

The 7 Principles for

Happy Children, Happy Families



Creator of the 7 evidence based principles for Happy Children, Happy Families



**Clinical Psychologist Dr Angharad Rudkin MA(Oxon),
HCPC Registered Psychological Practitioner**

Hello! I hope you find this guide a helpful tool for your parenting journey. There is no rule book when it comes to separating, but there are some useful principles to guide us towards becoming 'good enough' parents.

Dr Angharad Rudkin has 25 years of experience of working with children and their families. She has co-authored a number of books for children and parents, including the 'Split Survival Kit', a book for children coping with divorce. Angharad regularly appears on radio and TV to discuss child mental health and parenting.





from the team



Dr Angharad Rudkin, Bob Greig & Rebecca Giraud



OnlyMums & Dads is a leading UK Social Enterprise supporting mums & dads and delivers training to the professionals who work with them.

We hope you find this guide useful; it is the kind of support you can dip in and out of over time. Please do share this with any parent you think might find it useful.

The 7 Principles

Children do better when:

- their parents are not feeling stressed
- they have a meaningful life
- they have parents who are confident and empathic
- they have stable and high self-esteem
- they and their parents have a supportive network of friends, acquaintances, community leaders
- they are given time and attention by the adults who care for them
- there is continuity of care and few changes at home and in school

1

Children do better when their parents are not feeling stressed.

Stress can be contagious as it creates an air of tension which affects other people's moods and interactions. Stress also changes the way we think about the world.

When parents are stressed they are less able to empathise, and be accepting and tolerant. They are also less likely to use positive and helpful coping strategies to deal with difficulties.

Children benefit from parents who are less stressed because they are more psychologically available – they have more bandwidth to engage with their child, and give the kind of support and care their child needs and are more able to mentalize and empathise - two important skills for attuning to a child's needs.

Mentalizing is being able to think about and understand the internal experiences of others, and to be able to communicate this understanding. This is linked to empathy, which is about understanding another person's feelings and perspectives.

You might like to:

- get to know your own stress reactions by identifying what happens in your body and mind when you're stressed
- when you feel stressed, go back to basics - sleep, diet, exercise and rest
- identify your triggers for stress and, where possible, work to avoid them

WATCH

Self care for parents and carers

- Anna Freud Mental Health Charity

READ

How to reduce stress

- UNICEF Parenting

LISTEN

Avoiding parental burnout

- BBC World Service, Parentland

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.

“Parents who manage their stress are parents who have an open mind and are available to their children”

2

Children do better when they have a meaningful life.

Children grow and develop according to the environment around them. If they are lucky enough to grow up in a stimulating environment (e.g. with toys, books, clubs, baking, adventures) they are more likely to feel life has purpose and meaning. Adolescents, especially, benefit from opportunities to express themselves, connect with other like minded people and master skills so that they can feel useful and valued.

School and college can give young people a sense of meaning and value and adding to this with other community activities gives them the opportunity to build up resilience, learn new skills, be courageous and make new friendships.

Children are reliant on their parents to help them explore what gives them meaning. They need adults to get them to places, to coordinate and organise, to pay, to commit and to encourage and motivate them.

While online activities can give some children meaning, too much time on social media can impact a child's mood and exacerbate feelings of loneliness and lack of meaning.

You might like to:

- do a life audit of your child - what are they enjoying or not, what have they shown an interest in that you can help them do more of
- understanding what gives you meaning maybe very different to what gives your child meaning - this is ok
- find out more about what is going on in your community - you maybe surprised how much is available

WATCH

How every child can thrive by 5

- Molly Wright, Ted Talk

READ

The good life according to children

- The Lego Foundation

LISTEN

How to help children feel happy

- BBC Radio 4, The Open University

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.

“

Children need parents who are able to support them in building up a meaningful life - a life which is active, purposeful, challenging, interesting and balanced

”

3

Children do better when they have parents who are confident and empathic.

Children benefit from parents who are confident, empathic and authoritative. These parents are warm and loving as well as responsive and attuned to their child but they also have clear boundaries and expectations.

Rather than causing distress for a child, having kind, confident leadership from parents makes it easier to understand what to do, and exposes children to a full range of emotions to learn and understand within a safe and loving context.

Children are more likely to fulfil their potential when they are surrounded by adults who trust and believe in them.

