

Ideas and Activities for Today- Fostering Optimism and Positive Attitudes

Steer Your Child to Hopefulness and Happiness And as Always... HAVE INCREDIBLE FUN TOGETHER!

Lesson 4 - Fostering Optimism and Positive Attitudes

You know when someone is positive and optimistic. Generally they are interested and interesting, adventurous, braver than others to try new things and curious about lots of things. They are usually not bored; they have so much that they want to find out about and do. Optimistic and positive people are also more likely to be thankful for what they have, and show genuine gratitude to others. Little children are like this, but somehow, sometimes, it begins to change. Let's encourage them to stay optimistic.

As parents, we all do the best we know. We do a great job; we love our kids, and have fun as a family. But sometimes it just takes someone else discussing an idea, or a note in an article, or perhaps even one of these lessons, to set us on a path we hadn't thought about before, and we can add to our skills and 'parent tools'.

In this lesson, 'Encouraging Optimism and Positive Attitudes', as with all of the previous lessons, you build on your skills over time, and at the same time you help to develop your child's skills and ability to cope with his world beautifully.

A lot of your progress with him comes from **bringing yourself to a much greater awareness of your language**. If your words and communications with him are focused on the positive rather than the negative, this begins to be the way to think and act at your place for all the family.

Once again it's in the little things that make the difference. For example, instead of "Don't do xxxxx" we can say "Have you thought of doing xxxxx", or perhaps "Would you like to do xxxxx". (Then when you really need to shout 'Don't' in a dangerous situation say, he will jump to action).

When children are whining and complaining, instead of talking about that issue, you can change the subject and just ignore the negative talk (especially for younger children - talk about something they are really interested in), or for older children, find something positive about the issue he is talking about, in other words, turn it around.

It's a scientific fact that when you raise the level of endorphins in the body you feel happier and more positive. Activate those little fellers with exercise and laughter. As you start to bring your focus to using positive language with your

child, you will start thinking of even more little actions that will guide him to be a more positive person.. Here are some fun starters/reminders:

Little Actions on a Daily Basis

- After school, instead of asking “How was school today?” ask about the most interesting thing he learnt, or the funniest thing that happened, or the best game he played.
- Laugh a lot. Laughter is the BEST creator of endorphins, and boosts a feeling of optimism
- Play a Game of Five Senses – in the car, or as you are sitting around the table; it just takes a few minutes. Take it in turns for each member of the family to say what they see, hear, smell, taste and feel/touch. Have a laugh too.
- Observe good things he does and says and comment what you like about that
- As you tuck him into bed ask him to tell you about the three best things that happened today – focusing his mind on the positive
- Keep TV watching to a set minimum each day. Set some rules for him here. Remove exposure to those negative stories from his life
- Always follow through with what you say you will do. If he is continually ‘let down’ he begins to give up; he doesn’t trust that things work out for him; pessimism about his world creeps in
- Be grateful yourself for the good things, and teach him to observe the lovely things that happen in his life each day
- Show him that when you give a smile, you get a smile (raise his endorphins) and improve his good feelings
- You are the role model. If you are optimistic and look forward to life’s events with excitement, you child is more likely to be the same.

Here are some things to think about

- Awareness of the language we use (positive rather than the negative)
- Appropriate information for children to know (world issues like war and famine; frightening events like murder, robbery and attacks on people are not subjects for children to hear about; they become fearful)
- Learning to notice positive things
- Be watchful for changes. Does you child show sadness lately that wasn’t there before. Find out what is going on - now
- Health and nutrition (Yes again – good food, and adequate sleep are crucial)
- Being a role model (talk more about the good things happening in your life)
- Be aware of the danger of expecting perfection (ALWAYS expecting children to be 100% positive). This can actually set them up to fail
- Smiling. When you give a smile, you get one back
- Learning to look forward to events with excitement and anticipation

Children’s health – my hobby horse again. We probably should have started our lessons with a reminder about health. Children function at peak performance when they get the right amount of sleep – at the proper times, varied and nutritious food – at the proper time, and enough fun exercise spread throughout the week.

Statistics show that in some areas as many as 40% of children are coming to school not having eaten breakfast. How many children eat a bowl of 'empty' (nutritionally speaking) sugar-coated cereal to start the day? These children are lethargic and not interested in their work; in fact can't work. It's a bit too easy for us to just serve a bowl of cereal and send them off. Fruit, muesli and yoghurt, or sometimes an egg with wholegrain toast and a glass of fresh juice is a great start to their day.

Now, a Fun Activity Idea to Promote a Positive Outlook

There are several quick ideas and some which take a bit more time on pages 12 to 14 in your book **Raising Happy Kids** Needless to say just one fun session will not result in huge changes right away. You want to support growth towards a more positive outlook for your children, so it's a matter of continuous consistent effort as you work towards this outcome for them.

With an older child, (or all the family), sit down together one day to plan a year's calendar of events. It could be weekly, monthly, every second month or four times a year – depending on how big your plans are. Make sure you only commit to what you are prepared to fulfill; the point of this exercise is to demonstrate looking forward with optimism and a positive attitude to something coming up. It's okay to explain that some ideas won't work for you – or that maybe they need to be modified.

Say to him: "I thought it could be fun to plan some things to do together for the rest of the year, would you like to do that?" = **Wow, Mom wants to be with me to have some fun = this sounds exciting = I will look forward to this**

Start to make a list together that he will write down in any order. Have a few (realistic for you) ideas up your sleeve to set the ball rolling. If he suggests things that are too 'huge/expensive/time-consuming' you could counter with even more extreme ideas and have a laugh together as you then think of ideas that can really work more easily for you both. Perhaps there could be one 'special' event in there to top off the year. = **This is fun = I am excited to think of what is coming up = I feel really positive about all these ideas**

Next sort your list into date order together and get him to make up his Yearly Chart = **Mom really is going to do this with me = I know this will happen with my Mom = I am confident about our future plans**

Choose something for today to actually start the first event; say making a kite together and go fly it = **Mom really does want to do stuff with me + I am looking forward with excitement and anticipation**

Pin his Chart near his bed so that you can comment together on it nightly. A great way to go off to sleep, with something to look forward to and dream about = **When I make plans with Mom they really happen = Mom can be relied on = my world can be relied upon**

Now over the weeks and months, build on his excited anticipation for each event. Look at your chart together at what is coming up. Make plans together. Even make small changes as you get better ideas – but not LOTS of changes on your part or his. This is about looking forward to something that can be relied on with anticipation and hopefulness = **I feel great about my world, it is an exciting place = I feel great about my future, I expect fun things to happen**

A cautionary word! His Chart and dreams will crash spectacularly, with devastating results if you don't fulfill your part of the commitment. You know he doesn't really care about what you do, how big or small it is. What he really wants is to know that you can be relied upon, that you want to be with him. That's the fun!

In the program for goal-setting in '**Go for Your Goals – for Kids**' we involve the process of building optimism and excitement. Your child is going to be motivated about achieving his goal when he feels positive that he will reach it.

It's delightful to see children who just have a great attitude about things. The way to develop excitement and anticipation for good things is by focusing on the positive in all your communication together.

