



**FIRST**  
things  
**FIRST**

**7 KEYS TO A**

**HAPPY  
HEALTHY**

**Family**

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**THE FAMILY GUIDE TO  
THE BEST SUMMER EVER!**

## INTRODUCTION

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# YOU ARE DOING **THE HARDEST BUT** **MOST REWARDING** JOB ON THE PLANET.

**You are a parent.** Despite busy schedules, balancing work and family, refereeing the sibling spat of the day or the week, and everything life throws at you, you can still conjure up chocolate chip cookies in a moment's notice to put smiles on everyone's faces. *You should wear a cape.*

The seven keys in this ebook are based on practical, research-based resources. These simple tools will be useful as you promote happiness and health in your family. **Keeping everyone connected, communicating, and enjoying family life is no easy task, but you got this!**

### I HAD A HAPPY FAMILY GROWING UP...

You've heard or maybe even said, "I had a happy childhood." or, "I grew up in a happy family." You know that doesn't mean it was perfect. Of course, there were problems and struggles and conflict. Nobody is implying they had perfect parents. What they are saying is that when they look back, **happiness** is what stands out to them. This is what you want your kids to look back and say when they've grown up. This is why you begin with the end in mind. This is why you do the challenging parenting work you do.





# **HAPPY FAMILIES ARE ALL ALIKE;** EVERY UNHAPPY FAMILY IS UNHAPPY IN ITS OWN WAY.

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## **RESEARCH SUPPORTS THIS**

It's no mystery. You don't have to crack the code. What is happening in happy homes? The kids will tell you...

When 1,500 school children in a national study were asked what they thought made a happy family, they didn't list material things, their number one answer was **"Doing Things Together."** Your children want you to hang out with them, play games with them, and show an interest in things they are interested in. Your kids want to be talked with, and listened to. See? The best things in life *are* free—but **you need to keep being intentional to make those awesome things happen.**

## **OUR FAMILY ISN'T PERFECT, BUT IT'S **HEALTHY**...**

You already know there are several key things that keep us healthy physically: eating right, physical activity, drinking plenty of water, proper sleep, and regular check-ups with our doctor. You know the work and planning that goes into staying healthy. A *healthy family is no different.* What follows are seven key things to help you keep your family in great shape. These seven keys aren't so you can have a *perfect* family. These keys will help you have a family with purpose, so your kids will look back and say, "I grew up in a happy family."

## KEY #1

# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES DON'T HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT

## WHAT?

The word “parenting” covers a lot of territory. You feel the weight of the responsibilities, duties, and all the specific things you want to focus on with your kids as you grow your happy, healthy family. It can be dizzying and even discouraging. You’re trying to be intentional with spending time together and checking in on everyone regularly and trying to stay on top of so many different things! How can you organize this juggling act? **Triple A.**

One approach, as the **family leader**, is to continually **Assess, Adapt, Achieve**. Assess where you are as a family and as individuals—physically, emotionally, relationally—how is everyone? Who needs what? What ways does your family need to Adapt so needs are being met? Is this Achieving what you wanted? If not, then back to Assess! These Three A’s help you lead your family by having a plan for family success, by being able to **respond instead of reacting to problems**, and by keeping your finger on the family pulse.

## SAY WHAT?

**You are leading by example 24/7.** In a Gottman Institute article, **10 Habits To Shape A Kind, Well-Adjusted Child**, Rebecca Eanes, put it this way, “The relationship that you have with your child is the single biggest influence on them. Your relationship sets an example for how relationships should be throughout the rest of their lives.”

## NOW WHAT?

You are already focused on your families’ basic needs (nutrition, sleep, exercise) because they directly affect your child. You are already keeping an eye on your **child’s behavior** (How do I get her to stop... What do I do when... How do I get my kids to...) BUT continue to think about how the leadership of your family goes **way beyond** basic needs and changing behavior. Don’t forget things like emotional and relational needs & social and educational needs. (Remember to **take care of yourself** so you’re at your **best** to lead your family.) **Lead using the Three A’s, and pull it all together by regularly having family meetings.** That’s parenting with a purpose!



## KEY #2

# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES HAVE BOUNDARIES

## WHAT?

**Boundaries** in the form of rituals, routines, and structure are **essential** for your **happy, healthy family**. Your *consistency* plus a *predictable home environment* not only **helps your children feel safe and secure** but **builds a sense of belonging where your kids can thrive**. (Plus, boundaries can also make your life less stressful as a parent.)

