



A Simple Guide to Spiritual Parenting



Timeless Practices, Emerging Science



What would you do if your kid said they persistently felt sad or hopeless?

Tragically, it's common. The percent of U.S. high school students who say they persistently feel this way rose from [28% in 2004 to 44% in 2021](#), marking a trend none of us want.

We all expect life to have low moments. It's how things go. But we shouldn't expect these feelings to be *persistent*.

It's a trend made worse through a culture of disconnection. We're too often walled off — from nature, from each other, from our inner compass.

At Uplift Kids, we believe that one of the best ways to reverse this trend is through fostering connection at home. We call this spiritual parenting.





Spiritual parenting is the practice of helping your kids connect with awe, love, and purpose.

It means:

1. **Connecting with something you're in awe of** — whether you call it life, aliveness, the divine, God, nature, spirit, source, oneness, or something else.
2. **Connecting with family members and friends** at the deepest level through vulnerable, heartfelt, and presence-filled conversations.
3. **Connecting with your authentic self and inner compass.**

Deep connection is the heart of *spirituality*, a word that one neuroscientist defines as “the deliberate efforts some people make to overcome their feeling of separateness.” It’s also the heart of spiritual parenting.

Importantly, none of this hinges on belief or religion — or lack of religion. Those who believe and adhere to a religion can experience the benefits of spiritual parenting, as can those who don’t believe or adhere to a religion. As long as the practice of spiritual parenting is deliberate and sustained, either approach can work.

Increasingly, the emerging science supports these claims. Neuroscientists like Andrew Newberg demonstrate that “spiritual practices, even when stripped of religious beliefs, enhance the neural functioning of the brain in ways that improve physical and emotional health.” Other experts in neuroscience, including Sam Harris, Lisa Miller, Michael Ferguson and many others, show similar findings.



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— *Andrew Newberg, neuroscientist*

As we’ll explore below, spiritual parenting is for everyone. We *all* want to overcome our feelings of separateness. We *all* want the same for our kids. That’s why spiritual parenting matters. It increases the probability of connection, and it decreases the probability of disconnection.

In this way, spiritual parenting helps families counteract the feelings of sadness and hopelessness that are so pervasive today.





3 Simple Ways to Get Started

1. Connect with something you're in awe of.

People around the world have shared stories about connecting to something bigger than themselves and feeling transformed for the better in the process.

One such story from [*The Spiritual Child*](#) by Lisa Miller, professor of psychology at Columbia University, tells of a young woman named Kaitlin, who developed major depressive disorder after encountering philosophical nihilism in college. Then one day Kaitlin had a spiritual experience.

“I was walking along the ocean, headed out along the dock, and saw the light sparkling on the water,” Kaitlin recounted. “Suddenly it all became clear to me. ... The world is bright and full of love — there is spirituality in everything!”

Miller writes that Kaitlin “felt a sense of peace, a calm reassurance that came from both within and beyond her, an uplifting sensation of sacred connection and certainty. It wasn’t a matter of belief or nonbelief; her experience was real and she knew it to be true.”

Another story from the same book tells of a neuroscientist named Stefan who recalled an experience from his childhood. He went out to the woods and sat on a rock.



“While sitting on that rock,” he says, “I watched the pretty trees surrounding me. After a few minutes, I started feeling connected to the rock and the trees. It then appeared to me that the rock, the trees, and myself were part of a whole much greater than ‘Little Stefan.’ Following this experience, my purpose in life became clear: I would later become a scientist to demonstrate that the essence of human beings cannot be found in the brain.”

We’ve gathered nearly [two dozen stories of spiritual experiences](#) on our site, and there are [sites with hundreds more](#).

As you dive into such stories, you find that they tend to share similarities. They often happen in nature, often near dusk. They also happen when



hearing stories or listening to music or dancing or during times of stillness or in large crowds where people are united around a common cause.

From what we've seen, they tend *not* to happen in a messy, dim room while scrolling through social media on a smartphone — a common way that today's kids experience disconnection. Technology *can* be a springboard to connection when it leads us to videos and words that inspire us to come alive. But when our relationship with technology becomes mindless or numbing (qualities that algorithms seem to incentivize), it walls us off from life.

Spiritual parenting is about setting up the conditions that increase the likelihood of having and noticing spiritual experiences. Such experiences bear fruit including love, joy, and patience.

Try This:

- **Get outside often**, especially at dusk. Go on bike rides, picnics, hikes, etc. Point out what fills you with awe. Allow kids to be alone at a safe distance in nature.
- **Listen to or sing** awe-inspiring music together.
- **Attend an experience** with a large crowd together, whether it's a concert, a play, a church service, a sporting event, or something else. Focus on the energy and unity of the crowd.
- **Carve out time for stillness**. Don't pack your days with so many activities or so much screen time that there's no time left for presence.



