Raising kids to **thrive**.
Confidence. Character. Resilience.
A message from Michael

Hello,

Welcome to the Best of Happy Kids 2.

This is the second time I’ve published a collection of my favourite Happy Kids email newsletter articles. (You can subscribe to Happy Kids at www.parentingideas.com.au)

People loved the first volume so much that we thought it was important to follow-up with the Best of Happy Kids 2.

There are many reasons why I chose these ten from a collection of over 30 that I published this year. Some such as The Incredible Power of the Kitchen Table and Creating junior Versions for Independent Living were chosen because of the incredible amount of feedback they generated from readers.

I chose others such as Build your Parenting Capacities and Get around children’s denial with ‘I-messages’ because I felt their messages are important and timely.

Some articles such as Do your kids have gemeinschaftgefuhle? (It’s good if they do) and Would your kids pass the marshmallow test? were chosen because of their quirkiness, as well as the importance of their message.

I hope you enjoy them all.

Best wishes to you and your family,

Michael Grose
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Enjoy!

*Michael Grose*

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One. 10 ways to build confidence in kids

The power of parents to shape a child is enormous.

Self-confidence is one area that parents have significant influence, particularly for children of primary school-age and below. Kids in these years are on a journey to work out what they can do and how they can fit into their various groups. These are vital confidence and esteem-building years.

As a parent, you are in THE prime position to mirror back to kids how they should see themselves. You do this through your messages, your expectations and how you treat your child.

Confidence is often confused with extraversion, assertiveness, self-assuredness and cockiness. It’s not necessarily so.

Confidence is more about risk-taking and trying new activities. Confident kids are more likely to make the most of their potential as they’ll extend themselves both socially and learning-wise. Failure doesn’t reflect on them personally. Fears and anxieties, while present, don’t stop them from trying new activities. So how can you develop real and lasting sense of confidence in your kids?

Here are 10 ways to build confidence in your kids so they can take their place in the world:

1. **Model confident mindsets:** Let your kids hear what a confident mindset sounds like. Kids pick up your thinking as well as your language so teach kids how to approach tricky or new situations confidently by doing so yourself. That means, don’t put yourself down if you make a mistake. Make sure your child understand that mistakes are acceptable and part of learning, rather than a reflection on them personally.

2. **Encourage kids to look on the bright side:** Optimism is catching and helps kids overcome their fears. Help kids set their antennae to look for the good, something positive or the lesson to be learned from any situation.

3. **Help them understand self-talk:** That little voice inside their heads can talk them up or talk them down. Get kids to listen to their self-talk and help them work out messages that help them, rather than hold them back.

4. **Recognise effort & improvement:** Low risk-takers and perfectionists appreciate parents who focus more on the processes of what they do, rather than results. Effort, improvement and enjoyment are examples of processes that you can comment on.

5. **Focus on strength and assets:** Fault-finding can become an obsession for some parents, particularly fathers. Step back and look at supposed faults through a different lens (i.e. stubbornness can be rebadged as determination). Let your kids know what their strengths are so they know what they are good at!

6. **Accept errors as part of learning:** Don’t over-react when kids don’t get the perfect score or make mistakes. Errors are part of learning, ask any golfer…

7. **Give them real responsibility at home:** Giving responsibility is a demonstration of faith. It fosters self-belief and also provides growth opportunities for kids. Confidence and responsibility go hand in hand.

8. **Develop self-help skills from an early age:** Confidence is linked to competence. You can praise a child until the cows come home, but unless he or she can do something they won’t feel confident. Basic self-help skills are linked to self-esteem.
9. **Spend regular time teaching & training:** Parents are children’s first teachers, educating toddlers to do up their shoelaces and teenagers to fill out their first tax form. Look for teachable moments where you can help your kids.

10. **Build scaffolds to success and independence:** Break down complex activities into bit-sized chunks (learn to smooth the doona, before they make the whole bed) so they can experience success or even cope with stressful situations (go to an anxiety-inducing party for an hour rather than attend the whole party) so they can overcome their fears.

There are some powerful strategies outlined here. (My book *One Step Ahead* expands on these and more ideas.)

