

*Tried and tested techniques
for increasing your child's happiness – from toddler to teen*

Raising Happy Children FOR **DUMMIES®**

Sue Atkins

*Parenting coach and NLP Master
Practitioner and Trainer*



A Reference for the Rest of Us!®



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About the Author

Sue Atkins is a working mother of two children and was a former teacher and Deputy Head. She studied for her B.Ed (Hons) teaching degree at St. Mary's College, London, and has a diploma in life coaching from the Coaching Academy. She is also a neuro-linguistic programming Master Practitioner and trainer.

She set up Positive Parents – Confident Kids Coaching Ltd in order to develop her passion for helping parents to build self-esteem in themselves and their children.

Sue has written and published a number of books on self-esteem, parenting toddlers, and bringing up teenagers (*Music for the Soul: The Gift of Self Esteem, Are We There Yet? The Magic of Looking Under Stones and Finding Fairies!, If Men Are from Mars and Women are from Venus, Then What Planet's My Teenager On?*).

She has also written a number of journals for parents and teenagers: *The Positive Parent Journal*, *Keeping All the Balls in the Air Journal* for working parents, and *The Confident Kids Toolkit*.

Sue is passionate about making life with children easier and more rewarding, and is enthusiastic about helping parents to bring up happy, confident, well-balanced adults; today's children – tomorrow's future.

By introducing parents to new ways of thinking about themselves and their family relationships through one to

one coaching, seminars, and books, Sue helps parents and their children to move forward and create positive change. In addition to running one to one parent coaching sessions, she is a regular speaker at events and workshops throughout the UK.

Sue enjoys salsa dancing (particularly round the kitchen table), singing loudly in the car, and lives on a farm in Surrey with her family, three dogs, two cats, and a hamster called Strawberry.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Will and Molly, my two wonderful children, and was inspired by my Dad and Mum who both passed away recently. My parents gave me the gift of self-esteem and the magic of realising that life is what you make it.

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Introduction

Bringing up children is a challenging, frustrating, and exhausting job because kids don't come with a handbook. But if they did, I hope *Raising Happy Children For Dummies* would be the one that at least helps you feel more confident about your parenting and gives you information to support and encourage you, and make you laugh along the way.

Parenting is the most important job that you'll ever do but is also the one few ever get any preparation for. Ironically, most people invest in everything *except* learning the skills needed for raising happy, confident, and well- balanced children.

The speed, pressure, and stress of modern living means you never seem to have enough time. These are different times – certainly different from your own childhood memories and experiences. Today's culture is about having it all and having it *now*. Children face the dangers of Internet chat rooms, exposure to recreational drugs, binge drinking, and casual sex. They spend vast amounts of time in front of screens – PlayStation, MSN, and the computer. And despite an abundance of other things they could do, they always appear bored.

My aims for you as you read this book are to:

- ✓ Develop a really wonderful and fulfilling relationship with your child that lasts a lifetime.
- ✓ Discover new ways to enjoy parenting your child.
- ✓ Find ways to communicate easily and effectively with your child, no matter what her age.
- ✓ Bring out the best in your child – and also discover the best in you.
- ✓ Explore new skills and choices in your parenting approach and style.
- ✓ Grow, change, and laugh together with your child and partner as you all go through this journey of family life.
- ✓ Realise that respecting each other as individuals is the magic that glues you all together.

About This Book

This book was written from the passion I feel for children deserving to grow up with true self-esteem so they can become happy, confident, well-balanced adults. Children are tomorrow's future, one that creates a ripple in a pond of good parents. Happy children can become adults able to become whatever they want in life – unique and special in their own way.

You may be reading this book because you're thinking of starting a family, you're interested in picking up some new ideas, or you're going through a time of change and transition. Whatever your reasons, I believe you want to

do a great job. You may have done a great job up to now, but perhaps you want to re-energise your family relationships or to feel more in control of your family life. Whatever your situation, if you care about developing effective parenting skills, this book is for you.

