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To improve your chances of parental success The Art of Brilliance team has compiled 10 parenting rules gleaned from the science of positive emotions ...

🧠 Rule #1: Celebrate what you want to see more of

The modern take is that you should be helping your child nurture a growth mindset. Coercive behaviour (punishment and pointing out what's wrong) activates a behavioural inhibition system where kids stick to what they know to be safe. Over time, this leads to a fixed mindset and your child becomes focused on not making mistakes.

If you stop and think about it, mistakes are a fabulous learning opportunity.

If you mix in a healthy dose of positive reinforcement, you will be rewarded with discretionary effort. If you encourage your child you are more likely to instil creativity, innovation and exploration and, best of all, it builds a growth mindset – an optimistic frame of mind in which your child starts to explore the outer reaches of their comfort zone.

One of the most effective things a parent and/or grandparent can do is to use a positivity/negativity ratio of about 8:1. It can be difficult to get it right, but catch your child doing things well. You don't have to make a song and dance about it, but please notice the little things they do well and tell them.

Examples:

'Thank you for keeping your room clean, it really helps my workload.'

'I really appreciated you playing nicely with your sister. It makes such a difference to the family's happiness levels.'

'Thank you for doing your homework without any fuss. I really appreciate it.'

'Thanks for helping me out with the shopping.'

'I really love it when you read a bedtime story to your little brother. And I can tell that he loves it too!'

🕒 Rule #2: The 4-minute rule

The concept of 'para-sympathetic arousal' means that your family will catch your emotions. In a bizarre tradition, many families go through a ritual of coming home from work or school and grumbling about the low-light of their day. Yes, we offload all our emotional baggage on the ones they love most in life. If this habit occurs day after day, it has a cumulative effect on family wellbeing.

Negative emotions work a bit like second-hand smoke – you catch them whether you want to or not. Also, it's not just the inevitability of the transfer, there's also a flavour.

Daniel Goleman calls it 'emotional soup', the concept that, in any social situation, everyone is adding a certain 'flavour' of feelings.

Two things spring to mind: first, dare to ask yourself what flavour you are adding. Are you coming through the door with joy and enthusiasm or are you poisoning the family atmosphere with toxicity? And, second, not all family members are equal. Yes, everyone is adding something to the emotional soup but, as a parent, you are adding the most.

For 'parent' read 'leader without a title' – your emotional contagion is massive.

The 4-minute rule suggests that if you can raise your personal levels of positivity and enthusiasm (genuinely, not fake or cheesy) for a short period of time, other people will 'catch' your emotions. Hence the first 4 minutes of breakfast time, coming home from work (etc) become super-important in setting the emotional tone. Instead of asking your children 'How was school?' why not upgrade to 'Tell me about the best thing that happened at school today?' or the funniest thing or the best thing they've learned.

It's not a guarantee, but if you do it consistently, you stand a better chance of creating a positive first 4 minutes, which sets the emotional flavour.

Rule #3: Celebrate better

Shelly Gable suggests that how we celebrate is a strong predictor of relationship strength. How we behave in a moment of triumph and joy makes a huge difference in either building or undermining relationships and that there are four types of response when you hear some good news.

For example, at the dinner table, your child announces that they've got down to the final three in the auditions for the lead role in the school play. Here are the four responses in table form:

	Passive	Active
Constructive	'That's great news, and about time. They should have given you a chance ages ago.'	'That's amazing. How do you feel? How did they tell you? How did you react? Tell me more...'
Destructive	'Oh, can you pass the salt?'	'Yikes. The pressure! What if you don't get it?'

We're hoping you are already avoiding the passive/destructive!

Once again, the aim here is to raise your levels of enthusiasm while retaining your authenticity. We're not suggesting an over-the-top punching-of-the-air celebration for every smidgeon of good news, but a raising of your levels of enthusiasm means that you won't miss out on so many glorious relationship-building opportunities. Rather than spelling it out, we'll let you experiment by celebrating success and good news in your own consciously uplifted way. Ultimately, it's not about your thoughts and feelings, it's about helping others revel in theirs.

