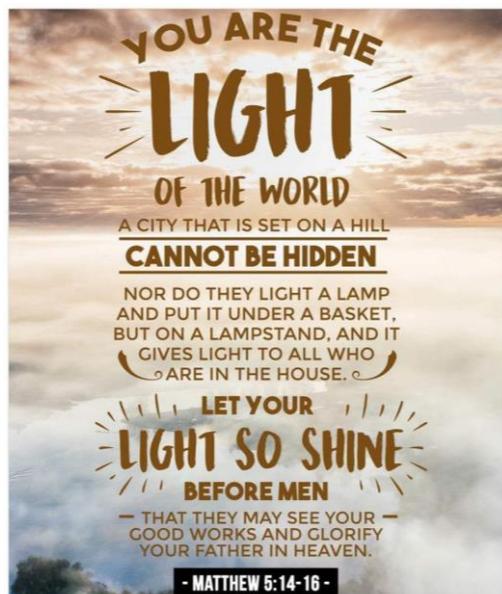


Dear PEPPS Community



The light of The Almighty is destined to shine through us all. We are reminded in Matthew's Gospel that **we are the light of the world and that light cannot be hidden.**

We are all anointed, as part of God's creation, **to be amazing and to find happiness.**

CS Lewis (author and theologian) reminds us that inside our neighbour shines God and to our neighbour, we are often God revealed.

## 2023 APPLICATIONS OPEN

Applications for all PEPPS Schools, for 2023, are now open. Please encourage families who you know are interested in joining our schools to apply early. The links to the **application forms are available on our webpage** – [www.pepps.co.za](http://www.pepps.co.za)

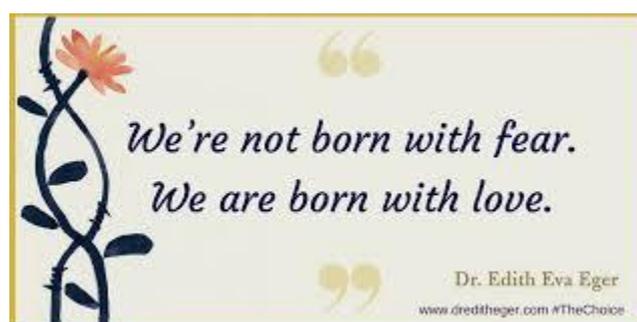
## UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

As teachers and parents, I believe that we share one goal for the children in our care. **We want them to be happy.** Often as adults, we are sure that we know what is good for the child and we make them do things that they do not want to do.

Examples include eating nutritious food instead of fatty, sugary empty calories; coming to school every day to learn; sleeping sufficiently to grow and learn optimally; and exposing them to a variety of extra-curricular opportunities in the hope that they will find something that they are passionate about.

We are told that life is all about balance and **parenting and teaching are continual balancing acts between being firm enough** with our children to set them up for success **yet accomodating enough** to ensure that they remain happy.

One of the crucial keys in getting this balance right is love. The love I am referring to is an unconditional love, where a child knows that **no matter what, they will be considered precious and worthwhile.** This does NOT mean that as parents and caregivers we accept poor behaviour or choices from our children without consequence, it simply means that we **discipline with dignity.**



Transgressions against our expectations must be followed by **conversations** and **reasonable consequences** with **clear expectations** about why we have the rules in our house that we do.

Example 1: You have chosen not to eat any healthy food that I have offered you. We need healthy food to grow our bodies and minds. **I love you and want you to be healthy.** Unfortunately, the consequence of your choice is that you may not have a small sugary treat after dinner.

(I do not advocate for children being forced to eat – they must just choose healthy food before being allowed treats)

