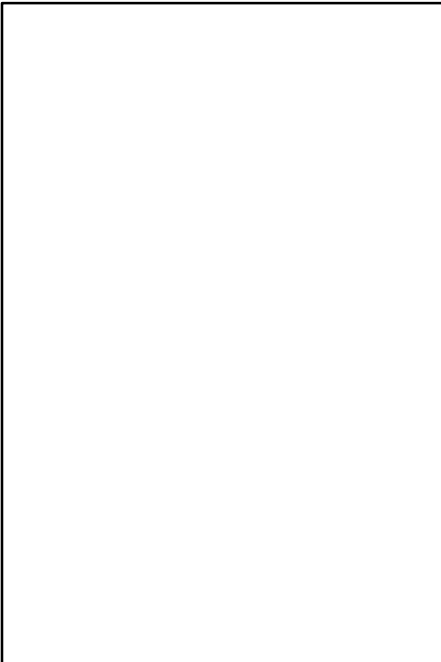


HONORING SILLINESS...

- ...Means being able to create happy memories for one's self as well as those around them.
- ...Means being able and willing to foster the imagination and world of make believe.
- ...Means being able to have uninhibited (appropriate) fun.
- ...Means allowing for childishness – especially in children.

By Christine L. Gillian, M.A.



As children mature, self-consciousness outweighs self-awareness. During early childhood, the ever-growing adventure, known as self-awareness, marks different milestones of development. This thrill is sometimes the cause of many parent's embarrassment, i.e., their

conversations on the phone is characteristic of both the junior high student and the high school student. However, most high school students are viewed as childish adult want-to-be's. They are the big kids now, but tend to do a lot of shrieking, loud laughing and practical jokes.

So what's wrong with the adult population? We see the silliness of these children and roll our eyes, scowl, fuss, complain, and generally wish they would go home so we can have peace and quiet in our malls and theaters. Perhaps for silliness to be appreciated, it needs to be understood.

When a child is happy, he tends to be silly. In turn, the silliness of a young child tends to foster smiles and happiness in adults. What better benefit to society, to family, to individuals? Is not our entire life spent in the pursuit of happiness? And yet, the simplest form of true happiness is in the silliness of a child.

youngster barking and panting in the grocery store; hopping tirelessly in the bank and repeating "boring, boring;" dancing, posing and signing in front of any and every mirror; et cetera.

However, during the elementary years, the child learns that self-consciousness lends itself to peer acceptance and is thus more desirable than the free expression of self-awareness. The elementary student is still "silly," but only in ways that are accepted and practiced by their peers, i.e., giggling over certain words, jokes without a punchline, etc. An elementary student who sings to himself and dances down the hallway, apparently quite happy in his own world, is shunned by peers. (If he were still in preschool, his peers would have joined in!)

Junior high students are in a league of their own. They love private and "inside" jokes. Slang is a must if one is to be recognized in their little "cliques." Having aimless

What better reason could there be for fostering a young child's silliness?

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A Baker's Dozen Tips for Parents

- 1. Be responsible for your own growth**This is the primary responsibility in life, and your children will have an example in you.
- 2. Be aware of your own expectations**It is OK to have them, but don't let them run you. Sometimes they prevent you from seeing the beauty of your child.
- 3. Be a model for "learning and change"**This is characterized by an "aliveness." Even our concept of the "ideal parent" should be changing with experience.
- 4. Be permissive with feelings and strict with unacceptable behavior**Respect the feelings of your children and set realistic limits that you can and do enforce.
- 5. Be fully present with your child**Don't slip into a role where you hear your parents' words coming from your mouth. Don't miss the present worrying about the future. Be in the "now" with them as much as possible, because that is where they live.
- 6. Don't take personally all their ups and downs**It's not personal, it's normal.
- 7. Try to listen to them without judging – listen for the feelings**Their experience is real for them, and when they share their truth, they are providing a key to how they are perceiving life — and it may be very different from your perception.
- 8. Don't panic!** A values conflict is not the end of the world. In fact, children often return to values very similar to parents.
- 9. Trust that they are capable – even of making their own mistakes and learning from them.** This involves a "letting go," which is gradual, but necessary.
- 10. Praise them and be specific**They need to see the good things about themselves as they form their identity. The more specific, the more helpful and believable.
- 11. Keep the doors open – try not to feel rejected**While they won't require you as much, be available for that hug or just to talk or for meaningful activities together.
- 12. Communicate with other parents**This adds perspective and provides a support system.
- 13. Last, but certainly not least, KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR**What would we do without this delightful survival tool?

P.S. While the word "love" is not mentioned in the above list, the truth is, the whole relationship is about love. You come from love in your communication with your children, and in your gentleness with yourself.