

The Longest Relationship

How to create a sibling bond that is
loving, connected, and fun.



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The Longest Relationship

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Some things to consider about having more than one child.

(Whether you are thinking about it or have already made them.)

- Siblings have the potential to know and love each other longer than they will know any other person in their life. A child will know his or her siblings longer than he or she will know you or their future spouse.
- The sibling relationship reflects the core energy of the family. If the parents are spacious and kind, this will be reflected in the sibling relationship. However, if the parents are competitive and hostile, this also will be reflected. So, siblings create an opportunity for parents to continuously reassess their relationship and how they interact. The same is also true for parents who are not living together.



- There is no crystal ball to show us the future relationship that will exist between siblings once children are grown and our primary work as parents is done.

- Regardless of how much effort parents put toward creating a strong bond between their children, parents cannot one hundred percent control the outcome of the sibling relationship and the paths the sibling relationships will take once children are grown. However, parents can have a tremendous impact on the depth and breadth of these relationships, both during and after childhood.

- This influence begins *before* the birth of each new child who enters the family.

- Bonding siblings is a magical experience. When you have one child, you get to experience your child and develop your own unique bond with him or her. When siblings bond, you get to experience a whole new level of joy because the way two children interact is pure, especially in a loving

environment. This is true even when they are disagreeing.

- Young children are not yet fully tainted by life's conditioning. Their potential for love is much higher between their two young hearts. They are little beings, who have infinite potential, the ability to grow in love for each other. If you set the stage correctly, what unfolds will bring great joy to your family.
- By putting active attention onto the sibling relationship rather than just "letting it happen," you show your children that the quality of their relationship matters to you.
- When children are young, if something matters to you, it matters to them.

"Sibling relationships—and 80 percent of people have at least one—outlast marriages, survive the death of parents, resurface after quarrels that would sink any friendship. They flourish in a thousand incarnations of distance and closeness, coolness and warmth, distrust and loyalty."

—Erica E. Goode, *Writer*

Why this was written.

I have four children, spaced about 20 - 22 months apart. This means my children were still babies when I was pregnant with the next. At that time, there were no resources about how to introduce a baby to a baby, or how to develop a strong bond between very young siblings. The available articles about introducing a new sibling assumed the older sibling was at least 4 or 5 years old. It was frustrating to read the articles and have most of the suggestions not apply due to how *young* my “older” sibling was. Because of this, I developed strategies to use with my own family, and taught them to others through my Happy Kids classes.

When my youngest child was born, I had four children, aged 6, 4, 2 and 0. We used to say our children were “Six, four, two, and new!” when people asked how old they all were. We had wanted six children, but decided to stop when we had two healthy girls and two healthy boys. This way, every sister had a sister, every brother had a brother, every sister had a brother, and every brother had a sister. Our hands were full!



Developing a strong and loving bond between my children was near the very top of my list of things I wanted to accomplish with my children. I made a decision before they were born that I would never tolerate cruelty or unkindness between them. I knew this did not mean there would never be cruelty or unkindness. It meant I would never let it go unnoticed without an appropriate consequence. I wanted them to grow in love for each other, even as they navigated all of the annoyances of having a sibling. This was my mission, a mission that developed out of my own childhood experience.

While growing up, my brother would hit me and throw things at me, push me down, and kick me when we would fight. My mother had to work a lot to support us on her own, and was naturally often very tired. When I was nine, she married someone who was not super interested in having step-children. She became distracted by her new marriage and my brother and I were largely unsupervised in the afternoons and evenings. When my brother was angry, he lashed out at me physically. This was most often unpunished and difficult for me to grow up with. It's interesting because we were, and still are, very close. I think of it like when two ducks are swimming in a pond. It's peaceful, then all of a sudden, they scuffle. Then, just as quickly, like “water off a duck's back,” they shake it off and go back to swimming peacefully. That's kind of how it was for us. We clung to each other and were the best of friends in play, but then when we would scuffle, he was violent. Luckily, we are now both close with our mom and have been able to work through and move past that time.

As adults, my brother and I have always lived within a few miles of each other. Since each of our parents moved to other cities more than 20 years ago, I can't think of a family member, aside from my own children, whom I feel more connected to. I would do anything for him, and him for me. That is our bond, the bond we created in our chaotic youth. The fact that he hurt me as a child was not only difficult for me, but for him as well. Perhaps not as much then, because he was just reacting to his own inner pain, but definitely once he became an adult. I will always remember the day he apologized to me for how he treated me in childhood. It is so sad to me, still, that he had to carry that burden. I accepted his apology but naturally jumped right into my most unwavering and fervent wish that I've always held for him—to take away his pain. I told him that I didn't ever think of it and that he shouldn't worry about it—we were both children, doing the best we could given the circumstances.

Making your own family is an opportunity to create something that is a unique reflection of your life experiences and dreams. Rather than letting family patterns unconsciously repeat themselves, you can be conscious and proactive about it. You can take the great experiences you've had, as well as the ones that were “less-than,” and proactively create the types of family relationships you want to have for yourself, as well as with and between your children. Your children and unborn children are counting on you to do this.

Ideas for introducing a new baby to your baby or toddler.

For when the older sibling is aged 1 to 3 years at the time of the baby's birth.

• Bassinet surprises and the ultimate surprise!

Prepare and place the bassinet you plan to use for your new baby in the family room, or other room where most of the guests who come to your home go. If you don't have a bassinet, or didn't use one for your first child, get one. If you sew, you can make a skirt and/or blankets for it. (If you don't sew, go to the store with your baby or toddler and buy stuff). As you make the skirt and blankets, tell your child that what you are making is for the new baby. Don't worry that your baby or toddler doesn't understand what you are saying, just say it. Your child will feel the energy of your words and see what you are doing. Monkey see, monkey do. When you are finished, ask your child to put the items in or near the bassinet. Say, "The baby is going to love this blanket. This blanket is going to keep our baby so warm. You can put the blanket on our baby when s/he gets here." If your toddler 'helped' you make the blanket, say, "Thank you for helping me make this blanket for our new baby."

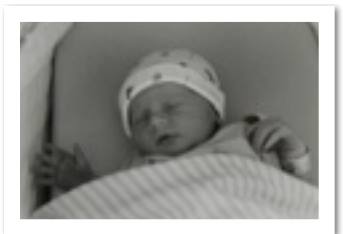
Toward the end of pregnancy, start putting small toys and notes into the bassinet. If you have more than one child, put a toy or note in for each child, or get a group treat. Cover the top of the bassinet with the blanket after you put the toy(s) or note(s) in. When your child sees the blanket covering the bassinet, encourage him or her to look inside. Let your child find the toy and/or note. Read the note to your child.

The note might say: (insert your child's name on the blank)

"_____, I love you. I want to snuggle you. Love, Baby."

"_____, I can't wait to cuddle with you. I hope you like me. Love, Baby."

"_____, you are going to be a fun brother/sister. I can already tell. Love, Baby."



Thomas Day, 17 hours old, home in his bassinet, ready to be found!

Save these notes in your older child's special box or put it on their treasure shelf. If your unborn child has a pregnancy nick name, or if you know the sex of your baby and have named him or her, use that name instead of "Baby" when you sign the note. We gave all of our children pregnancy names that came from some silly or special things that happened near the time we found out we were expecting (Sweet Pea, Pumpkin Pie, T-Man, and Blueberry). We referred to our children by their special names throughout pregnancy. Now, 20 years later, they still call each other those at times, and as parents, we use them frequently as a strong term of endearment.

Put a note and/or small treasure into the bassinet nearly every day, for the last few weeks of pregnancy. These can be a box of animal crackers, a small toy, a ball, or any other little thing you think our child will like. Your child will get used to looking at the bassinet to see if the blanket is on top, indicating there is something special inside. You can do it at the same time every day, or randomly.



