

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *Focusing Attention on the Positive*

**A**MOTHER TOLD ME RECENTLY that when she finished working on a project that had absorbed her for months, she noticed that her four-year-old son was more relaxed. Did that mean she needed to be less busy in the future? I could identify with her concern, but I wouldn't leap to a conclusion. It seems to me that her ability to observe the increase in her child's feelings of well-being will prove to be an important landmark in their relationship.

At school, we often notice that children's faces look visibly different after parents make changes in their schedule or decide to connect with them in a new way. We also reflect on what the variables are that are making a difference for the child. Actually, there is a way to think about positive change and what aspects of a situation are allowing it to occur.

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach that can help people ask questions that maximize the positive potential in their lives. Traditional ways of bringing about change start with looking for a problem, analyzing what's causing it, then trying to find a solution. Originally created to help businesses transform their ways of thinking, Appreciative Inquiry starts with questions that focus attention on the positive.

A parent might start by asking, "When does my child feel the most relaxed and happy?" This process might even involve taking notes. Over time, several variables might emerge as important, allowing for surprising insights that wouldn't have been apparent without taking the time to reflect. Close connections are all about noticing other people's responses, and when we take the time to observe and wonder, I believe that's a success in itself.

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