

Dream the Dream and Step into It Teaching Children to Think Positively

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By Patti Teel

While we'd like to believe that our children live carefree lives devoid of concerns and worries, many children become anxious and self-critical at an early age. However, parents can help their children to develop positive thinking, a discipline that can be developed through practice. Children can learn to replace worries with desire and faith, and to think and speak more positively. (In child-like lingo, this would amount to imagining that things will happen the way we want them to, and always saying good things about ourselves.)

Replace worries with desire and faith

Many children are born optimists. They have a wonderful feeling of self-assurance and absolute faith that their wishes and desires will come true. However, other children seem to be born worriers. They may worry about speaking in front of their class, that they are stupid, that no one likes them, etc. etc. Their list of worries can go on and on. Worrying is one of the most disregarded forms of stress. Instead of focusing on what we desire or want, worry focuses on what will happen when things go wrong. We attract what we pay attention to, but oftentimes children (and adults) don't realize that they are focusing on what they *don't* want, rather than what they *do* want. For instance, if you and your child have been sick, you're probably both clear that this is *not* what you want. However, if you're thinking and worrying about being sick, it's an entirely different perspective than focusing on being well. When your child expresses a worry by telling you what she doesn't want to have happen, help her to identify and then start focusing on what she truly wants to have happen instead. For instance, if your daughter says, "I don't want to go to the party because no one will play with me," help her to identify what she wants by asking, "What would you like to have happen at the party?" And then, "What if you have fun at the party?" Children who worry a lot are great candidates for visualization and imagery. The truth is, worry is negative visualization and it takes a vivid imagination to imagine such horrible scenarios! Gradually, teach your children to focus on their wants and desires, rather than their fears and worries. Tell stories in which your child faces and overcomes a fear or attains his goal. Eventually, he will be able to visualize these positive scenarios on his own.

Think and speak positively

Challenge your child to direct all statements that start with "I am," towards positive statements and goals. Negative affirmations such as, "I'm just stupid," or "I'm always sick," are very harmful because they can penetrate a child's subconscious, which accepts them—hook, line, and sinker. Our minds and

bodies are not separate entities—they are connected. When a child creates positive pictures and self-suggestion, it can have a beneficial effect on both his physical and emotional health. It sounds simplistic; however, children who picture themselves as happy and healthy will be taking an important step towards becoming happy and healthy throughout their entire lives. Happiness and improved health are gifts that each child can give himself through the power of his own thoughts and imagination.

As parents, we always need to keep in mind that we are our children's heroes and role models. If we are continuously worried and self-critical, our children are likely to be the same. Worrying projects negative energy and it doesn't do you or your children a bit of good. In fact, when children are aware that their parents are worried about them it projects a lack of faith and they tend to feel more anxious. Admittedly, there are times when our worries are well founded. Even then, instead of worrying and imagining the worst possible scenario, try to focus on the positive outcome that you desire and on actions that can help to bring it about.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the author of *The Floppy Sleep Game Book*, which gives parents techniques to help their children relax or fall asleep. She is holding Dream Academy workshops at schools, hospitals, and libraries across the country where parents and children learn the playful relaxation techniques from her book and widely acclaimed children's audio series. Children at the Dream Academy workshops practice the three R's by resting their bodies, relaxing their minds, and refreshing their spirits. www.pattiteel.com