Alongside confident and empathic parenting, children need parents who can:

communicate – listening and talking in an appropriate and accessible way

show action - whether it is with a hug, a high five or a loving look. All of these tell a child they are loved and valued

be organised and reliable – so that children can get on with the tasks of learning and exploring rather than worrying about what to eat or who is picking them up

You might like to:

- use apps, reminders, alarms and lists to help you stay organised
- identify a parent you respect then try out one thing they do and see if it works for you
- be curious about how your child sees the world and try to see it from their perspective

Managing time on screens is important and is best done by setting healthy habits from early on e.g. no screens in the bedroom at night, screen free meal times. Children need to learn to self-regulate their screen time but will need support in doing this at the start. Discussion, negotiation and flexibility are the key to managing screen time.

“

Having the skills and confidence to parent with clear boundaries, love, warmth and resilience gives children the best opportunities to grow and thrive

”

WATCH

Authoritative parenting. What is it & why does it work?

- Cadey App

READ

9 tips for better communication with your children.- UNICEF

LISTEN

Friend or parent?

- BBC Radio 4, The Open University

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.



4

Children do better when they and their parents have a supportive network of friends, acquaintances, and community leaders.

Parenting can be a tough job at the best of times and being the parent you want to be during a separation is a challenge. Having support, advice and practical help from others can make this time feel more manageable.

Families who feel connected with their community, have good working relationships with the adults in their child's life and who have invested in relationships with friends and family, will feel more support.

Children learn by watching and imitating. Seeing their parents create and maintain positive relationships means that a child is more likely to have the motivation and skills to build up their own friendships. These friendships can be particularly supportive during a parental separation.

“

Feeling connected to others and part of a wider community can really help a child feel like they belong

”

You might like to:

- model reasonable and kind behaviour in your relationships so your child can see how it's done
- follow your child's lead in who they want to connect with and encourage these relationships
- try not to be over-critical of others, instead figure out with your child why someone may have behaved that way

WATCH

If it takes a village to raise a child - build your own - Liz Lian, TEDxBasel

READ

Feeling lonely as a parent
- NSPCC

LISTEN

The role of grandparents during separation and divorce - amicable

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.

Children do better when they have stable and high self-esteem.

Self-esteem is how we value ourself. If we have high self-esteem we believe we are worthy of being treated well and also feel competent and confident. High self-esteem is protective in that it takes more to make us feel bad and unable to cope.

Changing levels of self-esteem for different parts of our life – our school/work self-esteem, friendship self-esteem, hobbies self-esteem. In general, children do better when they have stable and high self-esteem across these different parts.

Self-esteem is linked to feelings of safety and a belief that we are lovable. This is particularly important for a child going through a parental separation.

“

Believing that you are going to be ok, no matter what, and that you have the skills and opportunities to soothe yourself and feel safe is always going to be helpful.

”

You might like to:

- focus on the effort your child has put in rather than the outcome
- try not to label your child (as sporty, clever, popular) as this feels like a definition they can't escape
- encourage your child to engage in appropriate challenges - they will learn and grow by dealing with these

WATCH

On the crisis facing young men

- Sir Gareth Southgate

READ

How to promote healthy self-esteem in your child

- BBC, CBeebies Parenting

LISTEN

The fiendish world of friendship

- BBC Radio 4 Bringing Up Britain

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.



6

Children do better when they are given time and attention by the adults who care for them.

Attention is love, and children are very aware of this. When adults choose to spend time with their child they are sending a powerful message that their child is loved and valued. This is linked to secure attachments and higher self-esteem. When parents attend to their child with warmth and love, that child is better equipped to deal with all sorts of relationships, challenges and setbacks.

You might like to:

- put aside 10 minutes a day for you and your child just to be together. Put phones away and enjoy one another's company
- reassure your child that you will be there for them as soon as you've finished the task you are on
- look at your child when they're talking and show you're actively listening by nodding your head and asking them questions

“

Children feel valued and valuable when the adults they love want to spend time with them.

”

WATCH

How much time should you spend with your kids? - Dr Alison Ascalante

READ

Meaningful ways to show your Kids you care

- Jeffrey Bernstein Ph.D, Psychology Today

LISTEN

Our sense of self and attachment: Dr. Lisa Firestone

- From Attachment Theory In Action Podcast.

