

Raising Happy Children

FOR
DUMMIES®

by Sue Atkins



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

***Raising Happy
Children***

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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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I'd like to thank my long-suffering husband Kevin for cooking, cleaning, and ironing while I became absorbed in writing this book. Also for his ability to sniff out lost commas and for his total support while I went on amazing NLP courses, and talked incessantly late into the night about making a difference in the world.

Special thanks to Dominic Demolder for all his technical support and formatting – I really must get the hang of the technical side of life one day.

Thanks to my wonderful friends and family who inspire me, make me laugh, and put up with me hogging the SingStar karaoke machine at parties. Thanks to all the children I've had the pleasure of teaching throughout my career – you really are the special ones.

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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 1: 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.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

In the Part of Tens you find some quick and easy positive parenting principles to live by: Ten ideas to build a happy home, ten things to do every day, ten things to do when it all goes pear-shaped, and ten great resources to support you in the day-to-day parenting maze!

Icons Used in This book



Take a second look at these little reminders – so you don't forget! This icon highlights overall strategies to constantly bear in mind as you work to develop new parenting skills.



Pay attention to these practical suggestions to help you raise happy children.



This icon highlights anecdotes from my own life, and from my experiences working with parents and children in teaching and coaching.



Look for these positive ideas to help you remain optimistic in your parenting.



Watch out for these bits of information. The bomb draws your attention to behaviour to avoid when dealing with your kids.



Enjoy these inspiring (and sometimes silly) quotes by other people – some who are famous and some who are not!

Where to Go from Here

As with most *For Dummies* books, you don't need to read this entire book from cover to cover. Perhaps some sections don't really apply to you at the moment or you just need ideas to deal with a specific situation. I've tried to include age-specific information where I think it's useful or relevant and kept to more general principles in other parts.

Read the chapters from first to last – or in any order you want.

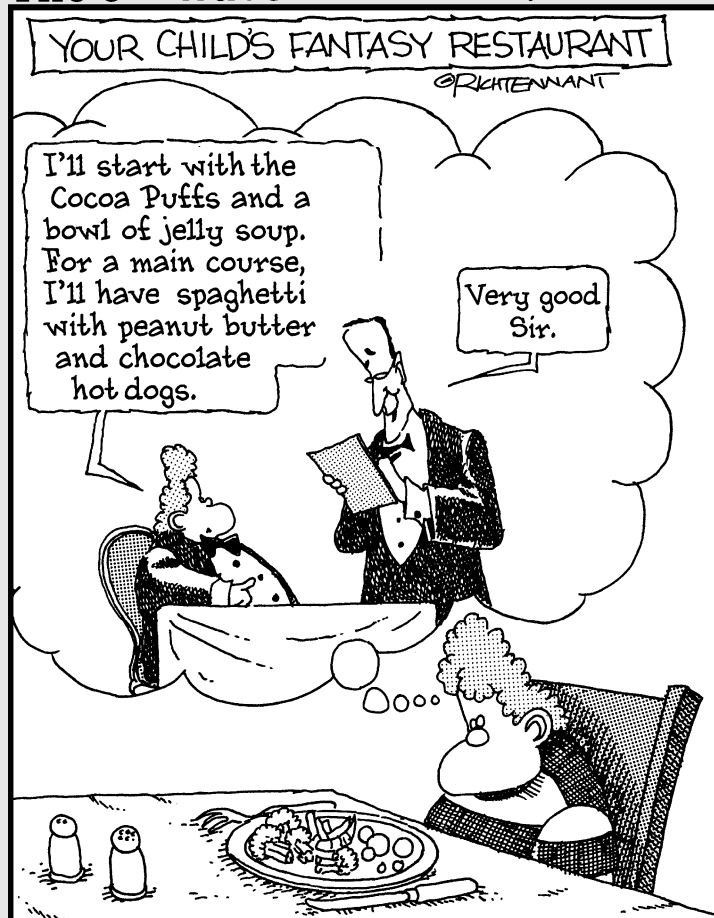
If you have a question that's not covered in this book, feel free to contact me. Perhaps you want to find out more about parent coaching as a positive way to help you bring up your children. The best way to contact me is through my Web site at www.positive-parents.com. At my Web site, you can sign up for a free monthly parenting newsletter full of practical tips and interesting suggestions.

Part I

Understanding Your Children and Yourself

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

Rome wasn't built in a day – houses without solid foundations and properly drawn up plans fall down, and it's the same with raising kids. They need a foundation to grow from and you need a plan so that you know where to start from and how it's all supposed to look in the end! I'm going to help you become the architect of your family's future. The first way to do this is to understand your children and understand yourself as a parent.