

STEP BY STEP



TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

NURTURING OPTIMISM

By Ruby M. Johnston

About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

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NURTURING OPTIMISM

Children are born to be optimists. Until the age of about nine, children have a wonderful capacity for positive thinking – a kind of built in ability to suspend disbelief even in the face of many different fabricated stories, such as bunnies delivering chocolate eggs, Santa Clause bringing presents down the chimney, or a fairy bringing money for their tooth while they sleep.

As children grow older, they may begin to demonstrate behaviors to suggest they are no longer as optimistic. They may worry, think others believe the worst of them, avoid taking risks or be overly concerned about who likes them and who might not. This is the opposite of being optimistic - it could be called being pessimistic. This pessimism doesn't come naturally to children, it is learned. Just like other attitudes and behaviors, it is learned from parents, teachers, and personal experiences. Naturally, it is the inevitable that children will grow up. However, becoming a pessimists is not inevitable, especially if an adult can proactively nurture the natural optimist in every child.

The goal of this guide is to provide you, the parent, with information which will help you understand how to nurture this optimism.. By using this information, your children will be encouraged to look at and respond to their world in positive ways.

The next few pages of this guide contain the following:

- Reasons for Nurturing Optimism
- How to Recognize an Optimist
- How to Model Optimism
- 5 Optimistic Messages to Give Your Child
- Additional STEP-BY-STEP topics and titles.



WHY NURTURE OPTIMISM?

Most would argue that the world is very different today for children than it was when we were growing up. It is full of new and very complex things like AIDS, the internet, pornography, exploitation, and more. We may have had some of these dangers, but typically we never had to worry about them. Today this is not the case, yet it is still not reason enough to be pessimistic about the ultimate fate and future of our children.

Though it is important to keep our children safe, it is equally important to protect their sense of wonder, innocence and hope for the future. There have been many studies that tell us us optimists are better off than their more negative counterparts. This research supports the fundamental reason for nurturing optimism: Optimism is good for everyone. The following are a few of the benefits of optimism.

Optimists:

- get better grades at school,
- win more often in sports,
- do better in business and politics,
- are less prone to depression,
- are more successful,
- are generally healthier, and
- live longer.

This all seems to be reason enough to nurture optimism in children, don't you think?



HOW TO RECOGNIZE AN OPTIMIST

Look around you. Optimists are not just on TV, they are those everyday people who approach challenges with a “can do” attitude. They believe that each problem is temporary and can be overcome with time, patience and persistence. Optimists see problems and challenges as opportunities and therefore learn from mistakes. The proverb about the half glass of water illustrates this well. Although a half glass is actually both half empty and half full, the optimist will always choose to see it as half full. Optimism is all about perception. Optimists are quicker to see the value in what they have, rather than focusing on what they don't have.

Optimistic children will:

- look for solutions to problems,
- feel confident when they resolve conflicts,
- exhibit a sense of hope,
- help others resolve problems, and
- demonstrate a positive attitude toward adversity.

True optimism is not only about ‘mind over matter’ or ‘looking on the brighter side.’ Positive thinking is an important step, but ultimately our perceptions are fueled by belief, and belief comes from the heart. When the heart is burdened it is hard to see good in any situation. When children are able to lighten their emotional load, the result is a more positive outlook on life.



HOW TO MODEL OPTIMISM

Children mirror what they see, hear and feel from parents, extended family and teachers. They also develop a positive or negative outlook on life based on how family crises, such as divorce, sickness, death, or financial struggles, get resolved. When children begin to think negatively, their language becomes pessimistic. This can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies of bad results. Statements like, “I’ll never get this right,” or “Nobody cares about me,” are learned reactions to daily experiences. Children who believe they are able to achieve something will be more likely to succeed than those who approach the same situation with a negative attitude.

Optimism is a powerful enabler. A positive attitude not only sparks a desire to make an effort and persist when the going gets tough, but also helps children to see the good that comes out of a ‘bad’ situation. Reinforcing positive messages with our children connects optimism with competence and, ultimately, with success and happiness.

Practice using statements with your children such as this:

- “We will find an answer , this can be worked out.”
- “This is just a little problem, lets look for a good solution for all of us.”
- “You ar such a helper and I really appreciate you.”

Look for ways to show your child how you have been successful with problems. Use challenging situations to demonstrate that things are sometimes difficult, but perserverence and patience are elements of success for everyone.



ACTIVITY TIME: 5 OPTIMISTIC MESSAGES TO GIVE YOUR CHILD

Delivering these messages to our children regularly will help them stay optimistic.

1. Focus on the positive, reinforce what IS working.
2. Every obstacle is an opportunity to improve your situation. Point out improvements.
3. Everyone makes mistakes; learn how to do it differently next time.
4. Adversity is temporary; change is inevitable.
5. Attend to the moment and the future will take care of itself.



FINAL STEP

We want to build strong relationships with our children; therefore, we need to learn to communicate with them in ways that are teaching, encouraging, supporting and responding to their needs. As you have learned in this STEP-BY-STEP booklet, you have many choices in the way that you respond to your children. Practice using different positive responses, and make an effort to avoid responses that can be nonproductive and hurtful.

We encourage you to continue to build on what you learn through these experiences. We think you will open new pathways to better communication, and develop strong and encouraging relationships with your children. As you do so, you will be developing children who grow up to be optimists!

OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aide – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family
36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different
37. Understanding Attachment

38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child
39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
 - a. How to Talk to Your Child
 - b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
45. Developing Responsibility
46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
51. Dealing with Lying
52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
53. Dealing with Defiance
54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
55. Dealing with Stealing
56. Dealing with Anger
57. Dealing with Fighting
58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
61. Help with Tattling
62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
63. Help with Thumb Sucking
64. Help with Bedtime Problems
65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
66. Understanding Suicide
67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
68. Dealing with Failure
69. Demonstrating Manners
70. Helping Siblings Get Along
71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE