of happiness? Here's the secret of happiness: Find something more important than yourself and dedicate your life to it."

In light of all this advice we might ask ourselves, "What can be done to help our children to find a high level of satisfaction in life through helping others, as we know we don't make children happy by simply enabling them to be receivers of kindness?" We increase our children's feelings of happiness and well-being, reduce bullying, and improve their friendships by teaching them to be givers of kindness. A 2012 study, *Kindness Counts: Prompting Prosocial Behavior in Preadolescents Boosts Peer Acceptance and Well-Being* conducted by researchers from the University of Columbia and University of California broke new ground by showing the benefits derived by tweens (9 - 11 year olds) when they were taught happiness increasing strategies. Several hundred students performed and recorded three acts of kindness each week for anyone they wished. Another several hundred kept track of three pleasant places they visited during the week. When kids performed acts

of kindness they significantly increased the feelings of happiness and satisfaction. In fact the study showed that those who performed acts of kindness earned them increased well-being and also popularity and acceptance among peers. Read more about the study here: <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0051380>

Below are some suggestions to help your children to give of themselves by encouraging them to:

- Listen attentively when someone is talking
- Support someone by cheering them up, listening to their problem, etc
- Tell someone how much they mean to them
- Phone or send a card/letter/email to someone they haven't been in contact with lately
- Compliment someone about their smile, their attitude, something they'd done well
- Thank everyone who did something for them, no matter how small it was
- Smile hello, nod, wave to someone
- Refrain from negative judgements and gossiping
- Choose to be positive with thoughts and words
- Give surplus clothing, toys to charities
- Help to raise money for a cause
- Take cake, chocolates, flowers to a neighbour or senior citizen nearby
- Give small tokens of love to family, friends for no particular reason eg flower, card, fruit, a poem, a hug
- Donate home made goods to a charity market stall
- Encourage their friends to use praise of others/compliments instead of put downs
- Do things for the environment such as clean up litter, plant trees, weed public spaces
- Join a group which works to help others
- Offer to help adults such as family members, their teacher/s
- Help your child to act upon their good ideas which may improve the lives of others.

To conclude, we believe there is much wisdom in the Chinese proverb, "If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help others."

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