Rituals, routines, and structure aren't just about **rules**, they are about **relationships and freedom**. (A train is only free to go places when it stays on the tracks.) They aren't just about your kid's limits on screen time, how they get ready and leave for school, and their chores. They designate how your family uniquely celebrates birthdays, marks rites of passage, and even **how you eat meals together**.

## SAY WHAT?

Think through your average family day, week, and month. What are the obstacles that rituals, routines, and structure could *alleviate*? What are the opportunities that rituals, routines, and structure could *create*?

### COMMON OBSTACLES

- GETTING READY FOR BEDTIME
- GETTING READY FOR SCHOOL
- GETTING HOMEWORK DONE
- ELECTRONIC DEVICES
- BUSY, HECTIC SCHEDULES
- READING, GOING OUTSIDE

### CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

- EATING MEALS TOGETHER
- FAMILY GAME NIGHT OR MOVIE NIGHT
- FAMILY MEETINGS & ONE-ON-ONE TIMES
- RITES OF PASSAGE: BECOMING A MAN OR WOMAN
- DADDY/DAUGHTER & MOMMY/SON NIGHTS OUT
- BIRTHDAY, HOLIDAYS, MADE-UP SPECIAL EVENTS



## NOW WHAT?

Your family is one of a kind unique! What do you need? A big Family Calendar on the wall? A list of bedtime/morning routines hung in your children's rooms? A regular homework check-in time? **Don't be afraid of getting your kids' input!** Do they want a weekly Game Night? What is a silly made-up holiday your family can put on the calendar? How will you hang out and have fun as a family regularly? (Don't be afraid to lead the way with some silly stuff! Your kids might roll their eyes now, but they will thank you later!)

## KEY #3

# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES CONSTANTLY COMMUNICATE

## WHAT?

Your family lives on a quaint two-way street named, **Communication**. This street is a wonderful family thorofare when it keeps you all connected, moving in the same direction, and headed toward the same destinations. But it can be a dangerous street when family members speed down it angrily, have collisions by not listening, create potholes with harsh criticism and insults, or put up roadblocks by avoiding conversation. Some family members just ignore the traffic signs: **TALK - DON'T TALK**.

You want this avenue to be smooth, safe, and frequently travelled. This involves making this street well-lit with clearly marked signs, and with lanes going both ways. **Communication Street** connects your family to each other and all the good things you want for them.

## SAY WHAT?

A child therapist once confided that the most common complaint that she hears from parents is, "I just can't make my child talk to me!" Ironically, the number one complaint of a lot of children is, **"My parents talk at me, not with me."**

### REMEMBER:

YOU ARE MODELING HEALTHY COMMUNICATION SKILLS LIKE NOT INTERRUPTING OR RAISING YOUR VOICE, **ACTIVE-LISTENING**, POSITIVE BODY-LANGUAGE, TAKING TURNS SPEAKING AND LISTENING, AND NOT LETTING YOUR PHONE DIVIDE YOUR ATTENTION.



## NOW WHAT?

Have a family talk **about how your family talks**. Play a game or do something fun to get everyone talking and in a positive place before you start.

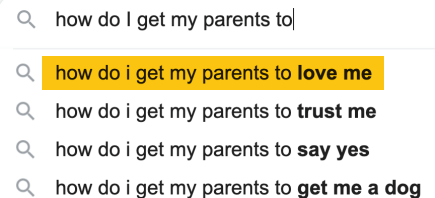
1. **Set Some Boundaries:** Everyone participates. No crosstalk. Keep it positive—It needs to be a safe environment for everyone to be honest and real.
2. **Evaluate How You Communicate:** Do you talk regularly enough as a family? Does everyone feel like they have a voice and are heard? What communication issues or problems do you need to address?
3. **Set Some Communication Goals:** Make a commitment to address any problems. Do we need weekly 15 minute family meetings? Do we need more one-on-one time? No phones at the dinner table? More family fun "hang-out" times like Family Game Nights?

## KEY #4

# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES INTENTIONALLY CREATE THEIR IDENTITY

## WHAT?

Google Autocomplete can be fascinating! As you probably know, you start typing a question in and Google will finish your question with the most common questions searched for using Google. Typing in, “How do I get my parents to...” reveals something heartbreaking. **The first autocomplete answer is, “love me.”**



Your family has an **identity** that is built on the bedrock foundation of each family member knowing and feeling that they are loved and belong. “Love and belonging are irreducible needs of men, women, and children.” **says Dr. Brene Brown**, author and professor at the University of Houston's Graduate College of Social Work.