A few seconds later; Annelise and Mackenzie hold Thomas for the very first time.

When you bring the new baby home, put the baby in the bassinet without your older child(ren) in the room. Hopefully your baby will be fast asleep and settled. You don't want your older child(ren) to think they made the baby cry the very first time they meet. Settle your baby in the bassinet. Cover the top of the bassinet with the blanket again. Invite your child into the room. This time, ask your child, "Do you think there's something special for you in the bassinet today?" Let your child lift the blanket and find their new gift.

Introducing your child to a new baby.

For when the older sibling is aged 4 years or older at the time of the baby's birth.

Introducing your older child to a new baby is similar, yet different, than introducing your younger child to a new baby. As children grow, they will likely have more excitement as well as more concerns about having a new little one in the home. These activities help develop a loving connection between your older child and the new baby, while simultaneously increasing their connection to you and your family as a whole.

• Bassinet surprises and the ultimate surprise!

Be sure to read the previous page because you will want to do the same thing with the bassinet for a child who is 4 and up that you would do with a baby or toddler. Older children of any age will love to find treasures in the bassinet and, eventually, their new baby to love. Of course, there will be less mystery around the notes and prizes because they will know one hundred percent that you placed them in there. But, they will love them, and you, all the same.

You will be sending a powerful message during all the pregnancy hoop-lah that you are still taking time to make them feel special, even with this new baby on the way. Overall, you will be creating a feeling in the home that the birth of a new child is a celebration. It's something we all celebrate *together*. It's a gift for all of us, not just the parents.



• Special Plate



Let your child make a special plate at a paint-your-own ceramics studio and let your child make one for the new baby at the same time. This way, your child will always associate his or her special plate with the coming of his or her sibling. If you don't have a make-your-own ceramics place near you, order a Make-A-Plate kit from <http://www.makit.com/> and do it this way. With Make-A-Plate, you design the plates on special paper, send the papers to them and they send back your beautiful plates! These plastic plates are super fun to make when baby is on the way, as well as over the years. It says to use only their markers (of which you only get a few colors), but you can actually use any type of marker or colored pencil and they still turn out great. Just avoid crayons

because they are messy. We have made these over the years to welcome new seasons, holidays, birthdays, to make a plate for Santa's cookies and another for reindeer treats, to honor the life of someone or an animal that we have loved who passed, and more. Be sure to have your young artists sign them, creating a record of their signatures, and date them. They are lightweight and easy to wash, great for everyday use with kids and a nice, special step above a paper plate.



Introducing your child to a new baby.

For when the older sibling is aged 4 years or older at the time of the baby's birth.

• Choose the baby's name



Naming your baby can take place early on, or after the sonogram (around 20 weeks) if you are wanting to find out the sex of your child. In our home, we name children and pets using a certain system that has become a family tradition. We use baby name books, or, now, the internet, to generate lists of names each of us likes. Each person gets to submit a list of ten names. If your child is 4 or so, help them generate their list. You can find names together, then ask them which ones they like, and write their list for them.

Type up and print out each person's list of preferred names. Put each person's name on the top of their list so everyone knows who picked which names.

If you already have more than one child, be sure everyone is kind in regard to each other's chosen names. This is an opportunity to create kindness between siblings. If someone says, "You picked that name? That's a dumb name!" You can say, "We are all going to be kind. Each of us gets to choose the names we like. Be your best self and say only kind things about the names each of us has chosen." If meanness or competition persists, the child would earn a penalty (See page 23, The Choice Chart, a behavior management system that WORKS.) Post the lists on the refrigerator.

Name the baby by _____	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____

Now, let the fun begin. Everyone can look over the lists. Parents have veto power. This means either parent can veto any name. This usually starts to happen after a few days. Let the names settle in. See which ones you still like and which ones become annoying. Practice saying them, seeing how they feel. Hopefully, you will have chosen a first and middle name before the baby is born. If you know the sex of the baby, you can pick just one. If you don't, it's good to be ready for either.

Name the puppy by _____	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
6.	_____
7.	_____
8.	_____
9.	_____
10.	_____

Once you settle on a name, and it is definite, begin to call the baby by their name, in addition to their pregnancy name. I have found that calling a baby by its name before its born has increased our bonding, both for me and for my children. My first child was the only one we did not know the sex ahead of time. That was super fun. What a surprise! The best ever — like Christmas morning times one million. Yet, it was also fun knowing with the other three and really getting to bond with them with that additional piece of information and the ability to name them ahead of time. Either way has its own magic.

Introducing your child to a new baby.

For when the older sibling is aged 4 years or older at the time of the baby's birth.

Continued

- **Early, private sonogram**

When I was pregnant with my third child, I suspected I might have a boy because I had followed some advice from a friend about how to increase the chances of having a boy (reportedly about a 50-76 percent chance of success!). She had followed her own advice twice with positive results. I had two healthy girls and was open to trying simple things that might increase the chances for a boy.

Around the same time, I heard about a place you could go to have a sonogram that was just for you. This sonogram is not a medical one meant to evaluate the baby's health, but a sonogram that is just for you to enjoy seeing your baby on the monitor and to watch him or her play. Two other benefits of this type of sonogram are that they will look for the baby's gender until they find it (which they will not spend a lot of time doing in most routine sonograms), and you can go in at 15 or 16 weeks, almost a full month before most routine pregnancy sonograms are scheduled. A third benefit—they give you a dvd of the whole experience when you leave, which includes an audio recording of everyone in the room throughout the sonogram.

We decided to take our daughters to the sonogram place so they could “meet” their new sibling, not knowing if it would be a boy or a girl. As soon as the baby came on the screen, tears of joy starting flowing everywhere. The girls were SO excited. They asked many questions about the baby, “What’s that?”, “Where is it?” , “Is that the arm?” and on. The technician pointed out the baby's features and the girls were fascinated by the whole experience, even though they were only 1 and 3 years old. Then the moment came when the technician figured out the gender of our baby. He typed on the screen, “Hi, I’m your new baby . . . ” and he just left the dot, dot, dot there for an elongated pause then wrote in the word “BROTHER!”

We were overjoyed and once again the room burst into laughter and tears. Since he was being named after his grandfather, Thomas Day, we started talking to him with his name. We told him how much we already loved him and how excited we were for him to come out to play with us. Once home, we were able to post the sonogram pictures around our home. When people came over, the girls played the video for them. It never lost its magic and added significantly to their bonding with our new little one.



Thomas waving at us,
15 weeks

Introducing your child to a new baby.

For when the older sibling is aged 4 years or older at the time of the baby's birth.

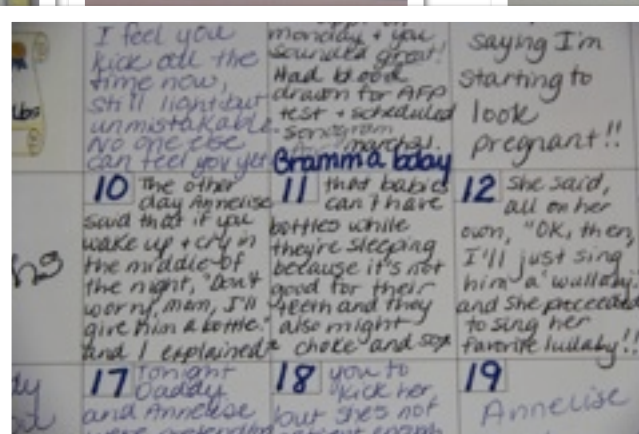
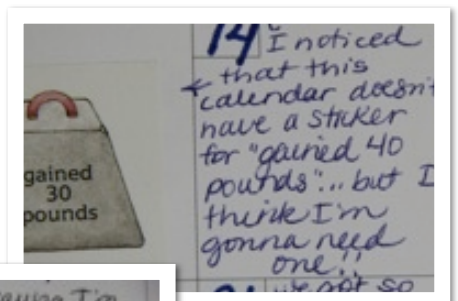
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• Daily writing on calendars

Writing has played a central role in my life since I was about ten years old. It came about as a coping strategy, and has turned out to be a significant gift for myself as an adult, and for my family. I've been able to weave writing throughout my children's lives as well. My strategies and ideas often have some element of writing to them, and introducing a new baby to the family is no exception. Writing on a pregnancy calendar that you post during the pregnancy can be another great way for siblings to bond with their new little one.