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.



Children do better when there is continuity of care and few changes in home and school

When a child experiences multiple changes in where they live, what school they go to and who looks after them, they can feel more stressed and anxious. A child can adapt to, and benefit from, change which is occasional and well supported. But a child may struggle to deal with frequent, significant changes which feel out of their control.

You might like to:

- try to introduce changes one at a time
- identify what choices your child can appropriately manage e.g. the colour of the wall in their new room, which new lunchbox they will use
- talk and listen to your child before, during and after all changes

WATCH

Building resilience in children

- Child Psychologist, Jean Gross

READ

Helping kids cope with strong emotions -

The Kids Mental Health Foundation

LISTEN

Divorce & separation.

- BBC Radio 4, Bringing Up Britain

Check-in

A short reflective questionnaire to find out how you are doing

- The Happy Children, Happy Families team.

“When children don't have to manage the stress of frequent changes they can use their energy and resources on learning and growing instead.”





We hope you found this FREE resource useful and that you will come back to it time and time again as you navigate your separation.

If you are able to support us in continuing to develop free resources for parents you are very welcome to buy us a coffee **HERE**.

Thank you



Key Organisations

Separated Parenting Programme Directory (SPPD)

A directory to help parents easily find reliable, high-quality programmes designed specifically for families navigating life during or after separation.

National Association Child Contact Centres (NACCC)

Provides safe space where children can meet the parents they don't live with.

OnlyMums & Dads

A social enterprise that provides free resources , support services, and sign-posting for parents going through a family separation.

Both Parents Matter

A charity with a range of resources to support families through separation.

Gingerbread

Advice, support and information around some of the most common topics for separated parents.

Split Happens

A digital platform for young people dealing with their parents' separation.

Asian Single Parents Network

Provides social, emotional and practical support to single parents in the South Asian community.

Professional Support

At OnlyMums & Dads we believe that children's needs should be at the heart of every family separation. We encourage parents, where possible to find constructive ways forward away from the family court. If you need help choosing the right professional, **this** article will help.

The professionals below have made financial contributions to support the work of not-for-profit OnlyMums & Dads.

North East

Mediator
Online Mediation

Family solicitor
David Gray Solicitors

Barrister

Other Professionals

North West

Mediator
Mediation Together

Family solicitor
174 Law
Merrick Solicitors

Barrister

Other Professionals
The Divorce Doctor

Yorkshire & The Humber

Mediator

Vollans Mediation

Turning Point Mediation

Yorkshire Family Mediation Service

The Family Resolution Space

Family solicitor

Hartlaw Solicitors

Barrister

Other Professionals

East Midlands

Mediator

Holistic Family Mediation &
Coaching

Mediation Matters

Midlands Ltd

Mediation First

Family solicitor

Belderbos Solicitors

Barrister

Other Professionals

West Midlands

Mediator

Online Mediation

Barrister

Family solicitor

Weightmans

Other Professionals

East of England

Mediator

Kippax Family Mediation

Evolve Mediation

Barrister

Family solicitor

Cambridge Family Law
Practice

Other Professionals

London

Mediator

Family Law in Partnership

Family solicitor

NE Family Law

Anthony Gold

Withers LLP

Family Law in Partnership

Barrister

Coram Chambers

Other Professionals

amicable

South East

Mediator

[Summit Mediation](#)

[The Family Resolution Space](#)

[Circle Mediation](#)

[Farnham Mediation](#)

[Family Solutions](#)

[Wells Family Mediation](#)

[Rathbone Family Mediation](#)

Barrister

Family solicitor

[BH&O LLP](#)

[Paris Smith](#)

[Family Law Partners](#)

[Cooper Burnett](#)

[O'Sullivan Family Law](#)

Other Professionals

[My Thriving Child](#)

[Dealing with Divorce](#)

[Goodall-Smith Wealth Management Ltd](#)

South West

Mediator

Devon & Exeter Mediation Practice

Barrister

Family solicitor

The Family Law Company - Trethowans

Other Professionals

Separation Support - OnlyMums & Dads

Wales

Mediator

Family solicitor

Barrister

Other Professionals
Family Law
Paralegal Services

Scotland

Mediator

Family solicitor
Brodies

Barrister

Other Professionals

