

# Improving Family Harmony By Increasing Positive Interactions

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How are you feeling about each of your children? There are times when you probably find it easy to love your kids and appreciate their wonderful qualities. Undoubtedly there are other times when you may struggle to find positive things to say to them.

One mom lamented that it was hard to think of anything positive to say to her 13-year-old daughter. She felt her daughter was not working up to her potential. She found herself nagging and correcting her daughter which had led to her daughter not wanting to be around her mom.

Intimate parent-child relationships are filled with ups and downs. When your children are behaving well, it's easy to be with them and show them love. However the real challenge comes in maintaining a positive relationship when they are not behaving the way you would like.

## Building Loving Relationships

Do you find yourself feeling angry or frustrated by your kids more often than you'd like? How do you create the warm loving relationship you desire?

One key ingredient is making sure you have more positive than negative interactions with them. Dr. John Gottman has researched couples to learn what makes relationships last. [Gottman found that](#) "The magic ratio is 5:1. In other words, as long as there are five times as many positive interactions between partners as there are negative, the relationship is likely to be stable."



Although Gottman's research is with couples, this ratio also seems to apply to friendships, work relationships and parent-child relationships. It doesn't mean there are no negative interactions but the positive ones need to be far greater than the negative ones.

If you're like most parents you probably find that [critical comments flow freely!](#) The trick is increasing your positive comments on your children's good behavior.

## Increasing Your Positive Interactions

How can you increase your positive interactions? One way to start is to begin each day by smiling at your child and saying "Good morning!" You can count that as two positive interactions – one for the smile and one for the greeting!

Collect a couple more points by giving your child a hug or a shoulder rub. You might also want to throw in an "I love you!"

If you are struggling to find something positive to say, you can always describe what your child is doing. For example, you might say

- "You came into the kitchen and sat down at the table."
- "You are building a castle with your blocks."
- "You choose to wear your blue sweater today."

Just noticing what your child is doing sends a message that you care. You are paying attention to them.

Your children's misbehavior naturally catches your attention. It takes more effort to notice when your children are behaving well. When they are doing what they are supposed to be doing, you may think there is no need to say anything – yet commenting on what you like increases the likelihood they will do more of it. Don't miss out on this great opportunity to get more positive points!

Here are some ways you might comment on appropriate behavior:

- "You washed your hands without any reminder!"
- "You came right away when I told you it was time for dinner. I appreciate that."
- "You are being careful in coloring on the paper and not getting any on the table."
- "Thank you for putting your dishes in the dishwasher."

Making these types of comments may feel awkward at first. Just remember your goal is to increase your positive interactions. Your kids crave your attention and you're working to give them more positive than negative attention.

Another idea is to ask questions that show curiosity. Asking questions encourages your children to think about their decisions. For example,

- "What is your plan for getting your chores done today?"
- "You have a lot of homework. What's your plan for getting it done?"
- "Your little brother is crying after you took that toy away. What are you going to do?"

Whenever possible, instead of telling your children what to do ask a question that lets them figure it out for themselves. This sends the message that you have confidence in them.

Spending time with your child in an activity also counts towards positive interactions. You might play a game, read a book or cook something together. Try spending a little time each day with your children doing whatever they want to do.

### **Sharing What You Love About Your Child**

All of these ideas are helping you focus on what your children are doing well. You can take it a step further by writing down one thing you appreciate about your child each day. Do this every day for a week then sit down with your child and share what you've written.

What was your child's reaction to what you shared? Did you notice anything different about yourself when you were looking for what you would write down each day?

Simply knowing that you are going to write down one thing you like about your child each day will help you notice the good in your child. Building positive, loving relationships with your children is a lifelong gift!

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