I kept these calendars for each of my children, writing a little tidbit each day. You can write pregnancy milestones, ups and downs, the baby's heart rate, and all the usual things you might think of recording. It's also fun to write things your other children say about the baby. I remember when Mackenzie would put a pillow or ball under her shirt and say, "I'm havin' a baby. Hins name is Tom-is. Is a boy baby." These are the types of things you might think you'll never forget, but you do. By writing them on a calendar, and spelling them phonetically to reflect how your child spoke, you can chronicle the subtleties of every day life and the language development of your children.

Now that my kids are big, we pull out the big basket of calendars and go through them together. We literally belly laugh until we have tears streaming from our eyes at the ridiculous, loving, and insightful things they said over the years—things they said to me, to each other, about their view of the world. It only took a minute or so a day to fill a 2-inch box. Creating this habit when you are expecting will help ensure it for a lifetime.



Introducing your child to a new baby.

For when the older sibling is aged 4 years or older at the time of the baby's birth.

Continued

• Recorded Interview

Another great keepsake activity that also helps bond your children is to interview them about the baby. The responses to the questions are sometimes funny, sometimes so loving and unexpected. The answers can be written down and/or recorded on a phone or better camera.

Interview questions for the big brother or sister:

Create a quiet space with each of your children, one at a time, if possible. Ask and record their responses to these questions or questions like these. Be sure to date the interview. Place it in your child's special box.

Why is mommy's tummy big?
Who is in mommy's tummy?
What is the baby doing in there?
When is the baby going to come out?
What are you going to say to the baby when s/he comes out?
What color hair do you think s/he will have? Eyes?
What do you want to do with the baby
when the baby comes out?
Where should we take the baby?
What should we feed the baby?
What are you going to teach the baby?
What do you want to say to the baby?
And other questions that relate specifically
to your child or family.



Kenzie's trying to read a book at the lake while Annelise annoys her.

• Simple personalized version of a Big Brother and Big Sister book

For a couple of my children, I made a quick, personalized version of two adorable books titled I'm a Big Brother and I'm a Big Sister by Joanna Cole. These books can be found on Amazon.com. To make this book, simply gather up or print out some cute pictures of your new baby's big brother or sister. You will also need a picture of your family, some scissors, and a gluestick. To make the personalized book, look at each page, decide what photo fits best to cover up just the faces of the characters in the book with a picture of your own child, children, or family, depending on what's going on in the book. Cut out just your child's face, and affix it with a gluestick over just the head of the character in the book. It looks fun and silly and children just love these books. Don't forget to change the face of the child on the front cover with a picture of your child, too. If you make the book before your new little one arrives, be sure to add his or her pictures to the inside and cover, too, once you have some pictures ready to go.



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

Preface

This section is truly about how to create a family fraternity. Having regular family traditions and language unique to your family, even if forever unwritten, is a key part of creating a beautiful family culture. Everyone wants to belong to something special, something bigger than they are. There are connections you can create for your family within the outside community, but the first and most important community you can develop is the one within your own family. Tweens and teenagers will start to look for this connection outside of your family if it's not strong within your family. If you have created a rich family culture, you are likely to continue to be your child's strongest compass, even throughout the teenage years.

When my children were very small, people would often remark to their dad and I how "horrible" or "difficult" it was going to be once our children would all be teenagers. I've actually had the opposite experience. I'm not saying they have never challenged me or done things I wish they had not. They sure have! But, we share an incredibly close bond that has allowed us to navigate the teenage years in tight-knit, loving and supportive way. They don't shut me out because I am a safe place for them to fall, no matter the circumstance. I expect greatness out of them and I let them know this on a regular basis. I help them see their inner gifts and remind them they are *enough*, so they can play full out in life.

Our family fraternity has been a big part of this. Creating a family fraternity through language and activities is similar to how college fraternities and sororities do this. What's their purpose? Bonding. The purpose is the same for your family. A big part of parenting is teaching kids that they are part of an important family—your family. Important groups share a language, codes, and rituals that identify the group. Your family is no exception! The traditions in this book are a great place to start. In our family, in addition to all of the activities and traditions we enjoy, we also have a whole host of words and phrases that are unique to us. We have named our home, certain rooms in our home, things we do, and have all kinds of little phrases that people who spend time with us will soon begin to pick up on. We have nicknames for each other. We know what our traditions are and when and how we do them and we actively talk about them.

In addition to bigger traditions, our connection can be as simple as everyone murmuring at the end of dinner, "Many hands make light work" which is our way of getting everyone into gear at clean-up time. Or, it could be me saying, "All for one, one for all," which is my way of indicating that if one of them isn't going to be full of good choices during what we are doing, it will have negative consequences for all of them. This helps them help each other make good choices at times when I really need them to cooperate. It could be me saying, "I don't have time for the ER today!" which I say whenever I want them to pay particular attention to safety. This reminds them that if someone gets hurt during what we are doing, all of the fun is going to stop, so be careful and make good choices. Another is FHB, which means "Family holds back." This is said by one of us whenever we have guests over sharing a meal, a gentle reminder that we hold back and let guests serve themselves first. This is because there are a lot of us and if we were to dig in first, certain dishes could quickly become scarce!

When you repeat the same phrases, over and over again, year after year, they become part of your family culture. All you have to do to accomplish this, is to think of fun ways to say things, say it in that fun way, remember that you said it, and say it that way again the next time. And the next. This family culture is the glue that will keep your children close to you as they navigate the years that lead to independence.



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

The Activities

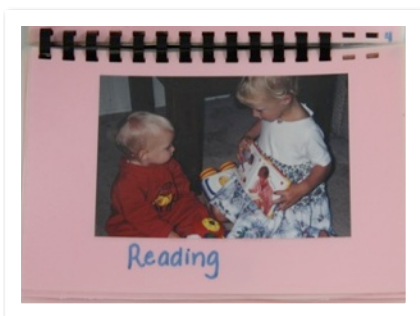
• Zero Tolerance for Violence Policy

As I shared before, having a philosophy of not tolerating any physical expressions of anger between family members in your home is the most important step in bonding your children. Parenting is hard work. It's humbling and exhausting. It can sometimes feel easier to let things go, even if at one point you felt more committed to a goal you had initially set for yourself as a parent. This is one area where you will want to stay strong. It's a "battle" worth picking, so to speak. Again, this does not mean your children will never be unkind to each other or occasionally fight physically, even with your most gallant efforts at bonding and consistent discipline. What it does mean is that you will never "allow it" in the sense of letting it be ok, or seem normal, in your family, any more than you would let it be normal for you and your spouse to hit, push, or kick one another when frustrated or angry.

• Book-making

Making simple books for your children is a wonderful way to bond them while you naturally teach your children to how to read. I started making books for my first daughter when she was about 11 months old. Her first book was filled with pictures of her doing simple things. Each page had only one word, ending in "ing." So, it was "playing", "sleeping", "eating", "loving", etc. At that time, I affixed pictures with a gluestick to construction paper, laminated the pages at a teacher store, and then had the books comb-bound at a copy store. Later, the comb binding switched to spiral binding. These books are still a cherished part of our family, even though the kids are big. They enjoy looking at them and surely if they become parents, their children will enjoy seeing them, too.