Think about how many of these you use already and which strategies you would like to find out more about. Effective parents do the basics well. Confidence-building of is an area of parenting that can has an enormous impact on kids and one that we can all learn more about.
Two. Build your parenting capacities

“Parenting is the world’s hardest job…”

I always grimace when I hear someone say this.

Yes, parents are on a steep learning curve and raising a child is a huge responsibility… but that comment has negative connotations and overlooks the fact that… parenting contributes to our personal growth.

Kids take us into new ground. They require us to have personal capacities and skills that most of us, never thought we’d develop.

For instance:

- When impatient, task-oriented people have kids most discover a patient side that they never thought they had.
- Effective parenting requires you to think ahead, think of others and bring others along with you. These great leadership capacities apply to any workplace.
- Discipline, confidence-building and family management require a range of communication skills that are found in customer service, counselling and negotiation disciplines.

There are four ways to build your parenting capacities:

1. **Build your expert knowledge**: There’s a lot to know when you have kids. There’s no shortage of parenting information around, but not all of it is ‘expert’. Knowledge that comes from a trusted expert source with runs on the board is important!

2. **Develop self-care strategies**: Parenting drains your energy. Toddlers are time-consuming, primary-aged kids lead busy lives and teenagers present you with their own challenges that keep you on your parenting toes. When you look after your own well-being, you have the energy needed to put your heart and soul into your kids. Maintaining your own interests and passions, regular breaks and plenty of partner time are some ways to keep yourself fresh and up for the parenting challenge. (My book *Great Ideas for Tired Parents* has plenty of strategies for taking care of yourself and your family. Find out more here.)

3. **Build your support networks**: People generally don’t parent well in isolation. Effective mums and dads are generally surrounded by a range of healthy people who can support them at different stages on the parenting journey. These supports include family and friends, general practitioners, associations (e.g. Multiple Births Associations) and child carers & schools. Surround yourself with support mechanisms so you can get advice, ideas and just a break, when needed.

4. **Build your parenting skills**: Effective parents have a range of tools in their parenting toolkits. Some people have a head start in parenting either because their work allows them to spend time around kids or they were substitute parents from time to time in their own family. If you didn’t come to parenting with experience of kids you will develop the skills you need throughout your parenting journey.

So my challenge for you is to see parenting as a personal growth activity where the skills and attributes we learn transfer to other parts of your life.

You need to be constantly building your parenting capacities so you can be a better parent and a better person, to boot!

One of my favourite quotes comes from business speaker Jim Rohn. “Don’t ask for things to be easier. Look to become better to handle life’s challenges.” This applies to parenting as much as it does to any area of life.

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Three. The incredible power of the kitchen table

The kitchen table is a parent’s best friend. It’s where conversations occur. It’s where thoughts are aired, compliments are given and food is shared.

If you want to get a window into a child’s world then you need to sit around the kitchen table with him or her.

When I was a kid, my mum always made sure there’d be food on the table when I came home from school. She knew when I came through the back door each afternoon, that I’d make a bee line to the kitchen table. I was always hungry!

Mum would sit at the kitchen table and have a cuppa with me. She always did... or it’s seems like she did. They’re my special mum memories.

It’s no coincidence that those countries with strong food cultures generally have strong families.

When people eat together they talk. You can’t help it when your behind is anchored to a chair.

People attach emotions to locations.

People also attach feelings to different places. I’d like to think my family links happy, joyous feelings to our kitchen table. We’ve had plenty of birthdays, Christmases, fantastic dinners, big breakfasts and countless other gatherings around our kitchen table.

I reckon the kitchen table anchors my kids back to their childhoods and gives them a sense of belonging.

That’s why the kitchen table is the first place they go when they come home for a visit. They feel at home again.

On my trips to England I’ve noticed that the Poms don’t use the kitchen table like Aussies do. In fact, about a third of English homes don’t have a kitchen table at all. People eat in shifts and in front of the television. That’s a huge shame.

English educators are concerned. They want their parents to talk to their kids more. They know when parents talk with their kids they enrich their vocabularies, and better still, influence their thinking.

