

# What's Wrong With Just Wanting Our Kids To Be Happy?

by Kathy Slattengren

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"I really do just want my kids to be happy! What can possibly be wrong with that?" The potential problem is that it appears there is a connection between parents focusing on making their kids happy with those children actually being increasingly unhappy.



## What does the research show?

Although it seems that children who have their basic needs met plus enjoy many extras would certainly be happy, this appears to not be the case.

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [surveyed over 14,000 students in grades 9-12 in 2007](#). They reported "During the 12 months before the survey, 28.5% of students nationwide had felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities."

## How do parents play a role?

Loving parents can unintentionally raise self-centered, unhappy children. How does this happen? One way it happens is when parents continually give their children the message that the children's needs, desires and happiness are superior over anyone else's. These children grow up learning to focus on themselves, not others.

I've heard many sad stories of parents who bent over backwards to give their children everything they could possibly want only to have their children grow into self-centered adults. These adult children often take their parents for granted and rarely pay attention to their parents needs. Instead they focus on their own needs.

One mom sadly explained how her 30-year-old son had flown home for Christmas. Mom had planned a big gathering and was busy with preparations. Her son left in an angry huff before the Christmas dinner complaining that his mom wasn't spending enough time with him!

She reflected that she had always done so many things for him so that he would be happy. She didn't think of asking for his help with dinner and clearly he didn't think of it either. They both ended up being very unhappy that day.

## What should we wish for our kids instead of happiness?

The answer to this question is discussed in Dr. Aaron Cooper and Eric Keitel's book titled [I Just Want My Kids to Be Happy! Why You Shouldn't Say It, Why You Shouldn't Think It, What You Should Embrace Instead](#). They analyze some of the negative effects of putting our kids' happiness first and present healthier alternatives.

Based on their review of decades of research on happiness, they suggest there are eight key ingredients to authentic happiness:

- Good mental and physical health
- A life of meaning
- Closeness to others
- Acts of loving kindness

- A sense of gratitude
- A sense of spirituality
- An optimistic outlook
- Gratifying pursuits

They examine how parents can help their children develop in each of these areas. Ultimately building these skills will help our children achieve a lifetime of real happiness.

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