

## Raising Happy Children

Dr Timothy Sharp (aka [Dr Happy](#)) is one of Australia's leaders in the field of positive psychology and happiness. He is also the Chief Happiness Officer of [The Happiness Institute](#).



He shares his tips for raising children that thrive and flourish:

1. Spend time with your children. A simple thing. We all lead busy lives but the most valuable and important gift that we can ever give our children is our time and undivided attention.
2. If there are things that matter to you, or things that you think matter to your children, talk about them. Out loud. Too often we avoid difficult conversations because we are not sure about how to phrase it correctly or if we were to plant a seed in our children's mind about something they haven't thought about before. It doesn't matter. Conversations, as a general rule, are going to be helpful.
3. Teach your children how to work through things. They won't know how to do it all straight away. We need to work through it with them – as a guide on the side – not necessarily doing everything for them – but helping them learn how to work through it on their own. This is what resilience is. And again, if I threw everything else away as a parent, or if I think about all the things that I have learnt over the years, one of the most important things that I would hopefully teach my kids is resilience. Because as much as I would love to protect them from everything, I know I can't. I won't be able to protect them but what I hope is that they will have the skills, the strength, the inner fortitude to bounce back, to deal with whatever they are going to have to face, big or small.
4. Try to make helpfulness and kindness and compassion and gratitude part of daily living. This is something that I am quite passionate about and again, I know from the research how important this is. It should be woven into the fabric of our everyday, of every week. It can start in the home and it should extend to their broader community of friends and schools. Giving, gratitude and compassion, these are big constructs in positive psychology, they go back way before positive psychology obviously – they are part of every major religion in some form or another – but they are vitally important and there is no age too young to start teaching these sorts of things. And I think it's important to help our children see the bigger picture. Many of our children, by definition, because we live in Australia, have a pretty good quality of life. I think it's important we can teach our kids how lucky they are and teach them that there are many other children and people in the world who don't have what they have so encourage them to be grateful for what they have.

5. And finally, it all comes down to love. One of the greatest longitudinal studies in health is the Harvard Men's Study. For more than 70 years researchers have been looking at "what goes towards living a long and good life". One of the study's directors, George Vaillant, who led the research gatherers for more than 30 years, was once asked to sum up what they have they learned about living a long and good life. He said he could sum it up in one word: "love". Everything that they have learned about longevity comes down to love.

So if we want our kids to thrive and flourish, the best thing we can do as parents, is continue to love our children, no matter what.