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family

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## How to Grow Joy Out of Family Stress

Dr. Nelson offers some advice on how to take your stress levels and flip them to increase the amount of joy in your life.

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If you embrace the role as martyr, it'll be hard for you to let others in and find the joy amongst the stress.

Your house is a zoo—literally! It's not just the dog, the cat, the three hamsters and the goldfish; heck, they're downright neat compared to the human animals inhabiting your humble abode. You come home at night and all you see is mess, mess, mess! The clothes strewn, half-empty glasses, plates with sticky something stuck to them, books, papers, chewed pencils, DVDs, Game Boys— nothing in its place except your children and spouse who are everywhere making yet more of a mess! After a long sigh, you set down your things before gathering armloads of displaced belongings and endeavor to restore some small measure of order to your chaotic universe.

Unbeknownst to everyone, you are not in the mood for conversation or liveliness. You scarcely have the energy to mutter, "Use your fork, not your fingers." "Milk is for drinking, not for blowing bubbles." Or, "Quit feeding your brussels sprouts to the dog." Later that night, finally buried in the safety of your bedclothes, when your spouse breathes sweet something's into the crook of your neck, it's all you can do not to swat him/her away like some errant fly.

Ah, the joys of family life! Well it would be or could be a joy if you changed your focus. You see, anything you focus on grows. You focus all your attention on everything that is awry in your household the minute you get home, so that's all you see. You don't observe the glorious energy and vivacity of your children, you don't notice your mate's welcoming smile, you don't give yourself even an instant to appreciate your home, whatever its condition. You see the mess, then more mess, and even more mess on top of that.

"But that's a fool's errand," you cry. "If I don't see the mess, if I don't take care of it, it will just grow exponentially until I need a snow-shovel to get from the front hall through the living room into the kitchen!" Indeed, if you don't take care of it, it will get worse. *But you don't have to focus on the mess in order to take care of it.* That's the secret.

Take a moment to hug your spouse, smile at your children and listen to their joys and woes of the day. Rest yourself for a few... you deserve it! And once you've taken in some of the love and enjoyment your family does provide, ask for their help. With smiles and gratitude, ask your children to pick up their belongings, your spouse to supervise or

however he/she can best help and make it fun! First one to get done gets an extra half hour of TV or whatever other reward is enticing. Focus more on what your family can and does accomplish than on being the martyred sole survivor of the pick-up brigade.

I will repeat, anything you focus on grows. The more you consistently notice these things happening day-by-day and appreciate openly all that your family does that contributes to a happy home life, the more they will want to do. The more smiles and praise you liberally distribute, the less heartache and toil you'll create for yourself.

Family life can be such a joy when you deliberately look for ways to enjoy it!

*Noelle C. Nelson, Ph.D., is a relationship expert, popular speaker in the U.S. and abroad, and author of nine best-selling books, including her most recent, "Your Man is Wonderful" ([www.yourmaniswonderful.com](http://www.yourmaniswonderful.com)) and "Dangerous Relationships." Dr. Nelson focuses on how we can all enjoy happy, fulfilling lives while accomplishing great things in love, at home and at work. Visit [www.wonderfulmanwonderfullyou.com](http://www.wonderfulmanwonderfullyou.com) for more.*