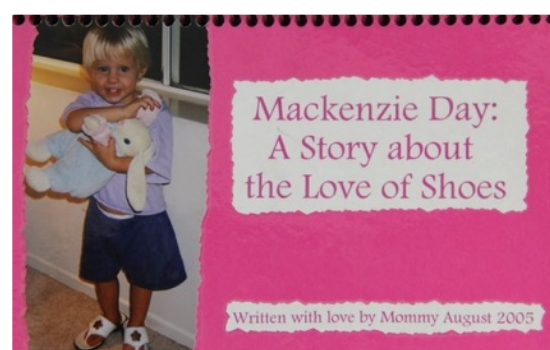
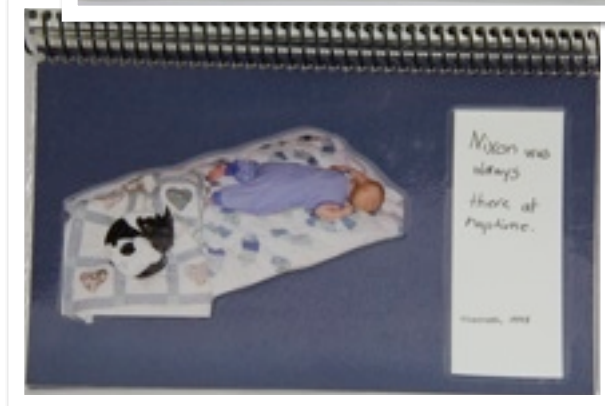
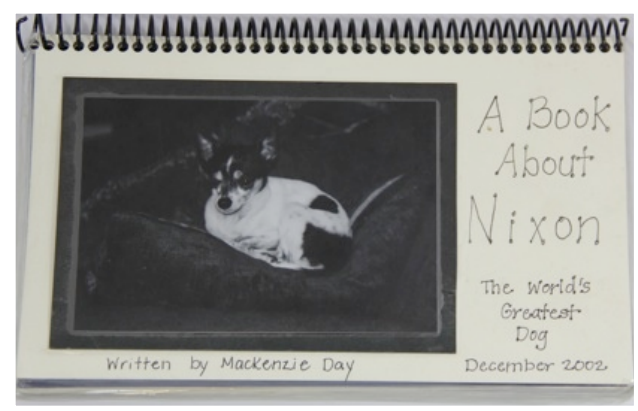
But the real gift was what they did for my children while they were growing. Not only did the books help my children begin reading before they started kindergarten, it helped them build a strong sense of self, and a love for their family and siblings. Laminated books serve a different purpose than the photo albums you can make on your own, or online at Shutterfly or a similar site, in that these books are made for your child to touch and use. If you write them with simple sentences, they become part of creating a literacy-rich environment, in addition to the celebration effect for each child. I make them in the same way for my niece and nephew now, chronicling our fun together and letting them see how special they are to me and my children. Can't wait to make them for my grandchildren. (Well, I can and hopefully WILL wait since all of my children are teenagers right now!)



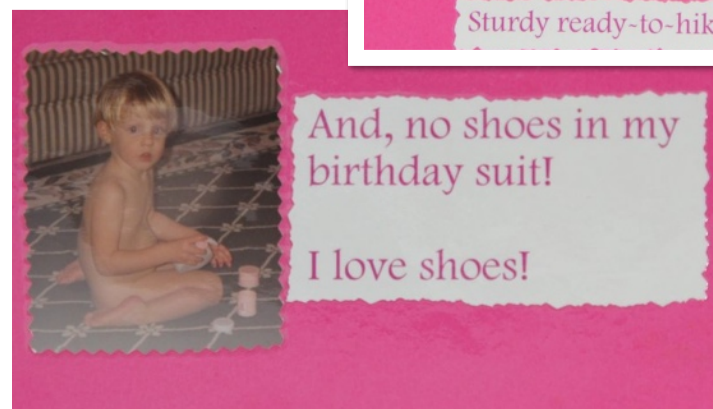
This is Mackenzie's "Hello, Baby" book. I wrote one of these for each of my children before their first birthday. Each simple page has an "ing" word.



This book is about our dog who died suddenly. I read The Tenth Good Thing about Barney by Judith Viorst to my children, and then formatted this book after the eulogy the children in the story are asked to write about their cat, Barney, who dies. Mackenzie wanted to handwrite the pages for this book.



These are from Mackenzie's shoe book. As soon as she became aware of the shoes on her feet, she loved taking them on and off and was always drawn to different types of shoes, unlike me and her sister who have little interest in shoes! She had red cowboy boots, shoes for make-believe, and was fond of taking other people's shoes when they slipped them off!

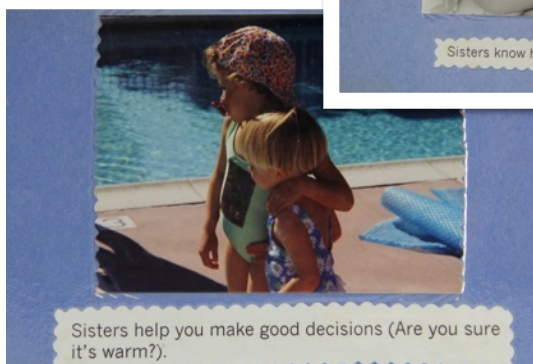
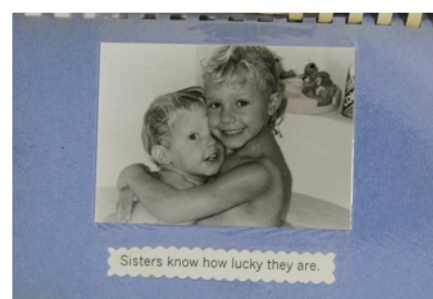
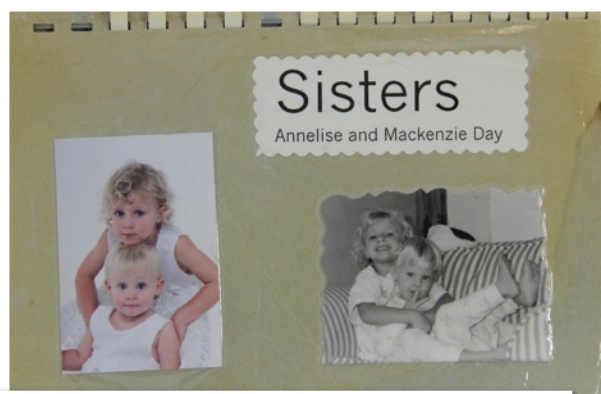




This book is about Thomas' doctor appointment to have his kindergarten shots and physical. It chronicles the doctor visit and his emotions as he gets ready for the big boy experience of starting kindergarten.



Books about siblings are powerful in happy moments and are great to pull out in unhappy moments, too.



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Family Name Song

It's a surprise to most people that you can teach a 2- or 3-year-old "how to spell" by creating a family name song. When my first daughter was 2, I made up a little song with each of our names spelled out within the song. Children learn songs quickly with repetition, beginning around one year and older, younger if they are more verbal. At first, they may not understand all of the words they are singing, similar to how we don't always know the exact words, yet we can sing along with an entire song from the radio.

As each child was born, I just added the new child's spelling to the song. We also sang our dog's name and other words we liked, such as "love" and "family." If desired, specific religious words can be added. In time, children can actually spell the names even when they are not singing the song. We chose multi-syllabic first names because our last name is short. The song made learning how to spell everyone's name easy and fun. The girls' names are only spelled out once each time because they are longer than the other names. You can play with each person's name and see what works. Note: Nixon was our dog's name.

