

Joy: Finding a way to be happy even when things don't go your way

PARENTING WITH JOY:

This month, you have lots of time on your hands, right?! Probably not. The truth about joy is that sometimes we really have to be intentional to remember how to be joyful, especially when things are moving so quickly around us.

Truth #1: Kids are much better at joy than we are.

They are joyful about cookies and YouTube and playing games in the basement. They are joyful when they spill things, make a mess, and defy your rules (unfortunately). In middle and high school, joy looks different than it does with toddlers and preschoolers, but it still exists. Have you ever been shown a TikTok video that cracks your kid up, but you don't seem to find anything funny about it?

Truth #2: Kids experience joy differently.

Sometimes we might struggle to find joy in our family because we don't experience joy in the same way our kids do. So if we are trying to balance doing things the kids want to do, we also have to find time for the things we find joyful. This is among the most challenging things for parents. Many parents feel this urge to simply give and do everything for their kids, but knowing that we feel differently will help us avoid conflicts. For example, if you plan a day that brings you joy, it might look like this:

*A visit to an art museum
A quiet, hot meal at a sit-down restaurant
Serene music on headphones and a hot bath*

But your kids would rather:

Eat fast food

Watch a movie with friends

Truth #3: Showing joy is a SKILL you can practice.

Most people believe joy is just an emotion. Indeed, joy is a feeling that we experience internally. But the act of being joyful is really what we want to show our kids.

Think about being joyful in three ways - with, about, around.

Experience joy **WITH** your child.

Experience joy **ABOUT** your child.

Experience joy **AROUND** your child.

Truth #4: Joy is vulnerable.

This might be a tough one to sit with. In fact, sometimes the hardest question for parents to answer is the one I mentioned above - what brings joy?

You see, joy is vulnerable because it shares our deeper desires with the world. It shows the people around us HOW happy we are. It gives a piece of our internal story when we show joy about things happening to us. Being joyful goes against our nature to be humble and to be a proper "adult".

As you think this month about joy, consider not only your kids' joy, but also yours.

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT JOY:

For parent reflection:

- Spend some time considering: what brings you joy?
- How do people know when you are feeling joy? How do your children know when you are feeling joy?
- How do you try to bring joy to others?

For discussion with your child:

In the car conversations:

- When was the last time you really experienced joy? Where do you think that joy came from?
- What do you generally do when things don't go your way?

In the morning conversations:

- What are you looking forward to today?
- What will you do if things don't go your way?
- How can you find joy even if things turn out differently?

Over dinner conversations:

- What was a time when things didn't go your way?
- How do you handle feeling left out?
- How can you still find joy when you are disappointed?

In the evening conversations:

- When did you have moments of joy today
- What can you be grateful for today?

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For parents to read:

<https://www.mhanational.org/create-joy-and-satisfaction>

For families to watch together:

Inside Out (2015)