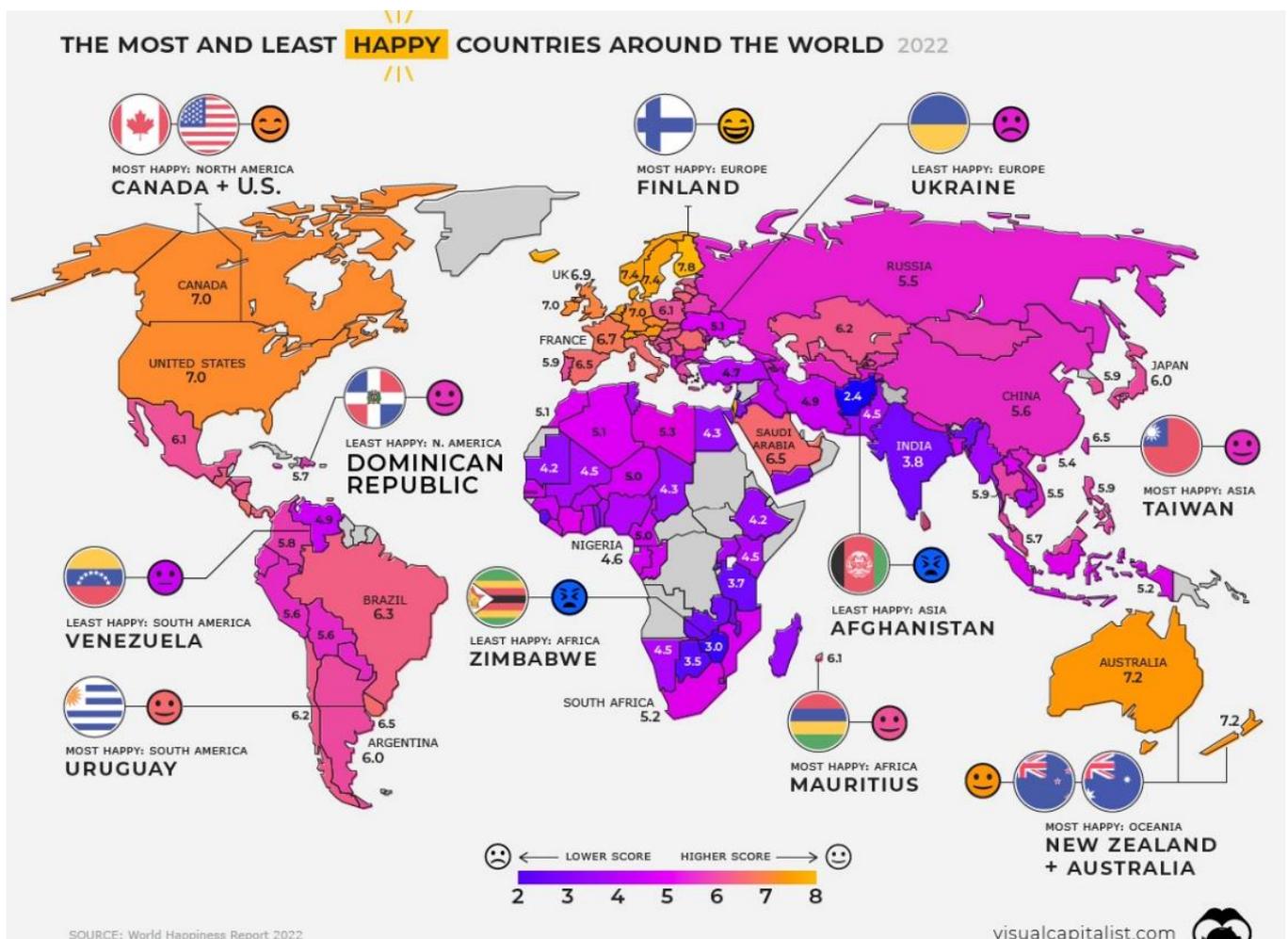
Example 2: You do not seem to be committed to your studies and have achieved lower results, in your last two tests, than you usually get. **I love you and want to help you in accomplishing the best academic performance that you can.** To assist you, I am going to insist that for the next two weeks, I see you working on school work at the dining room table for an hour before dinner. I hope we can work together to help you.

Boundaries that children understand are important. Sometimes it is helpful to write down a set of discussed expectations that everyone signs. That way there are fewer opportunities for misunderstandings and conflict. These **'family contracts'** should be reviewed annually.

## HAPPINESS

Happy parents statistically are more likely to have happy children. Scientific studies have shown that happier children are more likely to be healthier and achieve better academic results.

As you can see, **schools and families should all be working towards happiness as a goal.**



Interestingly, it was only 10 short years ago that the United Nations decided to start to measure the happiness of nations. Currently, 152 countries are surveyed and South Africa is ranked number 91 in national happiness. Finland is ranked the happiest country and Afghanistan is the least happy country. I am not really focusing on the happiness of countries, but rather, noting that it is a recent world trend to even care enough about happiness to measure and survey it.