## SAY WHAT?

Each member of your family has an **individual identity** that you can **parent toward** and **contribute to**. Collectively, your family itself has an identity that you can also actively cultivate to give your entire family a sense of purpose. “Without this vision,” Stephen Covey argues in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, “kids can be swept along with the flow of society’s values and trends. It’s simply living out the scripts that have been given to you. In fact, it’s really not living at all; it’s being lived.”



## NOW WHAT?

- You can work together as a family to **create a Family Purpose Statement**, or **Family Mission Statement**, which are awesome family identity tools. Remember to refer to it often!
- Just **the way you talk about your family** plays a huge role in forming its identity. Use the words “our family” a lot (“I love our family!” “Our family is honest.”). Refer to your family as a **team** and come up with a **team name**. (“Team Smith works problems out together!”) This language will become ingrained in your kids.
- **As a family, come up with 3-5 words (core values/character traits) that you want to be part of your Team Identity.** Post those words up in your house and refer to them as you work on those qualities and build that Team Identity.

## KEY #5

# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES HAVE BACKBONE

### WHAT?

Your family life has ups and downs. Every day isn't delightful. Every week isn't wonderful. Stuff happens—to your whole family and to individual family members. From natural disasters to kitchen disasters. That “special someone” didn't text your kid back. That special something in your transmission—financial setback. School bullies and sports benchings. How does your family handle the **not-so-fun situations**—big or small? **You can see them as obstacles that make you scream or opportunities to build your team.**

### SAY WHAT?

Your happy, healthy family has to handle hard things. Your team can have a wishbone and wish things were different, or it can have a backbone and find a different way forward. In tough times especially, your kids will take their cues from you. **You can be real and still really be modeling how to grow from difficulties, learn from failures, develop problem-solving skills, and the value of working hard and not giving up.**

#### REMEMBER:

**YOU'RE NOT RAISING A CHILD; YOU'RE RAISING A FUTURE ADULT. DON'T LET THEIR FIRST DAY ON THE JOB BE THE FIRST TIME THEY HAVE TO FACE A CHALLENGE ON THEIR OWN.**

### NOW WHAT?

If the best types of problems are the ones your family grows stronger from, then the second best type are definitely **the problems you avoid**. This is why planning, good communication, and a strong family identity are so important. But while you can't plan when trouble will hit, you can prepare your kids for it. Set the example, but also, at age and **developmentally appropriate times**, set them up to face challenges, take risks, test their limits, and work through problems on their own. Allow them to experience the importance of earning and learning. Let them taste failure while they're **growing up** and you're there to help them **process it**.



## KEY #6

# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES PLAY TOGETHER

## WHAT?

**You need to take play very seriously.** *But it won't be easy.* This time of global pandemic has knocked your family for a loop! You probably have been forced into playing the role of parent-teacher-employee-spouse while in quarantine, all while worrying about the future and maybe even your finances. You might be wrestling with guilt about how in the world you are supposed to do it all and do it well. All your routines have been disrupted and your family has had to try to create new ones. Nobody is their best self right now. Your kids might be climbing up the walls. You might be having trouble connecting with your spouse even though you are together 24/7. There is so much on your mind and your heart, but you are trying so hard to cover all the bases and keep it all together. Your family might be totally in Survival Mode and taking it one day at a time. **Hang in there!**

## SAY WHAT?

Your family might be so busy doing good things that there's no time or energy left for **one of the best things**—plain old playing around. The AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) takes play **very seriously**:

### PLAY...

- ALLOWS CHILDREN TO USE THEIR CREATIVITY WHILE DEVELOPING THEIR IMAGINATION, DEXTERITY, AND PHYSICAL, COGNITIVE, AND EMOTIONAL STRENGTH
- IS IMPORTANT TO HEALTHY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT
- HELPS CHILDREN ENGAGE AND INTERACT WITH THE WORLD AROUND THEM
- ALLOWS CHILDREN TO CREATE AND EXPLORE A WORLD THEY CAN MASTER, CONQUERING THEIR FEARS
- HELPS CHILDREN DEVELOP NEW COMPETENCIES THAT LEAD TO ENHANCED CONFIDENCE AND THE RESILIENCY THEY WILL NEED TO FACE FUTURE CHALLENGES
- ALLOWS CHILDREN TO LEARN HOW TO WORK IN GROUPS, TO SHARE, TO NEGOTIATE, TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS, AND TO LEARN SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS



## NOW WHAT?

**Get out and play!** Create margin in your day and week for spontaneous play to erupt. **Hug your kids** and horse around with them. Get on the floor with them and play with their toys. You're busy, so schedule undirected playtime. Don't count soccer, because the adults are in charge and keeping score. Don't count video games, because if the risks aren't real, neither are the rewards. Tell your kids to go outside and play. Don't give in when they complain they're bored. Boredom is the gateway to imagination and creativity. Try new things like having them draw a family portrait with chalk in the driveway or challenging them to make up a game you can all play together!

