



## RAISING HAPPY, HEALTHY CHILDREN: LESSONS FROM DENMARK

Denmark consistently ranks as one of the happiest countries in the world. So, what is their secret when it comes to raising children? While there is no single magic formula, the Danes seem to have figured out some key elements that contribute to well-adjusted, content children.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF 'HYGGE'

You might have heard the term 'hygge', a Danish word that has no direct English translation. It is about a feeling of cosy contentment and enjoying the simple things in life.

For Danish families, 'hygge' is a way of being. It means candlelight, snuggling on the sofa with a good book, sharing meals with loved ones, and creating a sense of warmth and togetherness. Prioritising hygge time helps children feel safe, loved, and connected.



## Play

The Danes passionately believe in the power of free play. Children naturally learn through exploration, using their imaginations, and figuring things out on their own terms. This approach to play and education is also deeply rooted in the Montessori philosophy too, where children are very much encouraged to be independent beings and explore their world through trial and error.

Danish parents and educators provide plenty of opportunities for unstructured play, both indoors and outdoors. Forests become magical kingdoms; a simple cardboard box turns into a rocket ship – the possibilities are endless! Through play, children develop creativity, problem-solving skills, and a sense of joy.

## Empathy Over Punishment

When conflict arises (as it inevitably does with children!), the Danes focus on empathy and understanding. Rather than resorting to punishment, they try to see the situation from the child's perspective.

To help children develop empathetic skills, adults talk about feelings to the children, help them understand the consequences of their actions, and guide them towards making better choices. This builds strong parent-child relationships and teaches children how to manage their own emotions.

## Authenticity and Letting Go of Perfection

Danish parents do not strive to be perfect. They embrace the messiness of family life and focus on being present and authentic with their children. They know that it is okay to make mistakes, to have bad days, and to ask for help when needed. This teaches children that it is okay to experience different feelings and therefore helps build open, honest communication between people.

## The Importance of Nature

Danes have a deep connection with nature. No matter the weather, you will see children bundled up and spending time outdoors.

Being in nature has a calming effect, encourages physical activity, and nurtures a love for the environment. Taking walks in the park, splashing in puddles, or simply observing the changing seasons can offer a wonderful sensory experience for children.

## 5 Ways to bring a Danish way of living into Your Home:

- **Create 'hygge' moments:** Light some candles, make hot chocolate, and curl up together with a favourite story. Turn off electronic devices and focus on being fully present and being 'in the moment' with each other.
- **Prioritise play:** Provide open-ended toys and materials that spark imagination. Let your little one take the lead and try to avoid directing their play too much.
- **Practice empathy:** When you feel like your little one is misbehaving, try to understand what they might be feeling. Encourage your little one to talk things through and focus on finding solutions together.
- **Relax the expectations:** Focus on enjoying the journey of parenting, not on achieving unattainable standards. Embrace the everyday moments, even the messy ones!
- **Get outdoors:** Go for walks, explore a local park, or simply play in the garden. Encourage your little one's connection with the natural world.

Remember, you do not need to transform your entire lifestyle overnight! Incorporating even a few of these ideas can make a positive difference in your family's happiness and well-being.

For more tips, tricks, hacks and advice on how to raise happy, confident children visit the [BBC Children in Need website](#).

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