<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2022/>

We now know that **happiness is important and increased research is being invested into happiness**. Apps are being developed to improve happiness and the media are selling happiness like it is a commodity on a shelf. These are all well and good, but attaining happiness is a little more complicated than starting to dance every morning to your favourite song or starting to meditate.

During the holiday I was reading various articles on **happiness resulting from general well-being**. I also read Dr Edith Egar's autobiographical journey to happiness called 'The Choice'. She writes her book when she is in her mid 80's and she recounts her time in Auschwitz and the impact that being a holocaust survivor had on her life.

She is a qualified psychiatrist and shares the following pearls of wisdom:

- **Live in the now** since we cannot change the past and the future is not guaranteed.
- **The opposite of depression is expression**. We have to learn to constructively express our emotions – we need to learn to name and understand our emotions in order to express them in a way that does not cause hurt and harm.
- **Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it listen to what it intends to do with you**. Live embracing your natural talents and strengths. Do not try to be someone you are not.
- **We all DESERVE happiness**.



Focusing on this last point, in her practice, Dr Egar noticed how many people did not believe in their right to happiness or that happiness was available for them to enjoy. As per the title of her book, **happiness is a choice that is available to all of us**. I am not trivialising mental anguish or illness, but I am encouraging each parent, teacher and child to believe in their hearts that they **are worthy of enjoying happiness**.

Aristotle reminded his followers that **we must pursue a good life and not pleasure**. People often mistake short term pleasure-seeking for happiness. **Long-term happiness is derived from consistent good habits**. Science has shown that happiness is improved by good eating, moderate exercise, meditation, curious learning, optimal sleep, spiritual connection and positive social relationships.

Robert Putnum is a political scientist who has specialised in social capital. His research has shown that **social bonds are the most powerful predictor of life satisfaction** (aka happiness).



Circling back to CS Lewis. He reminds us that **God is a God of second chances and a God of the future**. Many biblical figures who enjoyed God's favour had done some really terrible things in their pasts. **God expects us to strive for excellence and not for perfection**. And on that note, Dr Edith Egar highlights that **perfectionism is the enemy of happiness** since if we are striving to be perfect we are destined to fail and we continually feel as if we are not good enough.

Striving for excellence is beneficial, striving for perfection is destructive to emotional well-being.

## **SAFEGUARDING AND DIGITAL PARENTING**

Children who do not feel safe, cannot be happy. **It is our responsibility as parents and teachers to ensure the safety of our children**. PEPPS is about to embark on a staff-awareness campaign around safeguarding children. This includes heightening awareness around the abuse of children and behaviour patterns of sexual predators. With the increased access of young people to the internet and social media, **vigilance is required** at school and at home.

Parents and caregivers are obliged in our modern world to **upskill themselves** in terms of becoming good digital-parents.

I refer you to an excellent website <https://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting> which gives helpful practical advice to those looking after children in an online world. The website includes an **online course** on understanding the online world and how to navigate the fine line between intruding on your child's privacy and protecting your child's safety.

We are delusional if we think that we can prevent our children from accessing the online world. **This generation of children live emersed in technology** and if they are to be successful in their world of work, **they will have to become responsible and capable digital citizens**. Again, I return to the theme of balance.

Digital addiction is real and varies from addiction to social media, games, and gambling through to addiction to pornography. Children do not have a fully developed frontal lobe of their brains (this part of the brain only matures between 18 and 22 – later in boys than girls). The frontal lobe is responsible for regulation and discernment in choices. **We owe it to our children to help them by setting appropriate digital limitations and expectations**.

**'Family Link'** is a free Google App that helps you guide your family towards healthy digital use. Parents and caregivers still need to keep an eye on the type of content being viewed, and engaged with, by their children. This can be onerous and, especially in the teen years, this may be an intrusion on the age-appropriate privacy that allows a young adult to make their own choices.



## Help your family create healthy digital habits

Whether your children are younger or in their teens, the Family Link app lets you set digital ground rules to help guide them as they learn, play, and explore online.\*

With Family Link you can approve or block the apps your child wants to install from the Google Play Store. You can also monitor and limit screen time, including checking out how much time your child spends on their favourite apps, thanks to weekly or monthly activity reports. And, you can set daily screen time limits for their device.