Here's the song we sang:

"A-N-N-E-L-I-S-E, Annelise. A-N-N-E-L-I-S-E, Annelise. M-A-C-K-E-N-Z-I-E, Mackenzie. M-A-C-K-E-N-Z-I-E, Mackenzie. T-H-O-M-A-S, T-H-O-M-A-S, Thomas. T-H-O-M-A-S, T-H-O-M-A-S, Thomas. A-D-D-I-S-O-N, A-D-D-I-S-O-N, Addison. A-D-D-I-S-O-N, A-D-D-I-S-O-N, Addison. M-O-M-M-Y, M-O-M-M-Y, Mommy. M-O-M-M-Y, M-O-M-M-Y, Mommy. D-A-D-D-Y, D-A-D-D-Y, Daddy. D-A-D-D-Y, D-A-D-D-Y, Daddy. N-I-X-O-N, N-I-X-O-N, Nixon. N-I-X-O-N, N-I-X-O-N, Nixon. L-O-V-E, L-O-V-E, Love. L-O-V-E, L-O-V-E, Love. F-A-M-I-L-Y, F-A-M-I-L-Y, Family. F-A-M-I-L-Y, F-A-M-I-L-Y, family!!

To hear a free mp3 of this song being sung to tune, click on the following url, or type it into your browser: <http://youtu.be/DKGVxHAtjA8>

• Personalized songs, nursery rhymes, singable books, and lullabies

Another fun thing to do that builds phonemic awareness, which is part of the reading readiness foundation, in addition to bonding your children, is to sing songs to them nightly. I used to spend 10 or 15 minutes singing to each of my children when I would put them to bed at night as I touched their face and hair. (Now, they tuck me in, rub me, and tell me to go to sleep, hehe.)

I taught them all of the traditional nursery rhymes, which are a wonderful, natural way to build phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and manipulate rhyme). This skill is one key to reading success and is best built from birth through song and rhyme, rather than having to remediate it before a child enters school.



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Continued: Personalized songs, nursery rhymes, singable books, and lullabies

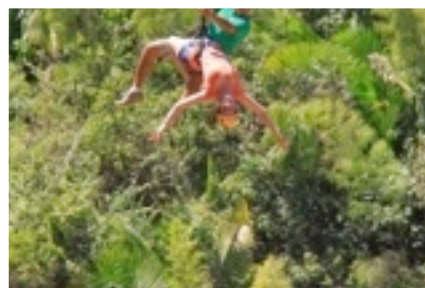
Some books are easy to sing, such as Time for Bed by Mem Fox, and I Love You As Much by Laura Melmed. With each of these books, I insert my child's name on the last page. Or, I insert a collective word for all of my children, such as "love buckets" or "boomchkins." Raffi and many other artists have wonderful songs for children. I do not have a great singing voice (although when Addison once told me I should try out for American Idol, I realized why some of the people who audition end up there), yet I found that my children absolutely loved this special time. I wrote an individual lullaby for each of my children, as well. Even now, sometimes my daughters will ask me to sing their individual songs to them. Four years ago when my oldest son was 12, I was rubbing his shoulders as he was falling to sleep, but I wasn't singing and he kind of mumbled "Mom, can you sing?" I acted like it was no big deal and started singing, but inside I was doing cartwheels, so happy he was not "too old" for our tradition. I can't say the boys ask anymore, but sometimes I can still bribe them to let me sing by offering an extended foot or back rub as they fall asleep.

• Wall of Fame

The Wall of Fame is a wall in your home that is dedicated to one single, large photo (between 8X10 to 24X36, depending on how much room you have to hang them) of each family member at a peak moment. We like to hang these in a central room, play room, or hallway where most people go. It could be a picture of the person airborne while playing a sport, reeling in a fish, laughing, or otherwise immersed or engaged deeply in something. It's a picture of each family member "in the zone."

This wall helps us celebrate each other as individuals. It's also a wall where each of us is at our best, being our best selves. It's a reminder that even at low moments, there is an amazing person in each one of us, our most authentic self, which helps us hold high visions for ourselves and for one another.

Mackenzie 2013



Annelise 2009



Thomas 2013



Addison 2005



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Greetings and Salutations

Teaching children how to say hello and goodbye, and good morning and goodnight, to each other, and then consistently having them do it, is a powerful way to build respect and love between your children. It can seem like a simple thing that shouldn't matter much, but it does. When children are going to bed, you can establish a family habit of everyone saying goodnight to each other, rather than just going off to bed on their own. In the morning, upon first greeting, it's nice to have siblings acknowledge each other and ask how they slept, etc. Once this habit is established, it will take on a life of its own. Now that my kids are all teens, I will often find them snuggling on the couch together when they wake up, or they gather into my bed one by one. They might talk about dreams they had, or about what they are going to do that day, or about nothing. Similarly, when the kids come home from school, and especially when they come home from a trip to Gramma's that not everyone got to go on, they can greet each other with kind words and hugs.

Saying hello and goodbye is part of basic manners with acquaintances and friends, and certainly should be extended to the members of a family. I can remember a time when we picked up my oldest daughter, then 9, at the airport gate when she was returning from a visit with my mom. Any onlooker would have thought she had been gone for years, rather than just a few days. She was missed and, even in an airport, her sister and brothers couldn't help but show it.



• Family Member Charades

If you have created a positive, generally uplifting environment in your home, this game can be great fun. If your kids are prone to unkindness, perhaps implement some of the activities and strategies in this book for a while before playing this game. This game of charades involves acting out different members of the family for everyone to guess. Acting out the pets is great fun, too! It's fairly rapid-fire as the charades are often guessed rather quickly. You can make them last longer by thinking of more subtle things to act out about a family member. You can act out physical traits, personality traits, habits, favorite things to do, skills, things they did in the past, goals they have, you name it. Set the ground rules before you start. The simple rules of speaking kindly and cooperating during the game should suffice, and can serve as a gentle reminder if anyone forgets or gets carried away. Get ready for a lot of laughter and love during this family game. It's also fun to play with extended family members and other families with whom you are close.

Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• The Myth of Taking Turns

It might sound counter-intuitive to think that not making your children take turns with their toys while they are engaged in play, and not requiring them share their most special things with their siblings, would be a way to bond sibs, but it is. Look for an upcoming video at www.Daychild.org that fully covers these topics between siblings and other children with whom your child interacts.

• Bend the Rules

(My 19-year-old daughter, Mackenzie, wanted this part added after she proofed this book.)

“Bending the rules” means simply staying present with your children as you parent and bending the rules when it is in the name of sibling love or bonding. This could mean letting kids who have been “put to sleep” stay up a little bit if they are talking quietly or singing together, even after you’ve admonished them to stop and go to sleep. It’s realizing that the benefits of the experience they are having could be greater than the need you have for them to follow your direction at that particular moment.

It could mean letting kids eat something they might not normally eat, if they perhaps made it together. For example, one time I came into the kitchen to find that my children had made what basically amounted to a blender full of all of the sugar-based items we had in our home that day. Because they were having so much fun together, I let them eat it. I did this despite the fact that it would likely spoil their dinner and that they hadn’t asked permission to use the blender (they were young). I also chose to hide my dissatisfaction at the huge mess they had made of the kitchen.



Another time they all begged to go out in the snow (we lived in an area where it would snow for just one day, every few years, to the degree that it would melt before it hit the ground). Even though they were all in clean pajamas, ready for bed, and had wet hair from their baths, I let them go out into it, knowing I had just opened up a whole boatload of additional work for myself. This is a night they still remember.



Sometimes siblings will get good ideas, or ideas they think are good that you might think are “not so good,” and it is helpful to evaluate them on an individual basis on the chance that the idea somehow creates a positive and bonding experience between your children.

Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

- **Help your children create a physical, symbolic anchor between them and show them how and when to use it.**

When my kids were littler, I used to want to bottle the hours they were playing and getting along, thick as thieves, so that I could pour some of it back on them when they were at odds.

I thought, “How can I get them to tap into this connected feeling when they are disconnected?” I decided to teach each pair of siblings something they could do to connect their bodies with their emotions—a physical/emotional anchor. The anchor would be a simple gesture they would do with each other that involved some form of physical touch. For example, they could put all of their hands together in a certain way, or each place their hands on the other’s shoulders, or hug in a certain way. They would be able to use this anchor when they were not getting along, as a way to shift themselves to a new space.



Arguments were usually between the boys and between the girls. The boys and girls rarely fought with each other. My two boys are 20 months apart, and the girls are 22 months apart. They have spent all of their time from birth together, with the exception of when they started school and were in class 6 hours per day. That’s a lot of time! They played and played, in pairs, in threes, and with all four, and are all very bonded.

Disagreements naturally occur when you spend large quantities of time with another person. It’s funny that we sometimes expect siblings to get along, but don’t acknowledge that if we, as adults, spent that much time with one person (not of our choosing, by the way), we would get into scuffles, too! Teaching your kids tools they can use to navigate this very intimate relationship is important. The anchor turned out to be a lot of fun.

Although some anchors fell away (because that sibling pair rarely disagreed), the few that were needed really did the trick. As they entered the tween years, they had all learned how to take space from each other and help themselves feel better when they needed a break, whether they did the anchor or not. I call the ability to instinctively notice when space is needed, and then to give the needed space without having to talk about it, “navigating space”. It’s one key to successful relationships, including marriage, friendships, and professional relationships. You can create an anchor with any person you spend a lot of time with. I will write this scenario for kids so you can try it with yours.



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Continued: Creating an anchor between two people.

—Pay a lot of attention to when your children are getting along and when they are not. What are the factors? Length of play? Location of play? A particular activity? Is one child the instigator? Who is the peacemaker? It's important to be aware of the circumstances of both scenarios. Do this for a few weeks.

—Pick a time during or just after two of your children have been getting along and cooperating with each other. It should be a time when they are both in their very best moods. You may have to wait for this time. Be sure to wait—it is best if they are in a very positive, connected, synergistic state when the anchor is created.

—Choose two happy children to anchor. Then say, "Remember this morning when you guys were fighting over who got to sit where at the table, and you were both starting to get mad and were pushing over the seat? Tell me what was going on then. How did that feel?" Let your children share how that felt. (You can skip that step if you think bringing it up will cause a new fight). Next, you can say, "Can you remember a few days ago when you were making the secret passageway in the backyard? You were out there for a few hours. I noticed how you both worked together and negotiated everything beautifully. You were really cooperating. How did that feel?" Let your kids talk about what it was like when they were getting along.



—Now you can introduce the idea of an anchor to your children. Let them know it is a tool that can help two people shift their negative thought patterns when they start to feel irritated or uncooperative. Tell them it's a good way to remember what really matters and to remind us that we are here to have fun together. Let them know it will be up to them to use it.

Tell them the rule is that if one person asks to anchor, the other person should agree to do it. And, let them know that you will ask them to anchor sometimes, and you expect them to cooperate. Tell them they are going to make the anchor and to get ready for some fun.

—Have your children sit or stand, looking at one another. You can say something like this, "I made you so we could have a loving family to play and share with. I want us to live in a home where we are safe to learn and grow. I want everyone here to feel they can make mistakes and still be loved just the same. I want the two of you to know that you will know each other longer than any other person you will know in your life. Longer than you will know me, longer than you will know someone you might get married to. The person standing in front of you is someone for you to love and play with your whole life through."



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family. In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

Continued: Creating an anchor between two people.

—Now, ask them to think of something physical they can do to connect. Let them try a few different things. My kids came up with all kinds of anchors, including putting palms together horizontally in front of them (one with palms up, the other palms down), crossing their forearms then holding hands, placing one of each of their hands on the heart of the other person with their other hand on the hand of the other person that is on their heart, placing hands on each other's shoulders, and on. This physical gesture is the actual "anchor".

—Once they have an anchor, have them practice it a few times to solidify it.



2005

—At first, the kids will just anchor to have fun with it. That's ok because it helps them to remember the tool. If they start to have a disagreement, you can say, "Why don't you anchor and see if you can start cooperating?" Depending on the ages and personalities of your children, they may easily do the anchor on their own. Others will need more guidance from you. If your children, or one child, is resistant to using the anchor, you can push it a little by saying, "You can do the anchor, or you can have a penalty. It's your choice. I think you'll feel better if you put your energy into making this better rather than into being right." (See page 23, The Choice Chart, to learn about penalties.) You'll have to gauge the situation to determine

whether or not you should force the anchor. You don't want to create a negativity toward it, but you also want them to know if they don't use their tool, there may be another, less desired outcome to the situation.

—If your children need some space from each other before they anchor, help them create that. Sometimes in life we need a respite. Once they have had some time apart, they can anchor. Be sure to separately and privately praise each child a little later for their willingness to anchor and the engagement they showed in making your family a fun place to be.

Anchoring is a simple, but powerful tool you can put in your kids' toolbox. They can use it with a best friend, and a spouse when they are grown. They can use it with you. You can use it with your partner or spouse. It's for any two people who really want to be in each other's lives, but sometimes need to be reminded of the love and fun they share.



2013



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Daychild Family Calendar (with sibling compliments)

For many years, I made a family calendar each month because there simply was not one available on the market that had big enough boxes for real family life. The calendar has a column for each person, and a couple of extra columns to write your planned meals, relatives' birthdays, and other household information you want to keep track of, such as trash day, housekeeping day, etc. I made it out of lined cardstock from a teacher store each month. It measured about 30" X 36". The calendar shows up in this sibling bonding book because it can be used as yet another way for family members to share the love.

After a date has passed, that box becomes "free" for someone to write a compliment to another family member in it. To start this tradition, get the calendar and fill it out with everyone's appointments, events, and similar time-certain activities (a time-certain activity is an activity where you or your child must be somewhere at a certain time). Add "all family" events by writing the event bigger, going across all of your boxes for that day, such as "Day at the Lake" or whatever you have planned. Make it special.

Embellish the box for each of your birthdays when those come up. You can also decorate the calendar with stickers. Children can decorate around the top and the bottom of the calendar if you'd like, but I didn't usually let them write on the calendar because it can get out of hand if you have a lot of children.

Post the calendar in GCS (Grand Central Station: this is typically the kitchen of a house, but may be a different area for you). It can go on the fridge, on a pantry door, an open wall space, anywhere that is easy for everyone to see and accessible. If you hang it where it is not easily seen, you may not use it as much and children will rarely end up looking at it because they will not seek it out the way you would.

After a few days of the month have passed, start writing compliments to your family members in the past boxes. You can write simple things you notice about them. "You make my heart go pitter-pat!" You can write habits you are wanting them to develop. "You cleaned up your room before school today!" or something you want to say to them for the day, "Make today great! I can't wait to play Apples to Apples with you tonight!"



Quietly encourage your children to write in each other's boxes as well. This is an activity that will take on a life of its own once you get started. If family members stop writing compliments when life gets full, simple modeling and reminders usually do the trick.

Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Birthday Person Compliments

We have a birthday tradition in our family that is very simple and very special that increases the love and bonding between siblings. You can start this with your boomchkins when they are 3 or 4, depending on how verbal they are. For starters (this is not the sibling bonding part), the birthday person gets to pick what they want for dinner. It can be any combination of their favorite items that you make, even if they are not paired in way they would normally be. For example, someone might request lemon chicken with snow peas along with 4-cheese macaroni and cheese, two things you might not usually make on the same night. But, it's their night. Also, since the kids usually only get milk or water for dinner, they also get to request a special drink, such as sparkling cider, or a specialty mocktail of their favorite juices mixed with Sprite, served in pretty glasses.