☆ Rule #4: Praise for effort rather than talent ☆

Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset book is crammed with good advice. One of her experiments involved setting a group of children a really tough exam after which one group was praised for intelligence ('You are sooo clever!') and the other for effort ('You've worked reaaally hard!').

Next, she set a test that was impossible for them to complete. The first group (praised for being clever) soon gave up, figuring that they weren't clever enough, but the second group (praised for effort) stuck at it and outperformed the others by 30 per cent. Dweck's advice is that, if your child accomplishes something, don't say, 'Well done, you are such a little genius!' but rather, 'Awesome, you put the effort in and got the reward.'

Here's a concrete example. If your daughter scores a goal at football, don't high-five her and say, 'Total genius girl. You were born to play football.' You'd be better off saying, 'Amazing goal. That's what practice and hard work gets you!'

Or when your son wins an award for art, avoid, 'Crikey, young man, you are destined to be the next Picasso,' in favour of 'That's what you get for all those hours of hard work.'

Rule #5: NEVER pay your children for chores or exam results

According to Dan Pink you shouldn't pay your children to do chores and on no account should you bribe them with cash for exam results. According to Dan, it's a slippery slope that kills their work ethic and love of learning. Let's examine the subtext of your well-meaning 'payment by results' system, carefully devised in consultation with your child.

What you are effectively saying is: 'I understand that studying is a horrible thing to do. And I appreciate that you will only do it for money.' And bang goes their love of learning.

You are teaching them (albeit innocently and subconsciously) that learning is a chore. Similarly with the payment-for-chores arrangement. On one level, it makes perfect sense. The teenager's part of the bargain is to keep their room tidy, empty the dishwasher and empty the bins. Payment is effectively bribing them to comply with what is a collective family responsibility.

If you do feel tempted to offer financial rewards, they should be in the form of a family treat (theme park, cinema, etc) so that everyone benefits from individual success.

Rule #6: Praise for effort rather than talent

Here are our 10 everyday parenting basics that require zero skill or talent. Get these right and build from there:

- i. Working hard
- ii. Keeping your word
- iii. Smiling
- iv. Role modelling good manners
- v. Having passion for life
- vi. Noticing good behaviour
- vii. Being organised
- viii. Having a great attitude
- ix. Being kind (to everyone, including yourself)
- x. Prioritising your children (rather than, for example, your phone or emails)

Rule #7: Nail the basics

Remember the basic rule from a few pages ago: your children will not do what you say,
BUT THEY WILL DO WHAT YOU DO!

That applies more to screen time than any other point. As a rough measure, we're sure that people would be much happier if they cut their screen time by 50%. Counter-intuitively, not only do children need to learn how to use technology appropriately, they also need to learn how to not use technology.

If we teach our children to turn to technology to fill every moment of boredom or discomfort, this strategy will stay with them their entire life. In doing so, we strip them of the opportunity to learn how to be alone with their thoughts, how to manage their own emotions, and how to be creative in figuring out what to do, or how to connect with those around them.

As with everything, this point is all about balance. The modern home has so many screens (TV, phone, games console, laptop, iPad) that it'd be impossible and ridiculous to have zero screen time. On balance, unrestricted screen time is equally ridiculous.

Our point is that just because other parents allow unrestricted screen time, a TV in their child's bedroom and an Instagram account, doesn't mean it's the right thing to do.

The bigger issue is will your child hate you for withholding technology? Yes, occasionally. But later in life when they can hold a conversation and make small talk, tune into the feelings in the room and create strong and lasting relationships, they'll think that less screen time was great parenting. And because they'll have developed empathy and appreciation, one day they'll actually thank you.

Our 99.9% certainty above tallies with your 0.1% hesitation that your child will get left behind in the rush to colonise cyber space. We doubt that will happen. Technology is getting easier and more intuitive to use, so it's not as though kids need a 'head start' on figuring it out. Besides, all schools have iPads and classroom technology. Your kids will fly in these lessons.

