

## How to Foster Happiness in the Classroom: A Guide for Teachers

As educators, you hold a significant role in shaping not only the academic skills of children, but also their emotional and psychological well-being. A happy child is often more engaged, more resilient, and better equipped to learn. In today's fast-paced world, where pressures on children seem to be ever-increasing, fostering happiness in the classroom is more critical than ever. But what does happiness mean in a school setting, and how can teachers actively promote it?

### What the research says about happiness

The research highlights that happiness can be significantly improved through social engagement, acts of kindness, and physical activity. Strategies like practicing gratitude and fostering meaningful relationships are key. Insights from experts, including Martin Seligman, Laurie Santos, and Tal Ben-Shahar, emphasise that true happiness comes from balancing pleasure with purpose, focusing on intrinsic values, and understanding that happiness is a complex, multifaceted pursuit.

### Understanding happiness in children

Happiness in children is not just about experiencing joy or pleasure. It encompasses a sense of contentment, connection, and security. Research shows that happiness is closely linked to well-being and mental health, which in turn affects a child's ability to learn, interact socially, and cope with challenges (Layard & Hagell, 2015). Children who feel happy and supported are more likely to develop a positive self-image, form healthy relationships, and achieve better academic outcomes (Parker, 2020).

## 5 Ways to Build a Happy Classroom:

### 1. Positive Relationships

The foundation of a happy classroom lies in strong, positive relationships. By creating positive relationships and being kind to each other, children can increase their happiness and help to build a happy classroom environment (Rohrer et al., 2018). By fostering a culture of respect, trust, and kindness, you can create a safe space where children feel valued. This can be achieved by acknowledging their efforts, listening to their concerns, and celebrating their successes.

## 2. Emotional Literacy

Teaching children how to understand and manage their emotions can help them develop the tools they need to be happy. Indeed, the research tells us that children who can express their feelings and navigate emotional challenges are happier and more confident (Greenberg et al., 2003). Activities, that help students recognise different emotions and develop strategies to handle them, are best interspersed throughout the day, specifically in those more personable moments like circle time, and during role-play games.

## 3. Physical Well-being

Physical activity is closely linked to happiness (Grant et al., 2009). This is explained by the fact that exercise provides physical health benefits, as it makes our heart and lungs work better (Moreira et al., 2020); and psychological health benefits such as reduced risk of depression (Blumenthal & Rozanski, 2023). Regular movement breaks, outdoor play, and active learning can boost mood and energy levels, reduce stress, and enhance concentration. Encouraging a balanced diet, spending time outside, and adequate sleep also play a role in a child's overall happiness and readiness to learn.

## 4. Purposeful Learning

Children are happiest when they find meaning in what they do. Connecting lessons to real-world applications allows students to pursue learning that interests them. This sense of purpose and relevance can ignite curiosity and a love for learning, contributing to long-term happiness. This is not in a curriculum as such, but in those more intimate teaching moments that you can value and make the most of.

## 5. Growth Mindset:

Growth mindset is the belief that skills and abilities can be improved. Teaching students to focus on effort and progress can help to create a positive learning environment where students feel empowered to take ownership of their learning. In this type of environment, children are more likely to see challenges as opportunities to learn, rather than as threats to their self-worth. Research by Carol Dweck highlights that when students believe their abilities can be developed through effort and perseverance, they are more likely to embrace learning and bounce back from setbacks (Dweck, 2006). To help students achieve a growth mindset, you can promote the use of phrases like "I can't do this yet" instead of "I can't do this" to instill resilience and optimism.

## Conclusion

Promoting happiness in the classroom is not just about ensuring children have fun; it's about creating an environment where they feel secure, valued, and engaged. By focusing on positive relationships, emotional literacy, physical well-being, purposeful learning, and a growth mindset, teachers can significantly enhance their students' happiness and well-being. Remember, a happy child is a thriving child, both academically and emotionally.

## References

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