After we eat the dinner and the person opens their presents, we do birthday compliments. Each person at the table says nice things about the birthday person. Teaching children how to compliment without being cliché is an important relationship skill, so the only rule on this is that they do not speak only in clichés. For example, instead of saying, "You are really great," they would say, "You always think about other people and ask them how you can help them. This makes our family work better." or "Your stories are so funny. When you talk about what happens at school, I always crack up because of how you tell the story."

Each person will usually talk about the birthday person for at least a minute, saying what they mean to them as well, and ending with I love you or something similar. It's great to hear siblings say, "Even though you annoy me sometimes and we fight sometimes, I love you more than anything." Eye contact is required between the speaker and the birthday person. It gets everyone out of their comfort zone and into the love zone.

You can teach children how to compliment each other and others in this way primarily by doing it yourself and also through direct instruction. For example, modeling to them the difference between a cliché compliment and a specific compliment. Kids are smart, they get it quickly, but only if you require it. We do the birthday compliments even if other people are at the birthday dinner, such as their aunt and uncle, grandparents, or other friends. Everyone at the table has to give a compliment. Sometimes I do birthday dinners for my children's closest, long-time friends and we will also do the compliments for them. They love it! Basically guests and relatives know that if it's someone's birthday at our house, they are going to be giving a compliment. I always give mine last because it is usually longer and I end up teary-eyed as I tell things about my child and share a story or two about how adorable they are.



Thomas, 16, receiving his birthday compliments at his special dinner this year while we were on vacation. Addison wrote his into a card he made by folding a paper in half.

Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Continued: Birthday Person Compliments

One year, it was Thomas' birthday and there were several other relatives there and we kept saying we need to do the compliments but somehow by the end, everything was cleared from the table, everyone got up, and we had neglected to do them. Later that night, Thomas seemed off and when I asked what was wrong he said, "It's nothing." When I pressed, he said, "We didn't do the birthday compliments." My heart cracked and I felt so bad! It was the first time we had forgotten, and he mentioned that fact as well. I apologized and said we would do them at dinner the next night (although that would never be the same). As sad as I felt that we had ended up forgetting, his reaction solidified the importance of this simple tradition in our family and has helped us to not forget since.

• Family Trophy

The family trophy is an easy, powerful every day dinnertime tradition that binds children like Gorilla Glue. Little children and teenagers alike love this tradition. Use a trophy from someone's old collection, a past soccer season, a thrift store, or get one from ebay. If you want, make a new name plate for the trophy by writing the names of each family member on a piece of heavy paper and gluing it over the old plate, or have a special trophy custom made.

Begin the tradition by choosing one person who wins the trophy for that day. We usually give the trophy just as everyone is finished eating. The trophy can be given for any reason, large or small. The recipient might have won a major award, achieved a certain grade, accomplished a goal, was a helpful part of the family, said or did something nice, or used courage in some way. When you set the table, the trophy goes in front of the person who got the trophy *the night before*. Last night's recipient gets to give the trophy tonight.

The person who is giving the trophy tells who gets the trophy this night and why. The person hands it to the new winner and everyone can clap. This fosters sibling love when they give it to one another and the reasons they share for giving it will amaze and delight you. Everyone loves to be a winner—especially in the eyes of their family.

Our Family Trophy tradition has taken on a life of its own over the past five years. The recipient gives an acceptance speech that mirrors the academy award speeches given by actors. It's canned now, we all say the same thing. The winner says "hi" to mom with an over-the-top wave, bites the trophy to "make sure it's made of real gold," asks the audience to send Nikes to the sherpas in Tibet, thanks a long list of people, and then takes the trophy and "runs" with it outside, holding it high up in the air, saying (actually, yelling), "I won, I won! I won the trophy!" It's very, very silly, and super, oober fun. Who knows what the neighbors think. All I know for sure is that my children will never forget that we gave a family trophy at dinner.

Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• Storytelling

Many hysterical things happen in a life with children. Whether you consider yourself someone who has a storytelling gift or this would be a stretch for you, I would encourage you to consider honing this craft. Jot down on a smartphone notepad or journal the funny little things that happen in your life with the kids. These aren't the little things they say that you might write on the daily calendar, but a little bit longer story about something funny that happens in the family. Since I keep a family journal for them, I sometimes write the funny thing out in a simple comic.

I haven't practiced drawing, so it's full of stick figures and simple landscape, along with the needed dialog. Another fun thing to do is to think of a way to tell each child's birth story that is interesting and has some funny elements. Sharing these stories again and again at family dinners and holidays helps bond siblings because they see that you have strong memories and feelings for each of them. It decreases competition when they see that you have a birth story, and other stories, unique to each of them.

At dinner or family gatherings sometimes my kids will say, "Tell the Waffle Story!" which is about some hilarium that happened when Addison was coming off of anesthesia after dental crown surgery when he was three-years-old. Or, they will say, "Tell about when the nurse told you to go back to bed and call in the morning and Mackenzie was born an hour and half later!" Just make sure you have stories about each of your children so no one is left out. I took the time to remember the small details of these happenings and add special voices and great exuberance to the telling of certain parts. These are stories the children love to hear again and again. Now that my kids are older, they are becoming adept at telling and retelling the new family stories we are still creating every day.



Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

• The Love Languages

Gary Chapman wrote a very popular book for couples called The 5 Love Languages. Exploring the love languages of each family member can bring out a good deal more of the love that family members feel for one another. I have done this work with my children and it has been a gift. You can go to his website at www.5lovelanguages.com to check it out.

• Pillow Journals

Pillow journals are something that can be shared from parent to child, sibling to sibling, or child to friend. It is simply a book that is passed back and forth, between two people (or more if you want to set it up that way), with short letters, drawings, pictures, questions, and similar things. One person can start it by getting a composition book, decorating a page or two, then putting it on the pillow of the person they want to do it with. The other person can take a few days or a week or longer to respond with their pages. They just put it back on the pillow of the other person when they have it ready.

This is fun because you never know when you're going to get it back, or what is going to be in it. It's just a little treat to look forward to. You walk in your room, it's there on your pillow, and then you have a big smile on your face. I've kept the ones I've done with the kids over the years. They love looking back on what they wrote, what was on their mind, and how I responded. Just another little time capsule of them. You can also send these back and forth in the mail with friends and relatives.

This is something I do with my best girlfriend who lives in another city. She has four children, too, and we have been besties since the first day of 6th grade, over 30 years ago! We share our thoughts, hopes, and musings. It's a lot of fun. We play password, affix pictures, and share things that make us think in new ways. To get this tradition started between siblings, buy composition books, colored pencils, and markers and see who wants to start. When done between siblings, it creates a quiet connection they can always feel.



• Alone time with each child

Once when Addison was making a Father's Day gift in the third grade, Addison was asked to think of things he liked to do with his dad. He told the teacher he could not think of anything. The teacher and I are friends so she shared this with me and she was shocked because she knew his dad well. I was shocked! My kids' dad spends more time with them than almost any father I know! He took 6 weeks off every time I had a baby, makes it a priority to leave work at a reasonable time each day (advice given to him when he was 19 by his first boss, whom he respected greatly), doesn't work on things at home, etc.

Activities to make your children fall in love with each other and your family.

In order, somewhat, from ages birth to adult.