They know that the kitchen table is a powerful ally in creating talk between the generations. That’s why they are encouraging people to sit at the kitchen table more.

Yep, the power of the kitchen table is immense. Don’t underestimate it or underuse it!

You can build kids’ confidence around it. You can build their character around it. You can build resilience too. Better still, you can build a family around your kitchen table and that’s quite a feat.
It’s function, not form that matters most in families

Families look very different these days to the traditional married couple with kids of the past.

The recently published “Families: Then and Now” report from the Australian Institute of Family Studies revealed that one in four families are now classified as ‘non-intact’, which is up from just one in 10 families in 1980.

“The most common type of ‘non-intact’ family is a single parent household, most often a separated mother and her children. The next most common types are step-families, where all children are stepchildren, and blended families, where at least one child is the product of the current parent relationship.”

Yep, it can get complicated!

We used to ask kids how many brothers and sister they had. Now we ask them: “How many mums and dads do you have?” A sign of the changing times!

Families Studies Institute director, Professor Alan Hayes, maintains that the make-up of the family matters less than what goes on within it.

He told the Melbourne Herald Sun: “The form of a family has changed quite a bit, but what’s more important than form is how a family functions – whether they’re places in which people are safe and children are protected, well-nurtured and developed well.”

Each family form presents its own unique challenges for parents, but as Hayes pointed out, there are some child-rearing fundamentals that parents need to adhere to.

Regardless of family form that I believe parents should strive to make sure their families are:

- **Rich in love, with adults who have time for and are supportive of kid’s goals**: Kids need to feel loved. They need adults who make time for them and adults who will help them achieve their goals.

- **Stable, predictable and chaos-free**: A stable, chaos-free family environment provides the necessary background for kids to develop, grow and take risks.

- **Rich in supportive, social interactions**: Kids need to be exposed to a variety of social experiences with adults and peers so they can hone their social skills. Similarly, they need plenty of opportunities to do things for themselves at home, at school and in their neighbourhoods.

- **Psychologically safe – mistakes are not thrown in their face**: Kids need to grow up in an encouraging environment that allows them to make mistakes without fear of being constantly reminded of them, which creates a fear of failing. When kids fear failure, they act in safe ways and are less likely to stretch themselves.

- **Places of spontaneity, curiosity and fun**: Healthy families enjoy each other’s company, or at least pull together when the chips are down. This seems to happen more in families where parents can lighten the tension, inject some humour and inspire kids to be interested in things and people other than themselves.

What else is important in family life? What are some parenting fundamentals that are important regardless of the form of a family?
Five. Creating junior versions of independent living

Recently, I attended an advanced presentation skills seminar run by one of the world’s premier presenters, Glenn Capelli.

It was knock-out session, where I learned heaps that I’ll be putting into practice in my coming parenting presentations.

I also heard a brilliant, yet deceptively simple parenting idea...

Glenn said that many speakers complicated matters for audiences, making things too complex. One way of making it easy for audiences to learn is to create a JUNIOR VERSION of whatever we are talking about.

He likened this to the way that many sporting bodies have now developed modified versions of adult sports so kids can learn the basic skills of the sport in fun, enjoyable ways.

I had one of those light bulb moments as I listened, and realised that effective parents create JUNIOR VERSIONS of the GAME all the time to help kids develop the skills of self-sufficiency and independence from a very early age.

Here are some examples:

- We get toddlers to smooth the doonas and arrange their teddies on their beds – that’s a JUNIOR VERSION of making a bed.
- We encourage early primary school kids to make snacks, prepare breakfasts and help prepare a meal. That’s a JUNIOR VERSION of cooking an evening meal.
- WE drive primary school kids half way to school and let them walk the rest. That’s a JUNIOR VERSION of walking to school.
- We let an early teen go to a local cinema during with friends. That’s JUNIOR VERSION of going out without adults at night.

There are heaps of ways we create JUNIOR VERSIONS of independent living every day so kids can become self-sufficient.

What JUNIOR VERSIONS of independent living are you creating for your kids?

If you are anxious about your child’s safety and tend to more protective than you want to be, and then start creating JUNIOR VERSIONS of the independent living so that kids can learn to stand on their own two feet rather than be dependent on you.

