

# FEEL-GOOD PARENTS' EVENING

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The preparations for the parents' evening begin in advance with the children working on feel-good themes. The aim is to relay messages from the children and present their thoughts at the parents' evening. The evening can be used to explore the building materials for a happy mind and to discuss the parents' thoughts on the messages from the children. At the end of the evening, the parents write their messages, which are then read to the children the following day. The parents receive a short bedtime story (following page) on this topic to take home.

The aim of the evening is to give the children a voice and present their thoughts to the adults. During the preparation, the adults at the day care centre can discuss mental wellbeing topics with the children. The evening's topic for discussion is how to build a good daily routine in cooperation with home and the day care centre.

The invitation to the parents' evening could go as follows: We wish you a warm welcome to a laidback parents' evening with the theme a feel-good day care centre. Come and hear your children's and their friends' thoughts on wellbeing and what is important in life for them.

## Preparations for the evening

The themes are divided between the different groups in the day care centre. If there are fewer than six groups, some of the groups can work on more than one theme. The crafts the groups produce form one large overall display.

### GROUP 1

The children make a sun. An adult writes in the sun's rays (e.g. yellow strips of paper) the children's thoughts on what makes them feel good and what in the day care centre specifically leaves them feeling happy. The children can then colour in the rays. The sun and the rays are attached to a large piece of paper, which forms the backdrop for the work by all the groups.

### GROUP 2

The group cuts circles out of paper. An adult discusses with the children what a good friend is like; what makes the children themselves good friends for others,

and how good friends treat others. The adult writes the children's thoughts on the circles. The children can colour in the circles, which are then attached to the backdrop.

#### GROUP 3

The children make a washing line, socks and gloves. An adult writes the children's thoughts about the things they need to have a good day. This leads to a discussion on basic daily needs, such as sleep, nutrition, rest, play and spending time together. The children colour in the socks and gloves. The washing line is then attached to the backdrop with the socks and gloves hanging on the line.

#### GROUP 4

The children cut triangle-shaped dens out of paper. An adult writes on the dens the children's thoughts on what they enjoy doing with their parents and which games they like to play at the day care centre. The children colour in the dens, which are then attached to the backdrop.

#### GROUP 5

The children make clouds. The group discusses worries and sorrows and what they find comforting and who comforts them when they are feeling sad. An adult writes the children's thoughts down. The children colour in the clouds, which are then attached to the backdrop.

#### GROUP 6

The children make hats. On the hats, an adult writes who the important people for the children are. The children colour in the hats, which are then attached to the display.

## Course of the evening

1. The staff wish the parents welcome. The organisers then introduce themselves. A comical event, blunder or a funny story a child has told could act as an ice breaker at the start. Another good way to relax the atmosphere is to ask who is present. The organisers could ask everyone whose child is in group A to raise their hands. If the group of parents is small, everyone can tell whose parents they are. Then the organisers quickly present the art work made by the children and note that that will be discussed in more detail later.
2. The organisers then ask each parent to work with someone they do not know yet. The partners discuss the following topics:
  - Tell who you are and who your child is. What was your favourite food when you were a child?
  - What kinds of games you enjoyed?
  - Tell a pleasant event you remember from your childhood.
  - Tell about a nice event or occasion you have experience with your child or a delightful activity you share.
3. The organisers present the children's display to the parents and tell about its themes. Then those day care centre adults who did the tasks with the children tell about the children's thoughts and about the discussions the themes stirred. The parents can first discuss the topic in pairs before a wider discussion.

4. The parents make flowers and write in them what they think is best about being a father or a mother. These are then attached to the children's picture, and everyone can admire the finished display. The messages in the parents' flowers are read to the children the following day.

5. The organiser(s) then tells about the ingredients for a happy mind. The core message is that children's feel-good routines are built together. Good building materials include rest, sleep, nutrition, exercise, pleasant activities at home and in day care, hobbies, friends, time with the family and sharing emotions and the day's events with family members as well as routines and a daily rhythm. The Hand of Mental Health produced by the Finnish Association for Mental Health can be used to discuss this topic. The Hand of Mental Health image can also be printed at the Finnish Association for Mental Health website for the parents to take home.

6. The parents receive the bedtime story included in this book and the Hand of Mental Health to take home with them. The evening ends with wishes for a safe journey home.

# BEDTIME STORY FOR A FEEL-GOOD NIGHT

WRITTEN BY KIISI ISOTALO

It was the morning rush hour in the Jones' hallway. Because the whole family was in a hurry, and the hallway was small, everyone was feeling cramped. Sometimes that meant blustering, snapping and rotten words. Alice was trying to put her shoes on but one of her socks didn't seem to fit in the shoe. Henry was putting his cap on and had hidden the hat mum had given him in the furthest corner of the hat basket. Mum was standing between them with her coat on and was trying to tie her long hair into a bun. Dad was trying to squash the daily paper in his bag and put his shoes on at the same time.