Continued

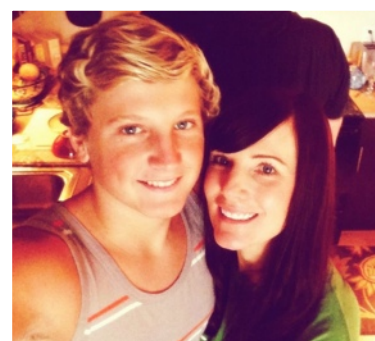
• Continued: Alone time with each child

I decided to ask Addison why he said that to the teacher. His response was, “Oh, I just couldn’t think of things we do by ourselves.” I called his dad to share this and it was a wake-up call to both of us. All of these great family activities we were creating were not registering for our son in terms of time spent “with him.” Addison was not counting all of the low-key family time they shared, let alone his dad taking him golfing, swimming, to the beach, on many vacations, having great family dinners and game nights—you name it—because all of the other children were there, too. Even though we both knew we should always prioritize alone time for each child, it was something we were not consciously doing as much as we should be.

After that, we started working more of it into our schedules. It can be a trick to create significant amounts of alone time with each child when you have even two kids, let alone four. Also, when spending time alone with each child, we started saying out loud to the child, “It’s so great to have this time alone with you,” so they would know we were making this effort, that it was important to us. I started taking just one child to the grocery store and similar places, as well as asking one child to help me when I did things outside, whether a little chore or fun, and pointed out the fact that I wanted to go “with just them.” These little comments and activities helped each child to feel they were getting more time alone with each of us.

Now that my children are older, I find I get a lot of alone time with each. Two of them have moved out, but are nearby, so when they come over during the day, it’s just two of us together. Or, we go to lunch, or have mani/pedis. Mackenzie and I sometimes spend a day just running our errands together. It takes a little longer than doing it alone, but we always end up creating at least one hilarious memory. On the weekends, one of the boys is often invited to something, which gives me time alone with my other son.

So, while in some ways it’s hard having kids become independent, gradually spending more time out of the house, it does provide the added benefit of making alone time with one child easier to come by. I suspect Addison will get the most, since he is youngest and I will have a couple of years alone with him after Thomas starts college. My oldest, Annelise, sometimes jokes, “I used to be the only child! Why did you have to make all these other people? It was already perfect!” Then they all tackle her.



Alone time for
Thomas and me

How does alone time relate to the sibling bond? While the child or children who are left behind may not like it at the moment, they see, with their eyes, that you value the time you are spending with this child alone, and with them as well when it is their turn. It decreases competition because children see you making equal effort toward each of them, even if the alone time looks a little bit different for each.

A few additional thoughts on ways to eliminate or decrease competition in your family.

- Think about which activities in this book speak to you. Try some of them out and use them as inspiration for more great ideas unique to your family.
- Remember that every child thinks of him or herself as an only child. Although you know that you have significantly more work to do and more you want and need to give to everyone with the birth of each child, to them, they are still the only child. It's beautiful to make them feel this way whenever possible.
- Time starts now. If you haven't done much to bond your children, it's not too late, no matter how old they are. I have seen miraculous transformations within families with tweens and older children, when these activities are implemented. Take baby steps and just start. Don't "should" on yourself or feel bad about missed opportunities. It's worth repeating: Time starts now.
- Don't encourage the notion of "fairness" with children. Help your child gain a strong inner compass by focusing on him or herself—their own life experience. When they start comparing something they received, or something they did or didn't get to do, stop them in their tracks. Allowing your child to "scorecard" every treat or every experience their sibling or another child receives is a disservice to them. Doing this can cause your child to develop an outer locus of control. This means their "happiness" is more heavily affected by situations and people around them, rather than their own experiences and sense of themselves. Help your children feel peaceful and calm, enjoying their life, by continuously reminding them to be grateful for their own gifts and experiences. Let them know that the flow of abundance in the world shows itself in different ways, at different times. Let them know that if they focus on being their best self and share that with others, good things will come to them, too—at just the right time.
- Notice where you might be competitive or create a "lack" mentality within the family. Work to become aware of and release these mindsets or behaviors.
- If your kids have had a fairly negative experience together so far, don't expect immediate results. Start now and stay the course. A family I coached more than five years ago had two girls, then aged 7 and 9, who were quite cruel to each other. They would put each other down verbally in ways that I had never quite imagined before meeting them. Sometimes they would even write mean things about each other on paper and post them around the house. Through the language and teachings in this book, and specific work with the parents, the girls were able to shift and see the potential of their relationship. I also helped them see how their actions affected each of them as individuals. After this work together, they gradually began to compliment each other on achievements, quell jealousies as they came up, and overall have become major cheerleaders for one another. Dad and Mom were relieved and overjoyed to see them start doing most things together, which included lots of physical affection, something that was completely absent before.
- Have fun! Play full out. This is your chance to be alive with the children who picked you to be their parent.



The Choice Chart: A behavior management system that WORKS. Why you might use it. How to get it.

I developed the Choice Chart behavior management system when my children were 3, 5, 7, and 9 because I needed something that would work with any child, for any type of behavior needing redirection, no matter where we were. It was a tall order to fill. I had been a classroom teacher and had developed rules and strategies effective for that setting. I had read books and tried different methods for home, from “time out” to “counting from 1 to 3,” you name it. None of these methods did it all and often created big inconsistencies and mediocre results. The Choice Chart came together over a one-year period to become a complete system that truly covers any type of behavior. It can also be used in a classroom with a few simple modifications. It provides consistent consequences and outcomes for all children in the family. I used the system with my own children for about 10 years. Once my children were 13, 15, 17, and 19, it fell away because I didn’t need a system anymore. The kids listen, behave and are kind. If we get annoyed with each other, we just take space. If they need a consequence, it usually results in the loss of their phone or some other privilege, but that hasn’t happened in a long time.

Over the years, I have taught the Choice Chart to well over 700 families, both through my private coaching practice as well as through the Happy Kids classes I present. When families implement it fully, it works well. Sometimes they make modifications to make it work better for them. Sometimes families make modifications that detract from key elements, and then it does not work so well. I recommend that folks implement it “by the book” at first, and make modifications if needed. It works for families that are having a lot of fun already, as well as for families who are not having much fun at all. It adds a consistency that few families enjoy without it. Children love it, too. One time I stopped using it for a couple of months while we were in the process of moving. After a bit, the kids were saying, “Get the Choice Chart!” and “When can we start the Choice Chart again?” Kids love it because it creates a peaceful calm and security in the home by removing mystery from discipline. It creates a quiet calm and stability in the home. Parents who use the system have shared time and time again that they have had the same experience.

Unique elements of the Choice Chart:

- It works for children aged 3 to 18, or anyone under your roof. You don’t have to use one method, then switch to another method as your children get older. It just keeps working.
- It’s based on the Daychild philosophy which is that we treat others with the same level of respect, love, forgiveness, and compassion that we treat ourselves. Everything in Daychild is designed to create children with a strong, yet quiet confidence that originates from a solid inner compass of integrity. Children are often difficult and annoying as they are growing up! They are supposed to be! The Choice Chart is a tool for reducing those behaviors while naturally developing the aforementioned qualities in your children.
- Like everything in Daychild, it is designed at every turn to save your parental energy for loving and playing with your children, rather than disciplining your children. This is because most parents spend inordinate amounts of unnecessary energy disciplining their children, and not nearly enough time having fun with them, or loving on their partner, simply because they are exhausted by their own discipline methods.
- The methods and consequences in the Choice Chart system mirror real life. With everything I teach, I ask, “Where is the mirror to real life?” By “real life,” I mean life and how it actually operates once a child is on their own, without you there to guide and buffer at every turn. I find the mirror, and teach accordingly. If it doesn’t mirror real life, it won’t stick. Or, it will be limited in some way. When you find the mirror to real life, you create lifelong learning.

How to get it

The Choice Chart video will be available soon at

www.Daychild.org

The video and its accompanying ebook will have all of the information you need to get started right away.