

The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness

What do kids need to grow up to be happy, fulfilled, responsible adults? How can teachers and parents make sure children get what they need? Based upon the latest research, Dr. Hallowell has developed a simple, five-step process that adults can easily use to make sure children have the right kind of childhood, the kind of childhood that will lead to happiness later on, as well as moral behavior, an attitude of cooperation, and a zest for life, no matter what kind of learner they are: **Connect, Play, Practice, Mastery and Recognition**. Dr. Hallowell explains the 5 steps below:

CONNECT - Connectedness is the first—and most important—step in the five step outlined. Feeling rooted gives children a foundation of security. Children need unconditional love from one or both parents and benefit when they have close ties to their extended family, feel part of their school, and help care for pets.

A Connected Childhood

**Unconditional Love from Someone,
 Family Togetherness**

The Individual's Own Self

Friends, Community

**God, and/or the World
 Of the Spirit**

Chores, Work, Responsibility

To Contribute

**Institutions & Organizations
 (School)**

**Activities, Sports
 Ideas & Information (School)**

Pets

The Past

Nature

The World of Beauty

PLAY - If you are a parent or a teacher or a coach, please don't take play for granted. Don't think that your child will automatically learn how to play, just because he is a child. Many children these days are not learning how to play. And knowing how to play is one of the essential keys to happiness in life. Make sure your child's / student's free time isn't too programmed and regimented. Open-ended play, in which children can invent scenarios and solve problems by themselves, helps them discover their talents and use their own resources. Never underestimate how important play is, especially the kind of play the child makes up on his own or with a friend or group of friends. It is the most important "work" your child does.

PRACTICE - You can feel enthusiastic about encouraging practice and discipline if you understand and believe one basic fact: practice and discipline build the bridge between play and mastery. Children may not understand this intellectually, but they experience it all the time. So do adults. When kids find out what they're good at, they'll want to do it again and again. Sometimes you may have to do some gentle nudging to ensure that your child /student sticks to an activity and experiences a sense of accomplishment. But the best approach is to simply set the process up, over and over, than to lecture. Let your child connect with others and play, let him find something he likes and practice it, and let him then taste mastery and receive recognition. As the process repeats, the roots of practice and discipline start to grow. The child need never even be subjected to the word discipline, let alone be subjected to any lectures on the topic of practice.

MASTERY: The Great Motivator - From practice comes mastery. The feeling of mastery and the wish to experience it again, transforms a child, or an adult, from a reluctant, fearful learner into a self-motivated player. One of the great goals of parents, teachers, and coaches should be to find areas in which a child might experience mastery, and then make it possible for the child to feel this potent sensation. When children achieve a skill -- whether it's learning to tie their shoes, play the piano, draw a flower, complete a math problem, or build a birdhouse -- they're further motivated to tackle new challenges. And that leads to a can-do attitude.

RECOGNITION - Although mastery is own reward, another crucial element reinforces mastery while also leading on to a wider feeling of connectedness. That element is Recognition, the feeling of being valued by others, especially others whose opinions the person respects. Approval and support from one's parents, teachers, and peers for a job well done reconnect children to the wider world. When kids think what they do affects their family, classmates, and team, they're more likely to exhibit moral behavior and, ultimately, to feel good about themselves.

Fortunately, one step leads naturally to the next.

* Adapted from The Childhood Roots of Adult Happiness: Five Steps to Help Kids Create and Sustain Lifelong Joy
Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. (Ballantine, 2002)