2. Connect with family members and friends.

The great irony of our times is that it's easier than ever to connect quickly and more difficult to connect deeply. Conversations get fractured, riddled with interruptions from devices that ping for our attention.

For this and many other reasons, we're lonely — with devastating consequences. As former U.S. surgeon general Vivek Murthy writes, "During my years caring for patients, the most common pathology I saw was not heart disease or diabetes; it was loneliness. I found that loneliness was often in the background of clinical illness, contributing to disease and making it harder for patients to cope and heal." He also found that loneliness carries "a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, depression and anxiety." [One review of 148 studies](#) found that loneliness is more damaging than smoking or obesity.

At a certain level, spiritual parenting is nothing more than the practice of regularly having vulnerable, heartfelt, and presence-filled conversations. If you do this and help your kids to do this with their friends, you've got a good thing going on.



As it so happens, the Uplift [lesson library](#) gives families a way to start daily and weekly conversations. It includes a printable calendar and journal with daily questions, as well as weekly lesson experiences to help you connect about topics such as kindness, forgiveness, compassion, social skills, and dozens more.

It's all about creating what Lisa Miller calls “a field of love” at home — giving your kids a deep-seated sense that the people in their life, including some who have passed on, love them unconditionally.



Try This:

- 1. Do more of what works and less of what doesn't.** It's simple but easy to forget: If a certain activity feels strained or forced, back off of it. For instance, Uplift lessons contain many different activities (videos, stories, activities, quotes, prompts, etc.). If one type of activity doesn't resonate, drop it. You don't have to "do it right" according to anyone else's standard.
- 2. Don't worry about doing everything all together.** Doing an activity (including an Uplift lesson) with just one kid works perfectly. Don't let the perceived need to do everything together prevent you from enjoying what resonates well with one kid and one parent.
- 3. Think small.** One hug a day, one kind sentence a day, one expression of gratitude a day, one inspiring quote a day — any of these things can make a monumental difference over the course of years. Uplift offers a daily devotional to make this easy.
- 4. Tell stories.** Stories from your life, from an ancestor, or from a timeless text can connect you to each other.
- 5. Say kind words.** By gathering together often and using phrases such as "I like you just the way you are" (a phrase made famous by Fred Rogers), you set the conditions to nurture a field of love.

3. Connect with your authentic self and inner compass.

Traditional parenting advice has often centered on set goals and outcomes. "You should do _____ so your kid will get into an ivy league school. *Then* you'll be successful." But that approach always centers on someone else's definition of success.

Spiritual parenting, by contrast, is about attuning to the life you and your kids are meant to live. Your job isn't to "fix" your kid, to make them into



the image that you or someone else has for them. Your job is to attune to *your* inner compass and help them attune to theirs. “Your own inner compass as a parent is the ultimate checkpoint for how to spiritually parent,” says Lisa Miller. “There is no expert in the world who has as deep a knowing of your child as you do.”



As kids experience such an environment, they stop outsourcing their morality. It’s like a kid who trusts their own sense of when they’re full rather than listening to someone else telling them that they’re not full and should eat more. The former sets a kid up to thrive in their own way, at their own pace. “Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition,” Steve Jobs once said, “They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

You might be the greatest parent in the world, but one day you will not be there for your kids. They’ll grow up and live on their own. By giving them



a foundation of spiritual health, you give them the strength to discern the best next step for them to take in their own life.

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— Lisa Miller, professor of psychology

Try This:

- **Make a habit of asking,** “What does your inner compass say?” or “What does your heart and intuition say?” and encourage your kids to have the courage to follow through.
- **Start and keep a habit of meditation and prayer.** Having regular moments of stillness and introspection each day helps kids attune to what’s happening inside themselves.
- **Point out what you love about your kids.** Sometimes kids feel like they can’t do anything right because they have a narrative in their heads that they should be someone else. You can help them see their own natural gifts by pointing those gifts out. Say, “I love how creative that idea was” or “I see you staying determined, and I’m so impressed” or “I just feel good when we’re together.”

Make spiritual parenting a practice.

It can be difficult to make spiritual parenting a practice, especially if you’re striking out on your own. “Parents have told me they felt stuck,” writes Lisa Miller. “We have books, blogs, online sources, and other media advisers on nearly all sides of parenting, but not for this crucial inner resource of spirituality.”



We built Uplift to be one such resource. Our [lesson library](#) serves as an in-depth spiritual parenting resource, giving parents the tools needed to make spirituality a habit in the home week after week. “Uplift was an answer to what felt like desperate reaching,” says one subscriber. “The lessons are clear and digestible for our four-year-old and somehow also transformative and stretching for our thirteen-year-old.”

This is how to build a culture of meaning and reflection at home, similar to how a child learns to play the piano or ride a bike or anything else.

“Spiritual development through the early years ... provides a protective health benefit, reducing the risk of depression, substance abuse, aggression, and high-risk behaviors.”

— Lisa Miller, professor of psychology



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