



# Family Matters

*Making Family Life Easier*

## What Makes Young People Happy?

*Happiness is ..*

According to Dr. Martin Seligman, one of the founders of positive psychology, having a happy life can be defined as a life filled with positive feelings and activities.

Ghandi described happiness as when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony. John Lennon, more darkly, described it as a warm gun. Some of the more typical descriptions that come from the young people I work with include hanging out with friends, listening to music, not worrying about anything, playing football or a musical instrument and having a good relationship with their parents, to name but a few.

When parents are asked what they think makes young people happy, most might imagine the answer to be something like having the latest gadgets, cash and the car keys. Turns out the answer is quite different. According to a recent study by the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, close friends, playing sport and a stable home life are more important to the happiness of children aged 10-15.

*'We are family'*

Happier people tend to have good family relationships. Young people need understanding and caring. Having a relationship with their parents, in which they feel supported and listened to, helps them to feel happy. Also spending time alone with parents, without their siblings can make a young person feel valued and special, which increases their sense of happiness.

Positive relationships with friends are also an important factor in creating a sense of happiness for young people. Relationships with their peers provide young people with a sense of belonging and help them find their place in the world. Ensuring young people have opportunities for social contact is important. In today's world of digital technology, it can seem like young people are in constant contact with their friends and while access to the internet can increase contentment, excessive time spent on social media can lead to an unhappy child. Therefore it is important that young people disconnect from technology and engage in other social activities that make them happy.

Young people need a variety of activities, both in and outside of school, in order to meet different people, cultivate different interests and develop self-confidence. For younger children, this can mean having safe places where they can run, jump and feel safe to play. For older children and teens, it can involve being a member of the local sports clubs or drama groups for example or simply having safe places to hang out in, such as youth clubs or youth cafes.

A final word on happiness, smile, even when you don't feel like it. Having a positive outlook can increase your happiness.

*Clare Crowley Collier, Therapist, Educator & Facilitator for Teenagers and Parents*