



## Happy children

These five 'S's' form the building blocks to raising happy children.

### Safe

From the baby's first cry of 'here I am' when they enter this world, we as parents are responsible for providing a safe environment for them. They will get to know their parents by touch, cuddles, being wrapped up snugly and the recognition of their voices. As the baby goes through the phases of baby, toddler, child and teenager they will always need a base of parental safety. No home is devoid of pressure or the stresses and strains of life, but parents still have the responsibility of providing a place of stability for their family.



### Space

We all need space. It's often the cry of a frazzled parent who brings this much needed commodity to the family's attention. However, space is a requirement from babyhood to adulthood. The contented sound of a baby cooing in their cot or pram is an early sign of a baby enjoying their own company and space. This early sign of contentment in babyhood needs to grow in the formative years of childhood. Children need to learn the value of having their own company for a little while in each day. This 'quiet time' or 'down time' gives a child the opportunity to create constructive ways of drawing aside from the hustle and bustle of family and school life. It will stand them in good stead in the future when they leave home to pursue their own careers and start their own families. Every child needs their own opportunity to find their way with this. Think about what you look forward to in order to refresh yourself. Be patient with yourself and your child as you steer them to learn how to achieve the most from these times.

### Structure

Think of a scale, 0 – 100, with 0 being thoroughly disorganised and 100 being super organised. Where do you find yourself? Are you aware of how either of these extremes affect you and those around you, whether in the home or at work? Be brave – take stock! Investigate thoroughly and assess – is there room for improvement?

Yes, we do need structure but too much can be as damaging as too little. Routine with flexibility and sensitivity works wonders. Home and relationships work better when everyone learns to consider that life goes on, come what may, with understanding and give and take.

Every child needs to learn the value of routine so they can be responsible for themselves, from learning to brush their own teeth and hair to learning how to cook, manage their money and apply themselves to educational and fitness opportunities.

### Socially adept

The ability to make conversation has its beginnings in babyhood. Have you had the opportunity to watch someone conversing with a baby? Instinctively their demeanour will soften and their voice will become gentle. It would appear that a baby, as it fixes its gaze on the speaker, understands every word. A mother's voice, together with her touch, will sooth a fretful baby and within six weeks a wonderful smile will be the response to undivided attention. Observe someone leading a child upstairs



by hand - the exercise is much more fun with the repetition of counting the steps. Interestingly, the child never tires of this conversation and expects it every time the stairs are climbed. The point-and-say games of 'where are your eyes...and nose... and ears...and mouth?', as well as recognising the characters in picture books are all part of vocabulary learning.

It doesn't matter where you live, every expedition, whether it be walking, a ride in a car, or bus or train, gives an opportunity to name the features and goings-on in the world around us.

There is a progression which can take place under parents' noses which limits communication. Children's programmes on TV soon lead to TV addicts, enjoying stories read to them can lead to a bookworm and, to update these, we now have mobile phones, ipads, computers and gaming. Are we aware of the content of these devices and their influence on these young minds?

This will not be an easy task by any means, but it will be worthwhile. It's worth the fuss, arguments and scenes to find a positive constructive outcome where a child knows the set boundaries are for their own good.

It is quite disturbing to see a family or even a group of older people go out for a meal where conversation is absent. Where has communication gone when two or more people are together and one, if not all present, are absorbed in reading a newspaper, magazine or mobile phone? It would take a very brave person to pass the comment. 'I thought we were going out together!'

It gives value, especially to an adult, as they strike up a conversation with a child to have the child turn around and say, 'How are you today?'. This doesn't generally come naturally to a child; it has been acquired as the child has been taught how to take an interest in someone else.

The child needs the basics of the ongoing conversation which start in babyhood and carry on throughout their formative years. It is very sad to see an adult who is socially inept. It might not be their own fault.

### **Self-assurance**

It is so important, together with the other four S's of 'safety', 'space', 'structure' and 'socially adept' to also make children aware of their own limitations, for example educationally, in sport and the arts. An awareness of social status as well as of different cultures is equally important. We can often show children the qualities of tolerance, acceptance, apologising and forgiveness, kindness and helpfulness by our example. It is sad when children exhibit a lack of any of these or display anger, frustration, rebellion and an attitude of general 'put-down'. It would be good if it couldn't be traced back to poor parenting.

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