

## Happiness Age 4 Summary

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### 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.



#### Getting to Know and Understand Your Child's Input

- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *“What do you notice? How do you feel? How do you think the other child feels? What are you wondering?”*
  - For example, if your child is with others feeling very happy at the park, help them notice their thoughts and reactions and those of the other children. You might even name the expressions and body language you notice. For example, *“I notice a lot of children running and smiling. Do you think they feel happy?”*
  - You can also point out when your child is feeling differently from other children and that it is okay for people to react differently to the same experiences. *“There are a lot of children going down the slide. They seem to be having fun. I notice that you are staying away from the slide. Your shoulders are slumped down, and you look scared. Are you feeling scared?”*
  - When reading books, look at the images of people and ask your child what they notice about their feelings. Point out ways that people may feel happiness in different ways. Ask, *“How do you think that man is feeling? Does that activity make you feel happy, too?”*
- If your child is unsure how to describe feelings or how others are feeling, consider naming what you notice, leaving plenty of quiet space for them to think of some ideas. You could say, *“I noticed many children seemed happy and excited when they saw the puppy. How did you feel when you saw the puppy?”*
- Each time your child expresses any big feeling, be sure to name it. *“You seemed really happy when you were playing in the backyard. 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.



## Teach New Skills

- Read and “pretend play” together.
  - During reading time, select a book with faces to help your child identify the different feelings of other children, including happiness. Point out what you notice and how you can tell what each child is feeling. You might ask, *“Do the children’s feelings change based on what happens in the book?”*
  - Replay moments that made your child feel joy during pretend play. *“Do you remember how much fun it was to play outside in the backyard yesterday? Let’s play in the living room and pretend we are at the park.”*
- 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 on that painting together. It was fun to paint with you, and I feel so proud of our picture. I will hang it on the refrigerator to feel happy every time I look at it.”*
- Talk aloud about how you respond to your big feelings: *“Dancing to the music with you makes me feel so much happiness that I want to hug you.”*
- Help your child see that emotions will change and that all feelings are important and welcome. For example, when your child uses definitive language like, *“I am mad at you,”* you may respond with:
  - *“It is okay to feel mad. Sometimes, I get mad and frustrated, too. I take a deep breath when I am mad, which helps me feel better. Would that help you?”*
  - *“Do you remember last time when you were frustrated? You took a deep breath, and we could work through it together.”*
  - *“I wonder if we can do something to help us overcome this challenge?”*



## 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 friend who has upset them in the past.

- 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.



## Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Recognize effort using "I notice..." statements like: *"I noticed that you like playing with your friend, and you asked her if she would like to play with you on the playground. 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 were the first to sit at the dinner table tonight, and you smiled a lot while we all talked. It seemed like our family dinnertime made you feel very happy."*
  - *"I remember last time we were at the park, you did not like being on the swings. This time, you went on the swings with your friend, and it looked like you were having fun."*



## 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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