

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *Focusing on the Positive*

**I**F YOU WANT TO SEE what positive self-regard looks like, watch the YouTube video *Jessica's Daily Affirmations*. If you've already seen it, watch it again with your child. Jessica, at about age three, stands on the basin shouting out all the things she likes about herself and her world while proclaiming intermittently, "I can do anything good!" You have to witness her enthusiasm for her life; verbal descriptions can't do it justice. Jessica's video can be a good conversation starter. Ask your child what people and situations make her feel good. Helping children remember positives is one of the ways we program them for happiness.

Neurological research shows that our brains are actually tuned to store negative experiences more readily than happy ones. If I have a conflict with someone during the day, I am more apt to replay that scene in my mind than remember a heartfelt compliment someone gave me—unless I make a conscious effort to savor the positive. That doesn't mean suppressing negative feelings or memories. Fostering positive thoughts can actually help shape our minds to perceive and reflect on good experiences in the future. Here are some ideas:

**Concentrate on positive qualities.** When your child won't give up on something he can't have right now, say, "Wow, you have such incredible determination, I see that you will be able to do whatever you set out to do." (You can say this without giving in or referring to your child as stubborn.) Instead of chiding a child for crying easily, comment sincerely on the benefits of being able to express her emotions rather than holding them in. If we value a child's innate characteristics, which could be seen as weaknesses, he is more likely to think well of himself.

**Help your child savor situations in the moment.** My three-year-old grandson exclaimed, "That was fun!" after playing ball with his cousin. If I want the feeling of having fun to stick with him, I can take a minute or so to reflect on the good feeling. "You liked throwing the ball, running with it, and laughing." Research shows that the more happy experiences a child remembers, the more apt he will be to experience those positive states in the future.

**Balance out the picture.** If your child says that "No one played with me," sympathize and ask for specifics. During what part of the day did she feel left out? Tell her you sometimes had those feelings as a child too. Then ask about activities she enjoyed, people she wanted to play with, the highlights of her day. Bringing up those warm memories at the same time helps dilute the brain's natural tendency to hold on to the negative.

There are many books today written on the subject of programming your mind for happiness. We are lucky to live in an age when we utilize this information for ourselves and our children.

*May 8, 2013*

© 2013 The Meher Schools