



5 ways to increase good feelings (and reduce a toxic atmosphere) in your family.

That doesn't mean that such families are devoid of conflict or criticism, but that they are generally pleasant environments to be part of.

One way to increase good feelings in your family is to increase the number of compliments kids hear at home.

As a general rule, the ratio of compliments to criticism should be around **five to one**. That is, there should be five times more positive, affirming comments than negative comments.

In unhealthy families this ratio is often reversed. Five negative comments for every one positive comment makes for a pretty toxic environment.

How does your family rate on this scale?

If you think about where your family may be on this scale, be careful about how much weight you put on your children's comments, especially to each other. Siblings can be unkind to each other, finding it hard to share a pleasant word, which can skew the positive to negative ratio a lot (and sometimes make family life quite awful for everyone).

However, this can change over time.

Here are five ideas to help you **improve the compliments to criticism ratio** in your family:

1. **Increase the number of affirmations and compliments you make yourself.**
2. **Keep a check on your use of 'good feeling killers' (and self-esteem killers).** Eradicate comments such as: "*Typical boy!*" "*If I've told you once I've told you a 1,000 times, don't...*" "*What a stupid thing to say to your brother/sister!*". Bite your tongue. If you find yourself thinking a criticism, keep it to yourself.
3. **Make kids aware of their negative language.**
4. **Make it a habit to follow a negative with a positive.**
5. **Let the bad feelings out.**

These, along with affectionate phrases and kind remarks, will start to skew the ratio a bit. Aim for a five to one ratio. Not only is this good modelling for your kids, but it will make family life more harmonious. Yep, five to one is your aim. If you can't do that, then you can't expect it of your kids.

Constant criticism harms self-esteem, not to mention family harmony. Use 'I' statements to let kids understand the impact their negative talk has on you and others. "*When you talk so aggressively I feel quite scared about what you are going to do next.*" It's impossible for kids to disagree with 'I' statements.

When I was teaching I always tried to follow discipline of a student with a compliment or some positive feedback so that we could maintain a good relationship. Do the same in your family. Follow discipline, a rebuke or a negative comment with a positive act or comment. Then teach your kids to do the same!

Sometimes there can be such a build-up of ill will between siblings that you need find a way for them to let the bad feelings out. One way to do this is let one child vent to you about their sibling. Be warned that *you may not like what you hear* but a clearing of the air can work wonders to improve the family atmosphere.

Most of these suggestions start with you, the parent. Like everything in family life, whatever you want from your kids, you must take the lead and do first. Remember, five positives to one negative is your aim!

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