Many, many theories, experts, and books exist out there giving wonderful advice for raising children, but I think they overlook one crucial thing – every family is different, unique, and special. My perspective as a parent coach is to support you in discovering that all the answers lie within you.

I believe that you are the real expert for your own family, but at times I offer you advice based on parenting skills regarded as good practice. I also offer you my own experience as a deputy head and class teacher for 22 years and a mum of two children, aged 11 and 13. I am still a work in progress (as my daughter occasionally likes to point out to me).

My philosophy is simple: Your child deserves the best. She deserves you to be the best parent you can be. I hope through reading this book you develop more choices and can make new and different decisions based always on your best intentions for your child.

My approach is *coaching-based*, so I often ask questions to help you find your own answers to your family's needs and personal style. Parent coaching is a non-judgemental, confidential, and non-critical way to explore your parenting. My intention is to help you bring

your answers to the surface and to help you gain clarity, direction, and confidence in your parenting.

I have tried to keep this book simple and easy to read, so it feels like I'm a friend talking common sense not jargon (but you are actually discovering something valuable and useful along the way). I believe all parents do their best, but sometimes you just can't see the wood for the trees – because it is *your* life! This book is an attempt to help you take a step back, see the wood, and maybe even smell the flowers!

Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, I set up a few conventions:

- ✓ *Italics* are used for emphasis and to highlight new words, or define terms.
- ✓ **Bold** text indicates the key concept in a list.
- ✓ Monofont is used for Web and e-mail addresses.

I use alternate male and female pronouns in the chapters to be fair to both genders.

How This Book Is Organised

This book has 19 chapters and 6 main parts.

Inside each chapter you find sub-sections that apply to that topic to make this book easier to pick up, find, and read topics that are relevant to you. Feel free to just dip in and out as needed.

Part I: Understanding Your Children and Yourself

This part is the solid foundation of all parenting. It contains the bigger picture – or the destination – of your parenting and helps you focus on what's really important to you. You discover how to make changes and gain courage to try out new ideas and fresh approaches. It also looks at the influences on your parenting and your parenting styles.

The part also looks at understanding your challenges and successes as a parent and helps you understand yourself better. You can identify the things you're good at and love about being a parent, while also pinpointing what you find difficult and a challenge.

You also gain an insight into actually understanding your kids – the differences between girls and boys, what children want from you as a parent, and what they really need from you, too.

Part II: Improving Your Basic Parenting Skills

This part seeks to improve the fundamentals of parenting by helping you better manage your family's day-to-day routines. It looks at how to build the 'we' mentality of your family, which builds up the solid foundations of security and stability for your children.

Effective and successful communication skills, including listening more attentively, praising specifically, and gaining co-operation from your child easily, are all essential skills for parenting that I cover in detail in this section.

I also cover ways to remain flexible in your parenting, adapting to and recognising the changes occurring in your child as she develops independence. I discuss how to accept the changes as both you and your child grow and develop together.

The part also looks at the world of parenting from an adult point of view and helps you find balance in your parenting. I offer ideas for examining and revitalising your adult relationships, analysing your free time, and making sure you look after your own needs.

Part III: Discipline

Different styles and approaches to discipline exist. The chapters in this part look at your type of discipline, the way you react to your children, and what is acceptable or not acceptable behaviour for you as a parent. It explores boundary setting, loving discipline, and how to create rules to fit your family that you all understand and can keep to.

The part looks at different strategies for parenting different age children – from toddler to teenager. You also find out how to focus on positive ways to handle conflict and to gain co-operation from any age of child.

Part IV: Helping Your Child Cope with Common Problems

This part explores problems that children often have to contend with, such as the school-related issues of friendship, bullying, and exam pressure. Other issues I address include handling disappointment, bedwetting, bad dreams, and the changes occurring around puberty. It also explores bigger issues such as divorce, sibling rivalry, and bereavement.

Part V: Being Different

Having a unique or special needs child affects the whole family. This part looks at the process of diagnosis and support, as well as common features of ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, Asperger's syndrome, and gifted children. I also discuss the joys and challenges involved in having twins, triplets, and other multiple births.