

The
HAPPY
FAMILIES
TOOLKIT

Everything You Need to
Improve Your Mornings, Rethink Family Dinner,
Fight Smarter, Go Out and Play, and Much More

BRUCE FEILER

New York Times Bestselling Author of
The SECRETS of HAPPY FAMILIES

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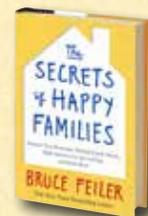
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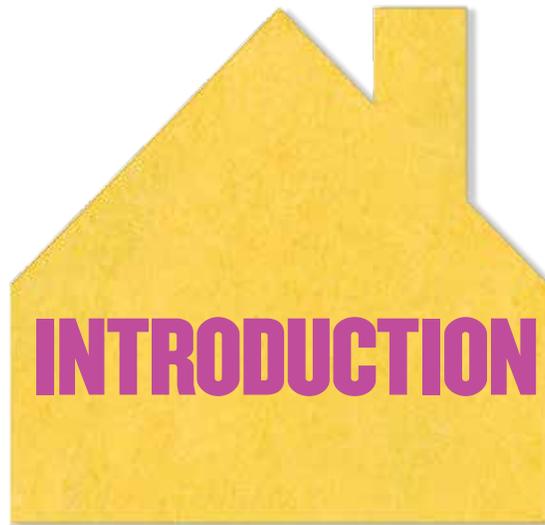
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**IN TODAY'S FAMILIES, THE OLD RULES NO LONGER APPLY
YET THE NEW RULES HAVEN'T BEEN WRITTEN...
UNTIL NOW**

No matter what kind of a family you are part of, an enormous new body of research shows that your family is central to your overall happiness and well-being. Study after study confirms that the number one predictor of life satisfaction comes from spending time with people you care about and who also care about you. Simply put, happiness is other people, and the other people we hang around with most are our family.

So how do we make sure we're doing that effectively?

I have tried to write the book I have most wanted to read as a spouse, parent, uncle, sibling, and adult child. I've broken down families into the things we all do—love, fight, eat, play, fool around, spend money, make pivotal life decisions—and tried to discover ways to do them better. I have sought out the most effective families I could find as a way to assemble best practices of families today. My goal was to put together a playbook for happy families.

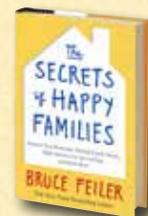
—from the Introduction to
The Secrets of Happy Families by Bruce Feiler

IMPROVE YOUR FAMILY'S DAILY ROUTINE

REDUCE CHAOS AND INCREASE HAPPINESS

- Create a Morning Checklist
- Template for Your Own Morning Checklist
 - Schedule a Family Meeting
- Follow the Agile Family Manifesto

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What is agile? What is an agile family?

Agile is a system of group dynamics in which teams do things in small chunks of time, adjust constantly, and review their progress frequently. Ideas don't just flow down from the top but percolate up from the bottom. The best ideas win, no matter where they come from. Many families have been using similar techniques to improve how their families function. Agile families have a system to change and react to family chaos in real time.

Bruce decided to adapt what he learned about creating an agile family from inside his own house. He and his wife, Linda, experimented with a morning list, and then presented the idea to their twin girls, Tybee and Eden. Together, they assembled their list, creating a homemade poster and a daily chore chart. In the first week alone, the Feilers cut parental screaming in half.

Soon they began holding a weekly family meeting. After some trial and error—learning to ask the right questions—something amazing happened. Bruce and Linda began to see into their daughters' emotional lives and their deepest thoughts and feelings.

“When Linda and I adopted the agile blueprint with our daughters, weekly family meetings quickly became the single most impactful idea we introduced into our lives since the birth of our children. They became the centerpiece around which we organized our family. And they transformed our relationships with our kids—and each other—in ways we never could have imagined,” Bruce explains.

Here are some tips and ideas to get your family organized and sharing, and improve your togetherness.



PUT TOGETHER YOUR MORNING LIST—GET INSPIRED WITH THIS SAMPLE MORNING CHECKLIST

1. Take vitamins or medicine
2. Eat breakfast
3. Shower or wash face and neck
4. Take care of your hair
5. Do morning chores
6. Brush your teeth
7. Backpack, shoes, and socks

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
GET DRESSED	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
MAKE BED	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
OPEN SHUTTERS	X ☹	X ☹	✓ @	✓ @	X ☹
SET THE TABLE	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
DRINK MILK	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
TAKE VITAMINS	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
CLEAR THE TABLE	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
BRUSH TEETH	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
BACKPACKS READY	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
COATS/MITTENS	X ☹	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @
JOY, RAPTURE, YAY!	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @	✓ @

- What are you having for lunch today?
- What are you taking to school today?
 - What are you forgetting?