Remember REDUNDANCY is your aim as a parent!

Similarly, one way for kids to develop self-help skills is to create JUNIOR VERSIONS of what you already do, so they can develop the skill-sets needed to look after themselves, and help out the rest of the family.

Now that’s an idea worth thinking about!
Six. Do your kids have gemeinschaftgefuhle? (It’s good if they do)

Kids are egocentric. The world revolves around them – quite rightfully too.

But with maturity they develop greater empathy for others, as well as a realization that the world doesn’t revolve around them. They begin to take into consideration the greater social good when they behave.

Austrian psychologist Alfred Adler referred to this development of social interest as Gemeinschaftsgefuhle. I call it the development of a sense of ‘other’. Regardless of the name, it’s something we all aspire to for our kids… or should.

The family is a great learning ground for the development of a child’s social interest. They must learn that they need to fit in to what happens around them. The sense of belonging and sense of well-being that kids get from heightened social interest is quite profound.

The flexibility principle I outlined in my new book Thriving! helps parents make sure that kids don’t become too self-absorbed or don’t grow up with a false sense of entitlement.

Okay, some kids are more self-centred than others. There’s nothing too much wrong with this as long as they know there are times when it’s not all about them. They need to be willing to share the spotlight at times. They should be encouraged to stand back and applaud a sibling who’s done well at school or in sport.

Sometimes our parenting can stunt kids’ journey from ‘me’ to ‘we’. Lack of expectation that kids help out at home is an example of such a practice.

Here are five parenting practices that help kids along the road from ‘me’ to ‘we’ and develop a healthy sense of social rather than self-interest.

1. **Ask kids to help you and others without being paid.** When we continuously pay kids for work they begin to think ‘what’s in this for me’. Okay at times, but even future entrepreneurs need to learn that helping others with no strings attached is a virtuous thing. (My book One Step Ahead outlines principles and ideas to get kids helping without being paid and other ways to develop social interest in kids.)

2. **Get kids to see both sides of a story when there’s a dispute.** Seeing the world from your sibling’s viewpoint is the start of empathetic behaviour. Interestingly, many bullies have an inability to empathise with others.

3. **Encourage kids to volunteer.** This is the ultimate in social interest. Volunteering to helping a neighbour, help a teacher at school or just help you fold the washing are simple acts that show social interest.

4. **Insist kids join you for family meals and celebrations that may not directly involve them.** Kids too easily can drop out of the family. You have to fight hard for this one.

5. **Provide age-appropriate opportunities to mix with people with different needs such as elderly people or kids with special needs.** My children when young were very boisterous, but they quietened down when their elderly grandmother stayed over. You have to create conditions sometimes where kids have to consider others.

In the pursuit of happy kids, you need to be always looking how you can move kids down the road from ‘me’ to ‘we’. It’s a continuous process that has big pay-offs in terms of your children’s future success and well-being.

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Ask ‘what’ not ‘why’ when kids misbehave

‘WHY…?’

‘Why on earth did you do that?’

Most of us have said this to our kids at some stage.

They hurt a sibling and we say, ‘Why?’

They argue and fight at the meal table and we say, ‘Why?’

They deliberately come home from an outing later than agreed and we say, ‘Why?’

This is a natural reaction. Few kids can articulate why they have done the wrong thing. Boys, in particular, will usually reply, ‘I dunno.’ They know something isn’t right, but articulating it is another matter.

Besides, asking ‘why’ is pointless.

Even if they give you a reason for their poor behaviour (‘cos she hit me first’, ‘I’m not hungry anyway’, ‘I was late because I lost track of time’) where do you go to from there?

Asking WHY kids misbehave generally closes down a conversation and puts kids on the defensive.

There’s a better question to ask when kids behave poorly. Ask a question beginning with ‘WHAT?’

Okay, your first reaction to misbehaviour maybe ‘What the…?’ but hold that thought in. Better to ask questions such as:

- WHAT were you thinking when you hurt your sister?
- WHAT were you doing when you decided to stay out late?
- WHAT was happening when you argued with your friend?
- WHAT should you have done when you didn’t want to eat and decided to annoy your sister?
- WHAT will you do next time when you feel like acting like that?
- WHAT do you think your brother meant when he said that you were…?
- WHAT will you do now to make it up to your brother?

