Resign from MAKING a Happy Child

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While happiness is a desirable emotional state, compassion and empathy are developed through feeling sorrow and pain. Many parents today seem afraid to have their children feel and express any feeling but happy. We are not talking about concern for a child that is showing signs of depression; rather, parental anxiety about a child experiencing the normal ups and downs of childhood.

Complicating this fear is the phenomenon of some parents inviting their children to like them and treat them as if they were bosom friends. There are parents (we're talking about the neighbours, right?) who are afraid to say "no" to their children and even bribe compliance or a smile with treats. Children need to know who heads the family, who cares enough to protect and set limits, and has a sense of firm leadership. Please note there are some parents who would benefit from minimizing their "no's" and replacing a few of them with "Yes." The Grandmother Rule or "After" Rule sounds like this, "Yes, ***after*** your homework is done you may play."

Instead of having children who always feel happy, don't we want children who will release a tear at their grandparent's funeral, who will feel angry with bullying behaviour and afraid for the toddler who waddles into traffic? Let's agree that all feelings are valid and we want to aim for children who will become healthy and contributing citizens who choose kind and responsible behaviours.

If we start with that premise, we will see the role of parent embracing functions of a teacher, guider, counselor, encourager and nurturer rather than a fairy or magic genie that can create happy miracles and lives on another planet. Clearly established rules, guidelines and family values are modeled and led by parents who want children living with balanced emotions.

Ron Moorish in ***Secrets of Discipline*** (www.realdiscipline.com) encourages parents to become the authority figures of their family. He describes how the parenting practice of giving choices for all manner of daily behaviour has backfired. He proposes that parents balance their managing choices (with consequences) with training for compliance and teaching life skills. As children mature there are personal aspects that we want them to be thoughtfully choosing. Yet, as Moorish points out, we want all citizens compliant to the rules of society, including driving on our roads. Just as you and I stop habitually at the red stop signs, children can be taught to respond consistently to routines and household rules--assuming they are age appropriate and fair. Establishing rules, directing, teaching, correcting and insisting are all qualities of the in-charge parent. The following are some tips from Moorish:

- Work from more structure to less structure, not the other way around.
- Rules worth having are worth enforcing.
- Whenever possible, discipline should end with the correct behavior, not with a punishment
- Limit children to the choices which are theirs to make.

- If adults won't say "no" to children, children won't say "no" to themselves.

Deciding that all feelings are acceptable and that you are primarily responsible for providing loving care, guidance and structure will free you to say "no" and "yes" when needed and appropriate.

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