Still not convinced? Here's the clincher; remember, catching up with tech is easy.
Catching up socially is *impossible*.

Now to the really tricky bit!

In exactly the same way that a boy will be influenced to read by seeing his dad with his head in a book, your children will be influenced by *your* use of technology. If you're logged on, scrolling, swiping, texting and emailing guess what your children will do.

And guess what you're *not* doing? While you're swiping, scrolling and retweeting, you're NOT chatting or making eye contact.

It's hard to find clear guidelines for 'healthy' technology use. The platforms are changing so rapidly, we don't really know what is healthy. Here are [The American Academy of Paediatrics](#) guidelines (with our commentary alongside):

Under 18 months	No screen time
18 to 24 months	Very limited time. High quality programmes, with parents
2 to 5 years	1 hour per day (max). High quality programmes, with parents
6 to 12 years	90 mins per day (max). Never after 8pm
13+	Negotiate reasonable weekly limit. At least 1 day media free. Never at mealtimes. Never have tech in bedrooms. <i>Bed-room</i> , the clue's in the name
All ages	Never at mealtimes. Get a new fruit bowl that becomes a phone bowl. On entry into the house each phone goes into the bowl. That's where it'll be if you need it. Stand there, do your thing if you have to, replace it in the phone bowl, crack on with chatting
Parents	As little as possible when the kids are around. They are your priority and they need to know they're your priority

Other households will have more liberal access. Most will have no rules whatsoever. Yes, your children might grumble but that's what children do. Relax, those next door with unfettered wi-fi access and the ability to play on their console till 4am, will also be complaining about not having enough game time. It also transpires that they will be asleep in class the next day whereas your children will be rested and in learning mode.

You are the parent. You're in charge. The climate in your house is your responsibility.

Do what's right, not what's easiest.

Rule #8: The Seven-second hug

Here's the headline news – the average hug lasts just over two seconds. If you hang on for a full seven seconds, then oodles of nice warm chemicals flow around both bodies and the love is transferred. Basically, a 7 second hug is an *I Love You hug*.

(A piece of advice: don't count out loud while you're doing the seven-second hug as it tends to spoil the effect.)

Rule #9: Chatter away!

Experienced head teachers have told us that kids are arriving in reception class unable to speak. Not 'unable' as in 'quiet and shy' but as in 'they don't know how' because they've never been spoken to!

Academic papers and government reports shows us that far too many families are hindering their children's development. Language, as Alva Noe suggests, '... is a shared cultural practice that can only be learned by a person who is one among many in a special kind of cultural eco-system'. Behind this ever so slightly too complicated sentence is the proposition that some homes tend to be quieter – much quieter. A study by Hart & Risley suggested that, by age four, children raised in quiet families will have

heard 32 million fewer words than children raised in chatty families.

So please speak a lot and, where possible, couch your language in the 8:1 ratio of positive to negative.

Rule #10: Role model healthy habits

Parenting is an exhausting business, so you need to be taking good care of your physical self.

Eating a healthy diet, getting plenty of exercise and a regular 8 hours of sleep will be great for your own wellbeing but these physical habits carry a multiplier effect because your children will see you role modelling them.

Your family needs you firing on all cylinders. The general rule is that if you haven't got time to look after yourself, you really need to look after yourself!

There are no guarantees but you stand a good chance that healthy habits become normalised and you will have set your children up for life.

So, there you go, our top ten family-friendly tips to create a harmonious and loving family atmosphere. There are no guarantees but you will be loading the dice in your favour.

In summing up, points 1-9 point towards having an 'affirmative bias' – that means an orientation towards your child's strengths rather than their weaknesses, optimism rather than pessimism and support rather than criticism. Point 10 reminds you that self-care is the least selfish thing you will ever do.

In biology there's something called the heliotropic effect, defined as; 'all living things grow towards that which gives life and away from that which depletes life'. In short, all living things have an inclination towards positivity.

Plants lean towards the light.

Children lean towards love and encouragement.

