

Give 'Em What They Want! (Nine Things Parents can give their children that are guaranteed to make everyone happy).

“Oh, no”, you’re thinking. “Not one of those crazy therapists telling me to spoil my children with everything they want... more video games, an MP3 player, a personal DVD player, their own cell phone. The list could go on forever!”

Good news – sort of. This therapist is not going to encourage you to buy your children all of the latest gizmos and gadgets on the market. I am, however, going to suggest that you give your children what they want. And the more of it, the better!

You’re confused. I understand. All day every day one of your kids is telling you that they want this electronic device or that latest toy. I’m sure they do want those things. But I’m talking about things they really, really want from you, their parent. Ironically, kids don’t usually ask (in words, anyway) for these things. But you can bet that their behavior often screams the message for them. I am referring to extremely important things that your kids want; things that will make all of you very happy, and that you don’t have to spend any money on.

Okay, I’ll stop with the riddles. As you read through the following list, I want you to change your mindset from “gifts I can buy at the store that will last a few months at best” to “gifts I can give my children that will benefit them for a lifetime and which they can pass on to their children (and will make me happier and my life easier)”. Not a bad deal, I’d say. And, if I could give you a guarantee, it would promise that these gifts can never fail, if used correctly.

Ready? Here’s the list, complete with examples of how to implement them:

1. **COMPLIMENTS/PRAISE.** The more, the better – as long as they are sincere. Provide the reason for the compliment, along with the compliment itself. “You did a great job cleaning up your art supplies. That is very responsible behavior and I’m proud of you”, or “I appreciate you helping your brother with his math. That was generous of you and I’m very proud”.
We tend to supply our children with an abundance of criticism. Make it a point to give genuine, thoughtful compliments (with explanations) many times every day.
2. **CHOICES/OPTIONS.** Giving kids choices helps them learn to make decisions, a very important lesson for life. For young children, you might say, “Would you like to brush your teeth now or after we put your pajamas on?” For an older child: “Would you like me to rake the leaves and have you mow the lawn or would you prefer to rake and have me mow?”
Choices allow children to feel as though they have an important part of the decision-making process. This gives them a sense of importance as a family member.
3. **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/VALIDATION.** We all want and need to be heard and to have our thoughts and feelings validated. “You sound upset that your friend took his cars and went home”, or “You seem angry about being asked to take the dog out”, or “You look frustrated by the instructions on your homework”, or “You look like you are ready to scream”.
Acknowledgement is one of the greatest gifts we can give kids (and everyone else, for that matter). Rather than simply acknowledging how our kids feel (or how we think they must be feeling) we sometimes say things like, “Get over it... he’ll be back with his cars tomorrow”, or “I didn’t ask you to run a marathon with the dog. I just asked you to take him out for a quick walk”, or “Quit complaining about your homework and just do it”, or “Don’t look at me with that attitude”. Acknowledging their feelings (whether we’re accurate about the exact feeling or not) allows them to feel invited to open up and tell us more about what is going on with them. This leads to discussions with our children. And if they talk to us when they are kids, they will talk with us as teens and then as adults. Win-Win.

4. ENCOURAGEMENT. A little of this can go a long way. "If you want to try out for the soccer team, I will support your efforts all the way. I admire your courage.", or "I see the tryouts for the next school play are next week. You didn't get a part in the last one. How are you feeling about this one? Would you like to talk about it?"

Be careful with how you use encouragement. Avoid encouraging your children to do things if they are things you want for them rather than things the child wants himself. Encourage them to talk with you about their thoughts and feelings.
5. EXPECTATIONS/CHALLENGES. Kids will live up to your expectations of them, whether those are positive or negative. "Your toys need to be picked up and put in your room before dinner in 30 minutes. I will turn on the timer and when it rings it means you have ten minutes left to finish the job. I know you'll do it well", or "You have five college applications to do. You are a responsible student and I will trust you to do them. I have a list of the due dates. Let me know if you want me to remind you a few days before they are due."

Kids want and need expectations and responsibilities. It is the parents responsibility to help them learn these skills in a way that builds their confidence.
6. YES! Say "Yes" to your kids more often. "Sure, you can go to the movies Saturday. You have been a big help to me this week and you deserve time with your friends", or "Okay. I will be glad to take you and your friends to the mall. You need to arrange for a ride home and let me know who that will be with and when I can expect you back".

We say NO so much more frequently than necessary. What's that about? Ask yourself that question and say yes more often to your kids.
7. APOLOGIES/EXAMPLES/COMPROMISE. Modeling these behaviors to your children teaches them to do the same. "You're right. I yelled at you after I spilled the water on the floor. I was frustrated with myself and I overreacted. You did nothing wrong. I'm very sorry", or "I promised I would take you for ice cream last night and I ended up working late. You must have been really disappointed. I am sorry and would like to make it up to you. Can you go tonight or would tomorrow work better?", or "I teased you in front of your friends. I should have thought about how that might have embarrassed you. I'm really sorry. That was unkind of me. I will do a better job of thinking about your feelings in the future", or "I don't mind if you go to your friend's party. I don't think you need to be out until midnight, though. I will let you go to the party so long as you compromise and come home by 11".
8. SMILES/LAUGHTER/HUMOR. We are far too serious with one another and with our kids. Have some fun. Enjoy one another and let your kids know that you enjoy them! Talk to them and be real with them. Keep the humor appropriate and don't use sarcasm when you're angry.
9. HUGS AND KISSES AND "I LOVE YOU'S". There can't be too many (appropriate) hugs, kisses and "I Love You's... no matter how old your kids are! Your spouse might like some, too. It's also great for the kids to see (again, appropriate) affection between their parents – even if they claim to be grossed out.

So go ahead – give your kids what they want! Everyone benefits and the effects last more than a lifetime.