These types of questions are reflective and restorative.

They ask children to reflect on their thinking, their behaviour and the situation at hand. They open up conversations that lead to learning. Some of the questions lead children to the important aspect of repairing or restoring relationships they may have damaged through their behaviour and take responsibility for the way they acted.

Asking what? when kids’ misbehaviour impacts on others leads them further down the road from self-interest to social interest. It’s also in line with the types of questions teachers should be asking your children when their behaviour adversely affects others.
“I didn’t do it. She did!!!”

Ever caught a child red-handed doing the wrong thing, only to have them deny point blank what they’ve done?

It can be infuriating!

Sometimes kids deny poor behaviour because they don’t want to disappoint you, or simply that they don’t realise what they have done.

When your kids are in denial over what they have done then use language than focuses on you, rather than them.

For instance, if you find your son or daughter to stop annoying a sibling resist using accusatory language such as: “You were annoying your sister?” It will invoke a response such as: “No, I wasn’t!!”

Then you are involved in an argument with your child. Usually one that you’ll lose or will leave you feeling inadequate.

Instead, say something like this.

“Jeremy, here’s what I saw. I could be wrong, but I saw you sit on the couch and throw a slipper at your sister while she was watching TV. I’d call that annoying. That’s what I saw!”

It’s hard for your child to deny what you saw!

**Sometimes kids’ misbehaviour will impact on you on an emotional level.** You need to let them know how you feel. If they come home late from an outing leaving you worried sick or they just leave their toys on the floor all day, use an I-message to let them know how their behaviour impacts on you.

An I-message sounds like this: “**When you... I feel... because...**”

“**When you come home late I feel worried sick because I don’t where you are.**”

“**When your toys are on the floor all day as I feel annoyed because everything is a mess.**”

This type of response is aimed at developing empathy in kids and is an essential part of the Thriving! Way of parenting. That is, it lets kids know how their behaviour impacts on others.

**I-messages** shouldn’t be used to shame a child, but to get across how you feel about their behaviour. There’s a difference!!!

**Teach your kids how to use I-messages**

Teach kids to use I-messages using a calm, assertive voice. It has more impact that way.

Here are two examples:

“I felt awful when you didn’t let me play with you after school because I was looking forward to it all day.”

“It sucks when you always tell me I’m stupid because I feel rotten inside.”
When using an I-message there is no guarantee that your message will be acted on. But it does heighten the likelihood that your message will be heard.

Next time you are angry, disappointed or annoyed at your child resist telling them off and step back and formulate an I-message.

Then check its impact on your child. With a little bit of luck there’ll be no denial, but a little bit of sheepishness because they’ve wrong thing. **Best case scenario is that you’ll get an apology.** But don’t hold your breath on that one!
Nine. Teach kids the processes of independence

If you want kids to become independent you need to teach them some skills so they can become self-sufficient.

Dressing yourself, making a snack, looking up a bus time table and making a CV are examples of self-sufficiency skills that are relevant at different ages.

Awareness, teaching and opportunity are the main requirements for kids to pick up these skills. They need to be aware of what can be done. They need to acquire the skills—some take more teaching than others. They also need the opportunity to put things into practice.

Choose any skill you want kids to develop and see how each of these applies.

But there is a deeper level you can go to develop independence. You can help your kids develop the processes necessary to become independent. If they don’t have the processes needed for independence, they will always be dependent on others regardless of their ability and skills.

Here are three processes for independence to develop in your kids:

1. **Planning ahead:** Thinking ahead is needed for real independence. Ask questions rather than continually direct your kids so they learn how to think ahead. *What are the three things you need to get ready for school? What do you need to do to complete your homework in time for the weekend?*

2. **Procedural thinking:** The trouble with everything off-the-shelf is that kids don’t see steps and procedures required to make, bake or do anything. It also means kids don’t develop procedural self-talk (*that comes first, when I’ve done that now I need to do this*) because they haven’t been exposed to sorting, sequencing and other steps that are required to make stuff happen. Spend time cooking, making and repairing things with kids so they hear your self-talk and see you work in a methodical manner.

