

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Finding Joy in Making Others Happy

HAS YOUR CHILD HEARD THE STORY of Miles Scott, the five-year-old who played “Batkid” last November while thousands of San Franciscans and people around the world, including the president, cheered him on? Miles had undergone treatment for leukemia since he was 18 months old and had just finished his last chemotherapy treatment before Make-a-Wish Greater Bay Area and countless others jumped on board to help stage the dramatic event.

Although Miles initially seemed slightly overwhelmed by the crowds, his dimpled smile later cheered hundreds of thousands of people who made the story a social media phenomenon. However, the lesson of the day wasn’t Miles’s pleased reaction but the joy of everyone who helped or simply got to witness his wish coming true.

How wonderful if children learn at a young age that real joy comes from making others happy. The Make-a-Wish Foundation has been teaching us that since 1980, when the organization started. Arizona state troopers rallied to grant the wish of seven-year-old Chris Gre-cious, who wanted to become a highway patrolman. They fitted him out with his own hat, trooper uniform, and badge and swore him in as the first honorary state trooper in Arizona history.

The organization has also expanded our consciousness of what wishes are meaningful to people. We can see through children like Miles and Chris that people don’t always wish for things—they want experiences and connections with other people. Although we can’t all help critically ill children, we can help our children develop sensitivity to other people’s wishes and learn the delight that comes with making others happy.

Part of the fun of granting a wish is using our imagination to determine what someone else’s might be. “What would make Grandma happy on her visit?” “What games do you think your friend would like to play when he visits?” “How can we surprise your teacher with a present?” One aspect of bringing wishes into reality is thinking creatively about what we could do to make others feel satisfied, happy, and sometimes even surprised.

Surprise clean-up. “Your sister has a test. Why don’t we clean up her room before she gets home?” “Let’s straighten up Dad’s tools.” “How about pulling Grandma’s weeds while she’s out of town?”

Helping someone achieve a goal. Team members can play a part in fulfilling each other’s wishes by helping each other work toward a goal—practicing throwing basketballs, dribbling a ball, or running laps.

Capturing the moment. Technology can help us to make lots of wishes come true. “Why don’t we Skype with your Grandpa. I know he would love to see you.” “Let’s take a picture of our outing and share it with your mom since she couldn’t be here.”

Intuiting others’ wishes is also the basis of developing good manners. In the highly acclaimed film *Princess Bride*, the character Westley answers every request from his friend Buttercup by saying “As you wish.” When we think of others’ wishes, we automatically consider their happiness and respond to them with love.

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