Here's a full list of features:

- Manage parental controls across Google services
- Manage the apps your child can use
- Approve or block apps your child wants to install from the Google Play Store
- See how much time their child spends on their apps with weekly or monthly activity reports
- Set daily screen time limits for your child's device
- Set daily limits for individual apps
- Set a device bedtime
- See your child's device location
- Remotely lock your child's device
- See all devices where your child's account is signed-in
- Play a sound to locate a child's device

Family Link does not claim to block inappropriate content, though some apps do offer their own filtering options that can be accessed through Family Link.

That will mean you can set age limits on Google Play content, like apps, books, movies - you can set SafeSearch filtering on Google Search and you can filter explicit lyrics in Play Music, although Google declares that these measures are not all 100 per cent successful.

**'Bark'** is a paid-for App that monitors all of your child's online activity and **only alerts parents when something concerning presents**. If sexual content, self-harm ideation or inappropriate content is detected, the parent/caregivers will be alerted. The parents/caregivers do not have to 'snoop' through their child's devices and read all of their messages to become aware of worrying risks.

This incredible service may well be worth the investment of R220 a month or R1500 a year.

As a mother, I recognise that these are challenging waters to navigate. I encourage you all to **empower yourselves with knowledge** so that you can successfully chart a course through this unfamiliar territory. We can no longer afford to pretend that if we close our eyes to the potential risks, everything will be ok. I wish you strength in educating yourself about digital-parenting.

The screenshot displays the Bark app website with a grid of six feature cards. Each card includes an icon, a title, and a brief description of the service. At the bottom, there is a navigation bar with the Bark logo, links for 'How Bark Works', 'Pricing', 'Testimonials', 'Blog', and 'Schools', and buttons for 'Login' and 'Start free trial'.

Feature	Description
<b>Social Media Monitoring</b>	Bark tracks conversations and content on Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, GroupMe, and more.
<b>Text &amp; Email Monitoring</b>	Bark works with iOS and Android to monitor texts, photos, and videos for concerning interactions.
<b>Screen Time &amp; Web Filtering</b>	Manage when your kids can access the internet and which sites are appropriate for them to visit.
<b>24/7 Detection</b>	Our service looks for activity that may indicate online predators, adult content, sexting, cyberbullying, drug use, suicidal thoughts, and more.
<b>Parental Alerts</b>	Get automatic alerts when Bark detects potential issues, along with expert recommendations from child psychologists for addressing them.
<b>Save Time, Build Trust</b>	Bark saves you from manually monitoring your child's activities, respecting your time and your child's privacy by only surfacing potential concerns.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND SCHOOLS:

**5.9 million children covered.**

**550 thousand severe self-harm situations detected.**

**2.6 million severe bullying situations detected.**

## COVID



VACCINATE TO SAVE SOUTH AFRICA

TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT THE CORONAVIRUS

As the country reduces restrictions around Covid, we are all responsible for our own safety and well-being. **PEPPS continues to encourage vaccinations for all of our staff, parents/caregivers and pupils over the age of 12.** The scientific evidence, endorsing the protection that vaccines provide against serious illness and death, is now irrefutable. We would be devastated if any of our community significantly suffered at the hands of this disease, given that there is a way of mitigating its potentially life-threatening effects.

The new guidelines from the education department do not expect screening at school or masks to be worn outdoors. **I continue to beg families not to send unwell children to school.** If a family member is awaiting test results, please keep children at home for the day until the results come through. MyHomework (ECD and Prep) and Google Classroom (College) allow for pupils to access sufficient information to remain up to date for short absences from school.

I conclude this letter quoting one of my own regular sayings. **'Happiness is finding joy in the mundane.'** If we can **derive pleasure from the habits and routines of our lives** instead of living for big adventures, holidays and high-days, we will feel a sense of well-being much more often. Inconveniently, life is not a series of celebrations so we need to be real. **Each life includes some delight and some suffering** and through it all, we need to know that we are **all children of God who deserve to be happy.**

May the upcoming term be blessed for your family.



Yours in healthy, safe and excellent education

*Annabel Roberts*

PEPPS Executive Head