



## Finding Joy in Your Children

Ever get caught up in challenges or conflict raising your kids? Not uncommon.

The sad truth is though, that when mired in conflict we can lose sight of happier, better times and lose not only our own spirit but also the spirit of the relationship. When mired in conflict we can lose sight of our mutual love and escalate bad feelings, not to mention bad behaviour. We can turn our children, and they us, into villains.

When mired in conflict or parenting challenges, some parents reasonably turn to counselling. They look for strategies to manage their children's behaviour. They seek better forms of behavioural control or discipline. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as children do need to learn limits and internalize rules. However, a focus just on behaviour and discipline can give rise to ongoing bad feelings between parents and children. Resentment can continue to build on both sides. Focussing only on behaviour leaves out a vital ingredient for parents and children to both feel great about themselves and the relationship. It may sound corny, but that ingredient is *joy*.

Finding and expressing joy in children tells them they are of value. As children feel and experience their parents finding joy in them, spirits lighten and bad feelings can fade. Rather than being mired in challenges and conflict, attention is directed to good times, good feelings and cooperation. Parents and children experience a different kind of emotional energy; one through which they can return to talking and discussion as a means of mediating behaviour rather than relying upon control and enforcement.

Reflecting on *joy*, one parent writes:

- It somehow brought their preciousness back to life for me and I realized that there are definitely times that it's difficult to appreciate or feel loving towards our children until we revisit the times it was so easy to love them.

The challenge in using joy as a means to rekindling parent-child relationships and better feelings is that some parents may have forgotten how or where to find joy. A survey of parents involved in early childhood education, social work and family therapy provides the following suggestions for finding joy in children:

- Catch them doing something right.
- Watch your children when they are asleep.
- Remind your children of the pleasure and pride you take in them.

Reflecting on the outcome of using joy on her now adult children another parent writes:

- Having 3 very headstrong boys, when they were teens, I used to go into their bedrooms after they were asleep and just look at them and remember when they were babes curled up in their cribs. I also thought of times when they gave me laughter and tears of pride. I knew down deep that they would grow into responsible adults who not only would be my sons, but my friends. That got me through some rough times – did not resolve conflict, but did give me a better perspective and some patience the next day.

Mired in challenges or conflict with your children? Then think about finding joy in them. For more examples of how other parents find joy in their children, go to [www.yoursocialworker.com](http://www.yoursocialworker.com) and find the link, [Joy – Survey and Results](#).

Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW  
(905) 628-4847  
[gary@yoursocialworker.com](mailto:gary@yoursocialworker.com)  
[www.yoursocialworker.com](http://www.yoursocialworker.com)

Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report.

Search Gary's name on GOOGLE.COM to view his many articles or visit his website. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. His services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.