MORNING CHECKLIST:

MAKE IT A GOOD MORNING EVERY DAY.

No more screams, threats, tears, tantrums, commotion. Find more peace and calm.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

**TIP: Let your kids check off their own chores.
It gives them practice taking responsibility and making good decisions.**

THE FAMILY MEETING

WHAT'S WORKING IN OUR FAMILY, WHAT'S NOT?

Asking families to talk to each other.

1. Ask
2. Share
3. Connect
4. Celebrate Success
5. Solve Problems
6. Make Magic

TIP: Ask three questions:

1. What went well in our family this week?
2. What didn't go well?
3. What will we agree to work on in the week ahead?



AGILE FAMILY MANIFESTO

**COMMIT TO CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT—
INNOVATE AND PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**

THE FIVE KEYS TO AGILITY

1. Solutions exist: Don't rely solely on a family expert; talk to anyone who's an expert in making groups run smoothly. Solutions are out there—you just have to go find them.
2. Empower the children: teach them executive skills by allowing them to take a role in their own upbringing. Let them plan their own time, set weekly goals, evaluate their own progress, suggest rewards, and set appropriate punishments.
3. Parents aren't perfect: break free from the all-knowing parent and give everyone an equal say.
4. Build in flexibility: Evaluate and adapt—and always remember it's okay to change.

DEFINE YOUR FAMILY BRAND

CREATE A FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT

- Make a Family Beliefs Board
- List of Values to Consider
- Template for Your Own Mission Statement

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Define Your Family Brand

How do you teach values to your children? While visiting his friend, serial entrepreneur David Kidder, Bruce Feiler was introduced to the Kidder family belief board—an operating system for the Kidders and their children to help them communicate and share their values. Bruce also talked to Jim Collins, the leading expert on creating great company culture and author of *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*, and Sean Covey, a leadership coach in the company started by his father, Stephen Covey, and author of *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids*.

Drawing on a variety of sources, from books to a charter school character reporter cards, Bruce began by making a list of words that captured the qualities of his family. Then he and Linda began to hone the list, deleting some and adding others. They then threw a family pajama party with Eden and Tybee on a Saturday night, complete with homemade popcorn and s'mores. Gathered on the big bed in Bruce and Linda's bedroom, and using a giant flip chart attached to the door, the Feilers pondered four essential questions to understand who they are and what they believe.

The result was their family mission statement: “May your first word be adventure and your last word love,” as well as a number of phrases that complimented their family theme. Sifting through those, the family voted on ten that best summed up who they are. Then, Bruce found a designer to make their statement a physical reality. Choosing a symbol that represented them—a chambered nautilus—the designer combined image and words into a visual face for the Feiler family.

Here are some tips to help you create your family brand—self-knowledge that can help you and your children succeed.



DESIGN YOUR FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT: WHAT DO YOU STAND FOR?

Display your core values with a Family Belief Board:

“This is what our family is about.”

TIP: Ask four questions to help define your core values:

1. What words best describe our family?
2. What is most important to our family?
3. What are our strengths as a family?
4. What sayings best capture our family?

FAMILY BELIEF BOARD

FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES:

1. Make it authentic.
2. Keep it concise.
3. Keep it positive.
4. Emphasize what the family should do.
5. Make the drafting of it a special occasion.
6. Display it in a prominent place.

WHO ARE YOU?

