



The Secrets of Happy Families

By Bruce Feiler
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Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think makes a family happy? At the beginning of the book, Bruce Feiler poses a question that becomes the driving force the book: "What do happy families do right and how can the rest of us learn to make our families happier?" How does he proceed to answer this? Are his suggestions practical for creating more happiness?
2. Did you have a regular family dinner growing up? How does what you do now compare with that? If you don't have your ideal dinner now, how might you go about making it a reality?
3. Did you grow up with any family rituals? If so, have you carried them on in your own family? What kind of ritual might you like to create for and with your loved ones?

4. If you made a family mission statement – something that captured the many values you wanted your family to have – what would it include? What would it not include?
5. Do you believe in giving children an allowance? Should the money be tied to chores? Does bribing work to get children to improve their grades or eat their vegetables? Compare your own experience and conclusions from what Bruce decided to do with his family?
6. Do you talk with your spouse, or co-parent about money and finances? If not, what stops you? How often did you talk with other family members about money when you were a child? How do the attitudes you were raised with affect your outlook today? Bruce was advised that regular meetings to discuss money would be helpful. Do you agree?
7. How do you resolve conflict with colleagues or with friends? Do you use those techniques with your spouse, partner, or co-parent? If not why not? Bruce says that fights among siblings and other family members are often more intense because they take one another for granted. Do you agree? Which techniques that he learned from the Harvard Negotiation Project and elsewhere would you find most helpful at your home?
8. Bruce Feiler talked about the "Sex Mom" who teaches her children and their friends about the basics of human sexuality. How did you learn about sex? Would you be okay if a neighbor talked to your child openly and often about sex? Of the teenagers Bruce interviewed said, "It's not 'the Talk.' It's a series of talks." Do you agree?
9. If you are in a long-term relationship, how do you keep sex fresh and exciting?
10. Talk about your dream home space. What is missing from your current living space that you'd like to add? (What about something that doesn't cost any money!) Is there a memorable place from your life you especially love? What are some of the things you do to make your home a happier place for you and your family?
11. Are you a disorganized traveler or a consummate planner? Do you use a checklist for packing or leaving home? One of the most difficult aspects of traveling with children is keeping them interested. Devise a travel game you'd like to play either with a child or with your traveling companion.
12. What surprised you most in reading *The Secrets of Happy Families*? Are there any specific suggestions you'd like to implement with your own family? (Are there any you definitely would not?) What suggestions might you offer struggling families that are not in the book?
13. Has the book changed your outlook on families and their role in individual lives? Did the book offer you the insight and advice you were seeking? What did you take away from *The Secrets of Happy Families*?