## KEY #7

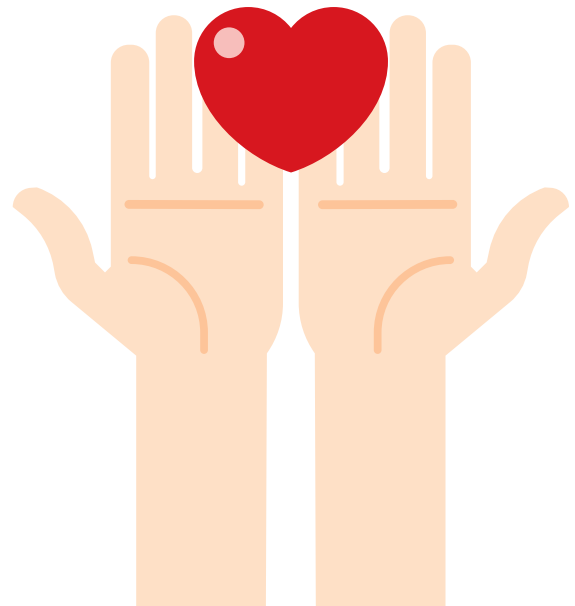
# HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES ARE GENEROUS

### WHAT?

Empathy is the ability to get outside yourself and take other people's thoughts, feelings, and needs into consideration and mentally process their experiences. It's understanding how your actions affect other people. **True generosity flows directly from empathy.** Empathy recognizes a need someone else has and generosity recognizes your ability to meet that need and takes the steps to do it. **Gratitude** recognizes when someone else has been generous toward you. Gratitude is so important that saying "thank you" is usually one of the first phrases we teach our kids.

### SAY WHAT?

Research has shown some **surprising benefits of empathy, generosity, and gratitude.** These qualities make your children more likeable, more employable, and better leaders. *Plus, they just feel good.* Generosity has an enormous impact on your brain, your mood, your physical health, and even your longevity. **Practicing generosity and gratitude together as a family helps you feel bonded together and connected.** Tackling a cause together builds your family identity.



### NOW WHAT?

**Generosity starts at home.** How can your family practice generosity toward each other? It can be as simple as sharing toys or helping with a chore without having to be asked. Try not to force it—then it's not generosity, it's obedience. You'll recognize the growth of generosity and the development of empathy when your kids do something for the sake of doing it. When they just help or share or give. As a parent, you should acknowledge it, but try not to make a big deal out of it or it can quickly shift from true generosity to a way of getting praise from you.

Include your children in conversations about how your family's time, energy, and resources could be put to use outside your home to help others. They might have a cause or an organization or a person or another family in mind that they would like to help. **Cultivate this conversation.** Ask questions that help crystalize generosity and empathy: *What needs do they see? How do they think someone that a given organization serves feels inside? Can they put themselves in their shoes? What do they think is the best way to meet that need? Why?*

## CONCLUSION

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### LEAVING A **LEGACY...**

It's totally possible, just not all at once. You can't read these seven keys for a happy, healthy family and wake up tomorrow, with the best of intentions, and BOOM—**transformed family**. You know your family: There are probably several of these keys that you are already doing well. Hopefully, this ebook encourages you to keep those things going or just tweak them a bit. There are probably a few of these keys that made you think, “Our family needs to do better in this area.” or maybe even, “Our family isn’t doing this at all.” Don’t beat yourself up. **Remember, you know your family. Pick one key. Be strategic. Start somewhere.**

If your kids are old enough, maybe this is seven weeks of family meeting material for some good family discussion. **No family is perfect or will ever be perfect. Fail better tomorrow. Fail, not on purpose, but with purpose.** You’ll be surprised by all the growth and success you find by falling in the right direction.

**Family gives life meaning.** Think legacy. Every family has one; yours might as well be the one you tried to create purposefully as a family. When your children are adults and they look back, how do you want them to finish this sentence:

*My family wasn’t perfect, but we...*



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