

Happiness Age 2 Summary

Why Happiness?

Your child's connections with you and others and their ability to engage in meaningful learning and play are essential to developing lifelong happiness. 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

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Getting to Know and Understand Your Child's 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?"* Two-year-olds do not yet have a feelings vocabulary and cannot describe their body sensations when dealing with any big feeling. They will need your support to be successful.
 - For example, if your child is with others who feel very happy at a family birthday party, help them notice their feelings and those of others. You might even name the expressions and body language you notice. For example, *"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 feels 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. Point out the different ways that people may feel happiness. 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 to name it. *“You seemed really happy when you were listening to the music. You had a smile on your face. Were you feeling happy?”* This builds their feelings vocabulary and adds to their self-awareness and ability to manage their feelings. This includes describing and naming the joy they may feel when they have fun with you and the pride they feel when they can do something for the first time. Pointing out how they can experience happiness will help them notice it and know what experiences bring them joy.

STEP
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TEACH

Teach New Skills

- 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 each face's feelings 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 are feeling throughout the story. This expands their feelings vocabulary and teaches them how to recognize a wide range of perspectives and emotions they might not encounter in daily interactions with others.
 - 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 feel, why you feel 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 your 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 essential 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 the last time you did not like something? You took a deep breath and tried it, and it was ok.”*

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Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Provide opportunities for your child to do more challenging things than they have done before. The goal is to create experiences beyond what they are comfortable with so they can experience working hard and mastering a new skill. 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. A daily walk around the block with a parent can become a cherished, comforting, connecting, and joyful routine.
- 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 an excellent way to relive special moments and remind your child about family members' and friends' roles in their happiness.

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Support Your Child’s Development and Success

- Recognize effort using “I notice...” statements like: *“I noticed 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 not to feel happy sometimes and that they are likely to feel happy again 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 feels when doing something that brings them joy. You can offer reflections like:
 - *“You smiled a lot while we all talked at the dinner table. It seemed like you felt happy.”*
 - *“I remember last time we were at the park, you did not like being on the swings. You went on the swings with your friend this time and had fun.”*

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Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when things are going well. It may seem obvious, but it's easy not to notice when everything moves smoothly. Noticing and naming the behavior provides the necessary reinforcement that you see and value your child's choice.
- Recognize small steps along the way. Don't wait for significant accomplishments—like the whole bedtime routine going smoothly—to recognize effort. Remember that your recognition can work as a tool to promote more positive behaviors. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, after you've completed your bedtime routine, snuggle and read before bed.

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