

# Harvesting HAPPINESS in Motherhood

By Lisa Cypers Kamen

I am the mother of two beautiful children. I have been through those infant years of midnight feedings and endless diaper changes, soothing tears and singing lullabies. There were times when I looked in the mirror after a long, sleep-deprived night, and thought, “Who is that, and when will I come back?” As my children have grown into their teen years in what seems like the blink of an eye, I have looked back with fondness on those moments of creating my young and growing family. I have spent many moments reflecting upon the choices I made as a young mother and the choices I might have made differently, had I known then what I know now. During the experience of parenting, I have made the poignant realization that through all the different stages of motherhood, every “mirror moment” when we wonder where our fresh-faced, more energetic and youthful selves have gone can be met with a peaceful pause of introspection regarding our choices in parenthood. It can supply a lifetime of joy, if we can learn to be happy with the decisions we have made.

Throughout my discussions, professional research and personal experiences, I have formulated some tips to finding and maintaining happiness in the choices we make while striving to create and maintain a happy and balanced family.



## Choose happiness.

Happy people are happy because they choose to be. There is not just one answer to developing joy in life. Just as all roads lead to Rome, happiness can come through all the choices we make, whether in the moment or after the moment has passed.

To better learn to take joy in your choices, develop the art of self-reflection. Taking stock of your life in quiet moments can offer a better understanding of how you personally make decisions, what situations make you angry or feel at peace, how you could have handled situations differently, and how your choices impact your life. We can't control the next diaper change, the emotional roller coaster of a tween or teen, or the natural progression of children becoming adults, any more than we can control when it will rain—but we can choose how we react to these situations. For new moms, those decisions might be whether to breast or bottle feed a baby until they are a year or older, whether to use cloth or disposable diapers, whether to feed the child homemade or store-bought baby food, and whether the baby sleeps in a crib or co-sleeps in your bed. Mothers of older children might be choosing how many sports their child plays, or if they play sports at all; whether they are allowed a cell phone at age 10 or 16; and whether they have an early or late curfew, among many other decisions.

Regardless of the age of your children, you have the responsibility not only to choose how to raise them, but also to help prepare them to make their own choices. If you are continuously apologetic to people who make different choices than you do, or who are negative about your parenting style in front of your children, you take away a valuable tool for your personal development in becoming a better parent through positive self-reflection. At the end of the day, as long as your child is loved, you have made a choice that makes you both happy. Whether or not someone else agrees with your choice has no bearing on you being secure in your decisions.

Feeling confident as a parent takes continuous, conscious effort. Pausing daily to take stock of even the smallest positive affirmation can change how you approach the demanding life of caretaking. As a result of your effort to be more positive and secure in your choices, you can find more control of your emotions, become better prepared to handle whatever the day brings, and feel happy about the job you are doing for your children. There is proven truth in the adage: When Mom is happy, the family is happy.

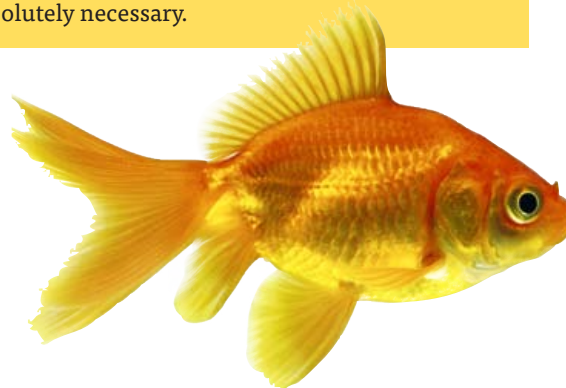


## Be your own best friend.

Make time to treat yourself like you would a best friend. The caring, attention and concern that you would give your best friend, give to yourself. Take time to listen to your inner voice like you would to your closest friend, and take the time in your busy life to physically meet your friends. Regardless of the stage of motherhood you are in, friends let you air your thoughts and feelings, provide comic relief, and can be a positive reinforcement of the choices you've made as a mother. Taking time for your friendships can also help create better friendships with your children, as you set an example for them of self-worth and healthy, supportive relationships.

## Breathe.

Breathing deeply in any moment of stress or uncertainty will give you time to pause, regroup and better see the situation at hand. Moments of quiet reflection are valuable for taking stock of a situation, adjusting an attitude if needed and enabling a positive outlook regarding the choices you make throughout your day. Breathing deeply for a few seconds not only physically reduces stress, but does wonders for mental health. I have come to know these moments as the ultimate spa for the motherhood mind: relaxing, rejuvenating and absolutely necessary.








## Eat and play healthy.

Put healthy food on your plate at regular times for you and your family. Take time to take care of your health by practicing moderation in your food intake and by developing an exercise routine. Not only are good nutrition and regular exercise proven to help your overall physical health, they are also leading factors in how you feel emotionally. Ask yourself, "Do I have what I need in my life to be healthy? Do I feel good about myself?" I cannot stress enough the important role food, diet and consistent exercise play in self-esteem. No matter the stage of motherhood, we only get one body to experience it in. Eating and playing healthy with your children can aid in creating close, active, happy families.



## Serve with a smile.

Mother Teresa, that pinnacle of selfless love, said with regard to service, "Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you." One of the greatest gifts of happiness we can give ourselves and to our children is the act of service. As women, we generally desire to help, to nurture, to aid those around us in need. We want to put a Band-Aid on someone's pain. But often, those who need us most are our children. Whether you are a new mother or a seasoned veteran, service is ongoing and can bring the most satisfying joy to our life. Service comes in every step of mothering. By showing our children how to give as a mother, we teach them how to give to others in the family, and they will be better prepared to offer service outside the family when they are able. Service to others is a choice everyone in the family can feel good about.

In the words of the poet Robert Browning, "Motherhood: All love begins and ends there." Whatever choices you make as a mother, regardless of age or stage, love yourself and your children with all your heart can give for what the day requires. Leave some room to be your own best friend, and choose to be happy in your decisions. If you can do this, you will improve not only your experience in motherhood, but also the lives of your family. They will feel the gift you give to them for generations to come. 

## Make happiness happen.

Recognize the events, things, thoughts and activities that really move you. How often have we seen a beautiful sunset that caused us to slow the car down, or stop walking to watch the sky transform into dusk? How often have we purposefully shared that moment with our children? With so many distractions in the world of mothering, it is easy to quietly observe the moment while chaos happens around us, but verbally sharing the moments that move us with our children builds trust. By showing vulnerability, we inspire more love. Taking the time to create happy experiences with our children directly creates happiness for ourselves.



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*Kamen's e-book Got Happiness Now?*

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*Her new release, Are We Happy Yet? Eight*

*Keys to Unlocking a Joyful Life, is available*

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