3. **Self-organisation:** The ability to organize yourself is paramount to real independence. Forgetful kids usually don’t have a process for remembering. My adult son came to stay recently and put his car keys in the refrigerator on the top of his 6 pack of beer that he wanted to take with him. He has a process for remembering! You guessed it. He didn’t leave the beer behind! I checked.

Think process as well as skill if you want your kids to become truly independent. Kids will most likely copy a great deal of good organisational processes from you. But you may also need to do some direct teaching, particularly with boys, who by nature can be organisationally-challenged!
Ten. Would your kids pass the marshmallow test?

Between 1968 and 1974 Stanford University researcher Michael Mischel conducted an unusual experiment that linked the delaying of immediate gratification to a person’s lifelong success.

In a long-term study, Mischel offered 4 year-olds a marshmallow, and told them that if they could wait for the experimenter to return after ten to fifteen minutes, he would reward their patience with a second marshmallow.

Control your impulses and delay gratification for a greater reward was the idea here! An interesting dilemma for any 44 year-old, let alone a 4 year-old.

Mischel found there were three groups of kids.

About one-third ate the marshmallow within the first few seconds. They didn’t even consider waiting. Down the hatch! Another third tried to wait, but couldn’t last the distance. Another third practised some old-fashioned self-discipline and didn’t eat the marshmallow. That’s quite an effort!

Mischel followed the 400 kids involved in the experiment over a 14 year period and found that there was a high correlation between the results of the study and how each group performed in high school.

The marshmallow gobblers were more troubled, and had difficulty subordinating immediate impulses to achieve long-term goals. When it came time to study, they were easily distracted and less likely to finish school.

The marshmallow resisters were more motivated, educationally more successful and more emotionally intelligent. Their end-of-high-school marks were higher than those of other groups.

So what’s the point?

Impulse control is one of the keys to being successful in life.

It doesn’t take a study to make that obvious. Those who can put off immediate gratification or the quick fix to work toward a bigger goal will always be successful in life.

It takes self-discipline to save, rather than use a credit card. It takes self-discipline to get up in the cold each morning to exercise rather than stay in bed. Impulse control pays off… in the long run.

Modern parenting can be detrimental to developing impulse control. Let’s face it, in this era of smaller families we have greater propensity to gratify kids’ needs immediately. To be blunt, to avoid disappointing kids, I see some adults bending over backwards to give them what they want.

Impulse control is about self-discipline and character. While some kids are more naturally prone to delay gratification than others, some parenting styles are more likely to promote impulse control than others. Parenting does have an impact!

Here are four strategies to encourage your children to delay gratification, practise self-discipline and build character along the way:

1. Just say NO! You may need to gird your loins with some tough nuts, but so be it!

2. Give kids pocket-money and teach them how to set goals. Being a child’s personal ATM doesn’t encourage impulse controls.
3. **Help kids focus on bigger rewards.** When kids can see that a BIGGER reward is attainable they are more likely to strive to get it.

4. **Establish rituals and rites of passage.** ‘You get your big bike when you are ten’ is a type of ritual that parents used in the past to make children wait. These rituals and rites of passage give parents strength to resist pester power and teach kids that good things come to those who wait.

There is no doubt that saying No to kids is hard work as it is in their job descriptions to push parental (and adult) boundaries.

It is in their long term best interests to realise that they “can’t always get want you want….”

It’s worth remembering the following line to that Rolling Stones song was, “But you can try sometimes, you can try”.
Don’t let the learning stop!

Here are 3 easy ways to continue learning with Michael Grose:

1. **Subscribe to Happy Kids at www.parentingideas.com.au**

2. **Talk parenting with me on my Facebook page. Join my Facebook community here.** Alternatively, go to your Facebook page and enter Michael Grose Parenting in the searchbox. Then click the like button to join Michael Grose Parenting community.

3. **To build your parenting skills check out a range of books, parenting programs and seminar DVDs at www.parentingideas.com.au**

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