



Five Ways to Make Your Family Happy

What makes a happy home? Though your house's physical environment is important, your family's well-being is much less about that—and much more about the people who live in the house, what they do together, and how they treat each other. The moment you walk into a happy home, you can feel the love, care, and respect that bind the people who live there. Ultimately, the foundation for a happy home is a happy family. Here are my top five tips to help you create a happy family:

1. Be grateful. Count your blessings. They probably include being alive and healthy, having family and friends who love you, having a roof over your head, having enough food to eat and clean water to drink, and so on. It doesn't take much searching to realize that your blessings are truly endless. Once you've acknowledged them, make a conscious effort to recognize your blessings every day of your life. There's immense power in writing down what you're grateful for. Keep a gratitude journal, or download an app that helps you track your blessings ("Gratitude Journal" is a good one). Establish a daily gratitude routine that works for you, whether it's remembering your blessings before you get out of bed in the morning, or reflecting on the blessings you had each day as you lay in bed before falling asleep each night. Everything—every breath we take—is a gift. Remembering that helps us let go of any sense of entitlement, whether it's for more time, money, or a new gadget. Be grateful for each person in your family; honor their uniqueness, talents, strengths, and vulnerabilities. Appreciate and be grateful for each other, even when you disagree. Because gratitude cleanses the soul. It opens the door for love, empathy, and compassion—the key ingredients for a happy family.

2. Have fun together. We've all heard that common refrain: "A family that plays together stays together." It's cliché because it's true. Even though we all have busy lives, it's absolutely critical to a family's happiness and strength to spend fun time together. So prioritize unstructured time with your loved ones: Exercise together, go for a ride bike, head to the beach, climb a mountain. Doing these types of things together provides time to talk and connect without pressure. As children grow, new interests develop, so the activities might change, but the intent won't. Be warned that the number-one thing kids complain about in therapy is that a parent isn't available for fun.



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3. Communicate. Poor communication is a common problem of families that are having difficulties. It can lead to conflict, ineffective problem-solving, lack of intimacy, emotional distance, and behavior problems in children. So talk nice. Notice your tone. Never scream. Remember your manners (saying please, thank you, and sorry shouldn't be reserved for strangers). Pay attention to your nonverbal cues. Creating positive, supportive communication lets family members express their needs, wants, and concerns. This, of course, involves lots of talking and listening. Say what you mean in a loving, respectful manner, and if you're not clear on what someone else means, ask for clarification to avoid making unwarranted assumptions.

4. Establish trust. Trust is the cornerstone of a healthy family, so never lie or break a promise. Promises can be broken in ways both big and small, gradually or partially, so it's essential to avoid promising something you can't deliver. Doing so makes you unreliable and harder to trust. Still, if a family member breaks your trust, it's important to learn to forgive and to recognize that we all make mistakes.

5. Be flexible. In life, change is constant and inevitable. Flexible families are much stronger because they're better at adapting to unexpected or evolving situations, leading to healthier relationships and greater overall happiness. Always remember that just when you thought you had life all figured out, it can all change. So be open to newness, cut others some slack during times of upheaval, and remember that nothing (or nobody) is perfect. Leave lots of room for error as your family—as families tend to do—changes, grows, and evolve. Kids grow up, move out, get married, and have kids of their own. Circumstances change, as do beliefs and goals. Learning how to be resilient and gracefully accept change will help you and your family cope with stress and adapt to whatever life throws at you.