

Surviving Adolescence...

part 6: The Final of a six part series for parents and other caregivers

To complete this series on adolescence for parents and caregivers, I'm going to quote some information from an article I read many years ago by John Obedzinski:

Why Happy Families are Different

Now, first, I have to say that I don't entirely agree with the use of the word 'Happy' – this is an over-used word and frequently when we strive to be 'happy', it invariably eludes us... more about this in another blog!



In his article, John Obedzinski suggests 10 reasons 'Why happy families are different' : here they are, with some of my thoughts:

1. Children know their place

This doesn't mean that you ignore the thoughts and comments of your children. They need to be heard. But what it does mean is that a family is not a democracy, with all having equal vote. As parents, caregivers, 'buck stops here'. Sometimes you will need to make difficult decisions that your children won't like. But making the final decisions gives your children a sense of safety, consistency and comfort...knowing who is in charge!

2. Parents (understand and) talk kids' language

Children think differently to adults – we know that...and language is just an extension of thoughts. Obedzinski suggests that in strong families the parents / caregivers learn to speak in a language children will understand. Children are 'concrete' or literal thinkers and speakers – they usually need something spelled out, clearly, precisely and specifically for them to grasp. And...they will frequently need to be reminded over and over...and over and over...and over and over...again! Frustrating yes, but often necessary.



3. Happy families are not always happy

One of the problems about focussing on 'happiness' is that it is fleeting...it comes and it goes. Life is life. As Obedzinski says, the sun is not necessarily going to shine every day. A happy, or perhaps content, family is one that learns to 'go with the flow'...understand that there will be negative events and perhaps even tragic events. It's about being supportive, encouraging, respectful and valuing during such times that will help you survive through those difficult times.



4. Happy families don't believe in quality time

Now this is going to be challenging for those of us who have been told over and over again...set aside 'quality time' to be with your children. Obedzinski suggests that parents and caregivers need to make it clear to the children that they are *always* available for quality time. I have some difficulty accepting this, but I understand what he's getting at: our children need to know that we are there for them, and not just at set 'quality times'. Children are spontaneous, impulsive and 'here and now' people...sometimes they can't wait for the set 'quality time' to share their excitement or sadness. While difficult to achieve for most parents / caregivers, it is important that whenever possible we share that time with our children, and when not possible, we make sure we connect at the next closest available time to share with them.

5. They value tradition

Rituals are a form of tradition and a source of strength for the family. Rituals such as a special Sunday lunch, or 'take-away' once a month/week, or visit to a favoured extended family member, become part of the family tradition: they provide a source or strength and consistency that are 'special' just to that family. These traditions, if done with value and respect, will be remembered favourably for many years.



6. Happy families make mistakes

I want to add a little to this...happy families make mistakes...and admit it when they're wrong. We all know that mistakes will happen...no matter how good we think we might be, we will be wrong at some point. When parents / caregivers admit their mistakes and apologise, it tells their children that they are human... it also encourages the children to accept responsibility and admit their mistakes when they are wrong.



7. They fight

No, they don't go into separate corners and come out fighting... but they do argue! The difference is of course, is that they fight fair. They don't sent out to undermine and tear others down. They don't resort to name calling or dredging up the past. They disagree...they state their disagreement, and yes, sometimes it might become heated... but underlying fighting fair is behaviour that does not undercut the relationship.

8. They compete

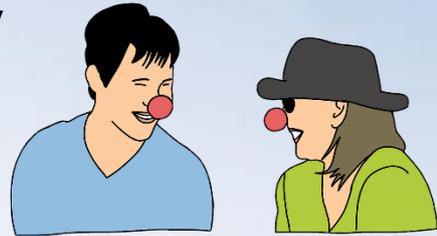
While it would be wonderful if we lived in a world where there was equality and equity...this is not the real world. Happy families provide a place for children to learn that competition is healthy...if it is done in a manner that maintains respect and valuing of each other. Competition – respectfu competition – also teaches our children how to win...and lose!

9. The children work

How often do we hear about children who want all but do nothing to get all? It's becoming all too often. Happy families are those where everyone contributes to the level of their ability...children included. This creates a sense of unity, of solidarity within the family. But, interestingly, it also helps set the scene for later in life for the children to feel useful, productive and contributing in their own relationships and society

10. They laugh at each other

Perhaps another challenging one. Who really thinks that laughing at a family member is good? Well, if it is not malicious – if it doesn't mock each other or 'hit the sore spots', then humour in a family can be a uniting and healthy function. Humour is real, we shouldn't suppress it...happy families learn to laugh at each other's quirks and foibles.



We hope you have both enjoyed and learned from this series on Surviving Adolescence.

We would love to hear your thoughts.

Contact us at inSync for life if you would like further information on anything in this series, or if you would like to discuss issues you might be having with your young person.

We have a number of highly experienced clinicians and we're here to support you.

Steve Jobson
Principal Psychologist
www.inSyncforlife.com.au