SAMPLE WORDS AND PHRASES TO GET YOU STARTED

<i>Agility</i>	<i>Energetic</i>	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Appreciative</i>	<i>Discipline</i>
<i>Courage</i>	<i>Excitement</i>	<i>Integrity</i>	<i>Self-control</i>	<i>Aggressive</i>
<i>Passion</i>	<i>Growth</i>	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Politeness</i>	<i>Adaptive</i>
<i>Curiosity</i>	<i>Creativity</i>	<i>Commitment</i>	<i>Hope</i>	<i>Hopeful</i>
<i>Inventiveness</i>	<i>Imagination</i>	<i>Adventurous</i>	<i>Open-mindedness</i>	<i>Cooperative</i>
<i>Perseverance</i>	<i>Vitality</i>	<i>Travel</i>	<i>Love to learn</i>	<i>Supportive</i>
<i>Faith</i>	<i>Uniqueness</i>	<i>Insatiable</i>	<i>Wisdom</i>	<i>Determined</i>
<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Surprise</i>	<i>Change</i>	<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Proactive</i>
<i>Justice</i>	<i>Independence</i>	<i>Question authority</i>	<i>Bravery</i>	<i>Quirky</i>
<i>Service</i>	<i>Community</i>	<i>Happiness</i>	<i>Kindness</i>	<i>Individualistic</i>
<i>Stewardship</i>	<i>Limitless</i>	<i>Pay it forward</i>	<i>Leadership</i>	<i>Colorful</i>
<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Diversity</i>	<i>Don't look back</i>	<i>Forgiveness</i>	<i>Generous</i>
<i>Persistence</i>	<i>Innovation</i>	<i>Push through</i>	<i>Modesty</i>	<i>Thoughtful</i>
<i>Positivity</i>	<i>Entrepreneurial</i>	<i>Optimistic</i>	<i>Prudence</i>	<i>Caring</i>
<i>Enthusiasm</i>	<i>Wow</i>	<i>Zest</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>	<i>Adventure</i>
<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Enthusiastic</i>	<i>Grit</i>	<i>Mindful</i>	<i>Teamwork</i>
<i>Excellence</i>	<i>Good citizenship</i>	<i>Gratitude</i>	<i>Being present</i>	<i>Tell stories</i>

SAMPLE MISSION STATEMENTS

MAY OUR FIRST WORD BE

ADVENTURE

AND OUR LAST WORD

LOVE

We live lives of passion

We dream undreamable dreams

We are travelers not tourists

We help others to fly

We love to learn

We don't like dilemmas;
we like solutions

We push through. We believe!

We know it's okay to make mistakes

We bring people together

We are joy, rapture, yay!

FAITH
We pursue our
INDIVIDUAL
Journey with God

FAMILY
We Love, Respect
and are Loyal to
each Other and build
Family and TRADITIONS

ATTITUDE
We are GRATEFUL
FORGIVING, optimistic
and polite

HEALTH
We make good
decisions about how
we treat our minds
and bodies.

The

PURPOSE OF OUR LIVES

KIDDER

IS TO CONTRIBUTE OUR UNIQUE GOD GIVEN GIFTS

DO UNTO OTHERS

TO HAVE AN EXTRAORDINARY POSITIVE IMPACT
ON THE LIVES OF OTHERS AND THE WORLD

KNOWLEDGE
We celebrate
intellectual CURIOSITY
and INVENTION

PURPOSE
We pursue our Gifts
with COURAGE
and PERSISTENCE

OWNERSHIP
We take FULL
RESPONSIBILITY for the
planning, actions and
consequences of our
decisions and resources

EXPERIENCES
We create a life of
ADVENTURE and
choose EXPERIENCES
OVER THINGS

JUSTICE
We seek to SERVE
and DEFEND others
with generosity and
without judgment.

STEWARDSHIP
We PRESERVE and
respect the environment
and animals that
contribute to our lives.



OUR FAMILY MISSION STATEMENT

NARRATE YOUR FAMILY'S HISTORY

WE ARE FAMILY

- List of Questions to Discuss With Your Family
- Template for Recording Your Family Stories

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We Are Family

Studies have shown that the more we know about ourselves and where we come from, the better prepared we are for meeting life's challenges. Psychologists have discovered that the more children know about their family's story, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self esteem, the more successfully they believe their family functions. Knowing their larger family story helps them understand that they are part of something bigger.

Every family has a unifying narrative, a story of its ups and downs. These stories can be shared over the dinner table, at the holidays, recurring family vacations, or any ritualized activity—a trip to the grocery store—that brings different generations together. Begin by answering a few simple questions on the sheets provided.

Do you know...

DO YOU KNOW ...

1. Do you know where your grandparents grew up?

2. Do you know where your mom and dad went to high school?

3. Do you know where your parents met?

4. Do you know of an illness or something really terrible that happened in your family?

5. Do you know what went on when you were being born?

6. Do you know about your parents' wedding day?

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

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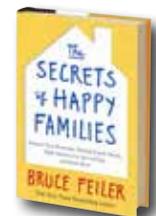


DISCUSSION GUIDE

TOPICS TO EXPLORE WITH YOUR BOOK CLUB, AT A DINNER PARTY, WITH OTHER PARENTS AT A PLAY DATE, OR WITH YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY

- 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? One of the teenagers Bruce interviewed said, “It’s not ‘the Talk.’ It’s a series of talks.” Do you agree?

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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*?**
14. Bruce said no family can implement all 200 ideas in *The Secrets of Happy Families*, but if you take a handful of new ideas, you can make your family happier. **Which ideas would you like to try?**

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