"Why can't we have a bigger hallway," Henry snarled and was ready to open the door.

"I said, wear your hat, it isn't warm enough for a cap yet," mum snapped back.

"Grandpa always wears his cap," moaned Henry.

"True, but grandpa's cap also has ear flaps."

"That's an old man's hat. I don't want one like that."

"Well then, wear your own hat and that's that," mum said.

"I can't get my shoe on," Alice complained.

"Pull your sock up, so it's not squashed," dad told her.

"I did already, but this sock doesn't feel like it's mine," Alice explained.

"What do you mean it doesn't feel like it's yours. Is it, is it not?" dad asked.

Just then, mum stood on a ball that was loitering in the hallway. Mum staggered and tried to get hold of dad, who was leaning over to look at Alice's sock, and suddenly the whole family was lying on the floor in one big pile with Henry, who was searching for his hat in the hat basket, right at the bottom.

"Ouch!" Henry exclaimed.

"Did you hurt yourself?" dad asked sounding a bit worried.

"Yes, my foot is under your bottom."

"Sorry," dad said and lifted his buttock so that Henry could move his leg.

There was nothing but grunting and muttering for a moment, as everyone was trying to pull themselves back up. Then dad burst out laughing.

"What's so funny about this," mum asked sounding slightly grumpy.

"Look at Alice's sock," dad said and started to laugh again.

Mum and Henry turned to look at Alice's sock. Now that they were all sitting on the floor in a jumble, the light shone properly on the sock. Soon they were all laughing. It was no wonder Alice had struggled to get her shoe on. She was wearing grandpa's sock, which he'd left behind last time he was visiting. The sock was a bit too big to fit in a small girl's shoe.

The mood in the hallway had changed with the laughter. The feeling of rush was gone, and it felt good to be sitting there, the whole family in one big heap.

“We should do something about these mornings,” dad said, still smiling. “We’re in such a rush and so grumpy, and something’s always missing.”

“That’s true,” mum said. “And I think we all have to play our part.”

They thought about it together. A decision was made that everyone would get up a bit earlier and take out their clothes ready for the morning the night before, including their outdoor clothes, and that would give them some extra time. The parents could put their jackets on in the living-room so that it wouldn’t be so cramped in the hallway. They did that straight away. Mum and dad moved to the living-room to put the rest of their outdoor clothes on, except for shoes, of course. Alice found her socks in the basket, and Henry dug out his favourite hat. Soon the Joneses were in their car heading to day care and work. The sun was showing its first rays and peeking behind the clouds.

It was quiet at the day care centre. Most of the others had arrived already. Mum checked the time and worried that the children might not make it in time for breakfast.

”Hoppity hop,” mum hurried the kids as they got out of the car. “Alice, move along now; the breakfast trolley will soon go back to the kitchen, and you won’t get any breakfast.”

Mum took Alice to the Dens Group and dad took Henry to Huts Group. Mum pulled Alice along. Alice’s feet just wouldn’t carry her. That turned into whining which kept growing louder the closer to the door they got. In the vestibule, Alice threw herself on the floor and refused to do anything. Mum tried to entice her to take her outdoors clothes off and put her gloves on the washing line. Just then, nursery nurse Anna came in pushing the breakfast trolley. She looked at Alice on the floor but continued to walk. She did say good morning, but even that sounded a bit feeble. Just then, Alice got up looking stern with her arms akimbo.

“Hmph and grrr” she shouted.

“Sorry?” mum said.

“Hmph and grrr!” Alice shouted again.

That’s when Anna stopped and turned. She was smiling now.

“I’m sorry,” Anna said.

“What is going on?” mum asked sounding confused.

“I’m sorry,” Anna said again.

“Forgiven,” Alice stated and started taking her clothes off.

“Well,” Alice continued. “I’m in a habit of saying hmph and grrrr here at the day care centre, when things don’t go as they should. It has worked well, and now it worked in reverse. I’m sorry; I’ve not slept or eaten enough. Thank you, Alice, for reminding me.”

“That sounds like nonsensology,” mum said and smiled.

“Pardon?” Alice and Anna asked in one voice.

“Nonsensology, and there should be more of it, more of pleasant nonsensical exchanges with one another instead of strict words.”

“That would certainly add good humour to everyone’s day,” Anna added.

“Feel-good day care and home,” Alice reflected. “Could I have some porridge? I’m really hungry.”

Anna and mum burst out laughing. That’s when dad stepped in. Dad was told that hmph and grrrr are important words and that there should be more nonsense. That would make home and day care even better feel-good places. Everyone’s input would be needed to achieve that both at home and in day care.

Feeling happy, Anna and Alice went to eat porridge and mum and dad to work. Hmph and grrr and nonsense. We need more of that. Are you playing your part?

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